



A Real Top-notch

An unpretentious appearance with high-class interior – this has been Lehmannaudio’s formula for about 25 years. The Linear USB II stays right on this track as well.

Michael Lang and Julian Kienzle

The visual layout of Lehmann’s devices is as plain as it is unmistakable: flat enclosure, minimalist feature list. Norbert Lehmann has focused on the inner qualities. In the design process of his appliances he systematically makes sure to use only long-term stable parts which are manufactured to the lowest tolerances.

With the brand new Linear USB II he raises the bar once more: power supply and audio signal path are now equipped with Mundorf capacitors, and mica caps are now an integral component of the concept as is a circuit board in a LowZ copper version, which costs about ten times as much as its already very decent counterpart in the “Linear“.

Later in the listening room the USB II offered evidence that it is indeed a full-grown preamp with two headphone sockets, analog

input and an ESS 9018K2M USB converter working in asynchronous mode with an excellent analog filter.

The other ingredients: the output stage has been taken over from the “Linear“. Just like in other devices we have a toroidal mains transformer which is wrapped in two mu-metal layers and, according to Lehmann, doesn’t care much about the mains phase. The SSC damping feet also contribute their share to the final result.

In case you’re missing an input selector switch: the USB connector has priority – when something’s going on there, the analog input will be muted. An upgrade of the Linear to the new analog board is available for 599 euros, owners of a Linear SE will only have to shell out 499 euros – that way you’ll stay up-to-date. For those who want to upgrade to SSC damping feet: the set of three costs 50 euros.

We enjoyed the performance of the USB II which, due to its considerable warming, pushed the already sticky summer heat still a little further upward. The gain in the 0 dB position first served Sennheiser’s HD 800 S

KEYWORD

Mica cap

A capacitor with a very high dielectric strength, capacitance and longterm stability

and HD 820 as well as Focal's Utopia headphones as game partners which brought the Lehmann's dynamic qualities to the fore with varying expressions. In a side-by-side comparison both the Linear and the Linear SE version were barely, yet clearly relegated to the margins.

Although we're not talking about a quantum leap, the new Linear delivers a better performance in all respects than its competitors from the same brand after all. Its musical rendition is better structured and acoustically more transparent while at the same time fuller, with enhanced dynamics and a tidy, more deeply staggered stage.

"Ramos Us" on Julian & Roman Wasserfuhr's album "Gravity" features the initial, progressively louder drumbeats with more accurate contours and better detached from the loudspeakers. The same can be said about the snaredrum in the background of "Fools Paradise". The band's instruments are more clearly separated from each other, with ample understanding for details: on Holly Cole's "Viva Las Vegas" the breathy intonations of her sublime voice are more palpable, apparently a little closer to the listener. Her voice is standing even more autonomously in the room, while the positions of the individual instruments are outlined with greater precision. Also in the low end range some bass lines, which formerly used to sound a wee bit impure, seem to have completely shed this tendency. The entire spectacle appears to be tidier and more natural, with a sparkling elegance and lightness which isn't that much pronounced in the predecessors. With the latest incarnation of the Linear, Lehmann has been able to clearly top his already outstanding preamp/headphone amp line once again.

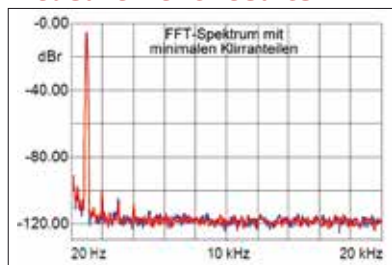


Lehmann Audio Linear USB II

Price: about 1,900 €
Dimensions (W x H x D): 12 x 6 x 32 cm (4.7 x 2.35 x 12.6 in.)
Warranty: 2 years
Contact: Lehmannaudio
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 www.lehmannaudio.com/de/

With the Audio Linear USB II Lehmann has surpassed himself. Top components and a clever concept make the minimalist device stand out as a preamp, USB converter and headphone amplifier.

Measurement results



Maximum output voltage (1 % THD)	7 V
Gain factor from high-level input	-0.3 dB
THD at 0.03/0.3/1 V	0.01/0.001/0.009 %
Intermodulation at 0.03/0.3/1 V	0.005/0.0005/0.003 %
S/N ratio at 0.3/0.03 V	98.3 dB (A) / 79.9 dB (A)
Input sensitivity for 1 V out	1,020 mV
Headphone output	5.3/7 ohms/volts
Upper limit frequency	80 kHz
Volume control, channel deviation at -60 dB	0.2 dB
Stereo channel separation at 10 kHz	85.2 dB
Power consumption (idle mode)	10 W

Lab comment

Very good to excellent measured values as can be expected from the Cologne sound engineer. Practice-oriented adjustment options and connection values.

Features

One analog input, one USB input, two jack headphone outs. Output level adjustable in two steps; automatic input selection, SSC damping feet. Comprehensive manual, replaceable power cord; no remote control

STEREO - TEST	
SOUND-QUALITY	78%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	
VERY GOOD	

Adjustable gain per channel and high-quality SSC damping feet are standard.

TEST SYSTEM:

Turntable:
Linn Klimax LP 12
CD player:
T+A MP 3100
Preamp:
Lehmannaudio
Linear/Linear SE
Loudspeakers:
B&W 603; T+A CTL 2100; DALI Oberon 7
Cables: Audioquest Rocket 22; HMS Suprema; Cardas Clear

The virtual 3D gain is impressive