

Lehmann Audio Black Cube Statement

Price: 300 Euro

by Helmut Hack, photograph: Rolf Winter

„Yeah, you light a cool, cool fire.“ (Beasts of Bourbon)

Have you ever heard a negative verdict about a Black Cube? Nor have I, the handy devices of ingenious sound engineer Norbert Lehmann meet an unanimous approval across the board. That is, not only with the press and dealers, but also in the shark pond of hifi end users. The name Lehmann seems to be a quality class of its own in terms of priceworthy, good sounding and innovative electronics. Therefore the only other thing coming in useful was the telephonic advice by the said Norbert Lehmann to keep the little Statement on the mains supply as long

as possible: it could take up to 300 hours before it developed its full potential - and I was consequently wary. An entry-level phono pre that puts on airs!

Well, first of all it didn't meet the power outlet but only my desk lamp. The first thing that caught my eye: it's not a cube but a 10 x 10 cm box of 4.5 cm height. The underside is defined by rubber feet which makes it clear where the top is; the rest is a matter of opinion. In any case there are gold-plated RCA phono sockets on two opposite sides, with an additional ground

clamp on the one side and a blue status LED on the other indicating readiness as soon as the power supply is connected to mains. On the underside we find two quartets of externally accessible DIP switches for adjusting the input impedance: 47 kilohms for MM cartridges and 1000 or 100 ohms for MC cartridges. Did you connumerate correctly so far? You're right, one's still missing; the last switch selects a free internal slot which may be fitted solderless with a customized resistor value if requested.

Beneath the aluminum top lid we see a double-sided pcb which also takes care of filtering and voltage rectification; that's why the Statement, as the only member of the Black Cube family, cannot be upgraded with an external power supply. Amplification takes place for both channels combined in two linear stages equipped with Burr-Brown ICs. The passive RIAA equalization network features WIMA foil capacitors, for bass decoupling even MKPs. In short: sensibly high-quality components in a compact design. The often mentioned benefit hereof is that for a short signal path the junior Black Cube may be put close to or even under the turntable. Yet please bear in mind that the signal path is, of course, always as long as the cable running from the tonearm. Together with its mains supply the tiny unit weighs only 500 grammes. Not a heavy, but hopefully a substantial statement. After several reasonable hours on the mains supply - electrolytic capacitors need to



Sensibly high-quality components in a compact design.
Not pictured: the power supply.

form and metal film capacitors are also said to have certain start-up problems - I turned on the power transformer which my Scheu Cello is connected to.

The following days were an acoustic challenge, because breaking in a phono preamp while at the same time listening for a development beyond suggestion is not as easy as with loudspeakers or valve amplifiers. Besides, it was also a sporty achievement, for only the Audio-Technica 33 Prestige was unreeling more miles during this period than I was on the (now well-trodden) path between hifi rack and listening spot. And what was the week-long tour-de-force all about? Well, I can tell you now that the Statement plays with a remarkable sententiousness already rather fresh from the box. In retrospect my first impression - which kept consolidating more and more - was: an extremely palpable bass range, dry like a Martini from Tanqueray gin, with nothing more than its memory how it was once standing on the shelf next to a bottle of vermouth where it could smell at its neck, and just as slim as it was fast. And now a novelty in this price category: records needn't sound cozy any longer! Yet it is indeed true that after several days the Statement sounds still a tadbit more open and richer. It extends its frequency range, especially towards the top end, this is my perception. With clear contours it soars into ever higher spheres without becoming a hypocritical detail polisher. If we could compare it to a gamsbart, it would not be one of those sprawling specimens which fan out over the hats of their bearers like a weeping willow, but a sleek, tight and wedge-shaped one.

Some notes on the adaptability of the "demi-cube" which is not self-evident in this class, but basically a must. The AT 33 PTG has an internal resistance of 17 ohms which results in a theoretical terminal impedance of 170 to 340 ohms. And indeed, switching between 100 ohms and 1 kilohm clearly shows the advantages of the low terminal impedance. Subjectively, this effect is even stronger than that of breaking in which, that much is true, tends to be more esoteric. So take the trouble to multiply the internal resistance of your MC cartridge by 10 or 20 and order the matching plug-in jumpers from Norbert Lehmann. It's worthwhile, for a sound improvement with so little effort should not be given away.

Irrevocably I can see the end of the text is already drawing near without having to fill up with unsolicited music reviews. It's hard for me to name a certain listening tip because there were simply too many records playing during the past few weeks. In addition, the Statement doesn't reveal any discernable preferences or weak points - maybe apart from those which one

would criticize in units of at least double the price. Furthermore, I can hardly come to any other conclusion than to give it my unreserved recommendation. You should see the beet red face of the misanthropic quibbler in me now whose opinion is simply not in demand. Now then, let's get serious and concentrate once more, the closing point which was just still a tiny dot is growing bigger and bigger and if I fail to come up with an original apt phrase right now, this review of the Lehmann Black Cube Statement will end like this: quadratic, practical, good. ●

image x-trakt	
What we like:	The espresso among the phono pres - small, black, strong..
What we miss:	Points of criticism.
What's surprising:	Moderate pricing with no technical catch.
What to do:	Make a clear statement (yes!).

image infos	
Phono preamplifier Lehmann Black Cube Statement	
Gain at 1kHz:	41–61 dB in four steps
Input impedances:	47 kΩ, 1 kΩ, 100 Ω
Special feature:	free slot for custom impedance
Dimensions (W/D/H):	103/108/45 mm
Weight:	audio component approx. 200 g (power supply approx. 300 g)
Guarantee:	2 years
Price:	300 Euro
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