

AUDIO
FILE

MM/MC phono preamplifier
 Made by: Lehmannaudio Vertriebs GmbH, Germany
 Supplied by: Henley Audio Ltd, UK
 Telephone: 01235 511166
 Web: www.lehmannaudio.com; www.henleyaudio.co.uk
 Price: £2599



Lehmannaudio Phonolith

Lehmannaudio's £2599 Phonolith wraps a trio of roles into one – an MM/MC phono stage, line level preamplifier and headphone amplifier. That said, it's not strictly rolled into 'one' as it's a two-box design with a dedicated standalone power supply.

In typical Lehmannaudio fashion, both diminutive cases, which sit on the brand's '3S device feet' for improved isolation, hide a good level of focused technology and functionality, mostly based on high-specification through-hole passive componentry. On the main unit, surface mount exceptions are the op-amps in the second stage of the phono amplification, plus the single op-amp in the ALPS Blue volume control stage, and their associated bypass capacitors. The PWX II LZ power supply, meanwhile,

'Not only technically accomplished, but musically compelling'

generates twin $\pm 15V$ DC outputs through its 4-pin XLR sockets.

Viewed front-on, the 11cm-wide Phonolith appears fuss-free, with just a volume rotary, phono/line input toggle switch, and 6.35mm headphone socket. However, a variety of adjustments, available on its underside through DIP switches, make it impressively flexible.

At the front are a pair that offer an additional +10 or +20dB gain to both line and phono options, and in the centre are switches to set the low frequency roll-off of the Phonolith's MM/MC subsonic filter (note that setting all switches to 'off' still leaves a roll-off at 7Hz), and to bring in an optional extra gain of 10dB for the phono circuitry. A final bank of six switches allows selection of gain and loading options. One

changes between MM and MC operation, with the MM setting giving a default load of 47kohm. When set to MC, various combinations of switches allow loads of 1kohm, 390ohm 280ohm, 100ohm or 74ohm to be set.

Another switch here selects an internal location within the preamp where a resistor of the user's choice can be added for cartridges with specific loading requirements. Finally, switch number 6 adds a parallel 1nF capacitive load.

PHONO FINESSE

The Phonolith's sonic balance is very much in line with our experience of Lehmannaudio's 'house sound' – no overt treble boost or exuberant thumping bass and no sense that the unit is attempting to impart any particular character. It's an effortless and subtle performer – a touch 'polite' but with a sense of rightness that gently works its way into your ears over a period of time. And it offers enough gain and loading flexibility to get the best out of any likely partnering cartridge.

'Fell Down Fast', from Kathryn Williams' *Little Black Numbers* [Snowstorm], was a masterclass in stereophonic layout, with Williams centre-stage, the cello just behind her, and guitars to the right. Nor was it all forensic detail and no heart – cello strings were rich and vibrant, and the double bass had warmth and weight. Listening via Ortofon's 2M Black moving-magnet cartridge, the experience was not only technically accomplished, but musically compelling.

Switching from the 2M Black to Clearaudio's MC Essence [HFN Aug '17] – and resetting gain and loading – revealed the Phonolith's consistent sonic 'management' of high- and low-output cartridge



ABOVE: The deep, minimalist chassis are all part of the Lehmannaudio DNA – seen here with 6.35mm headphone socket, phono/line input select toggle and volume control. The PWX II LZ PSU [bottom], connects to the Phonolith [top] via an umbilical and 4-pin XLR plugs. A second power outlet is also provided

types. Only now, with an MC in play, it appeared even more insightful, digging into the grooves to bring scale, texture and detail to the country of Eric Bibb's 'Needed Time' [*Spirit And The Blues*; Opus 3].

If you really want to listen to what your cartridge can deliver – unfettered rather than the buffed and tweaked version a phono stage thinks you might want to hear – then the Phonolith is your window onto the potential of vinyl.

VERDICT

This phono preamp offers flexible loading and gain, and a consistently fine performance with both MM and MC cartridges. Add the pleasingly transparent line stage and capable headphone amp, and it's perhaps more versatile than it looks – Lehmannaudio has crammed the proverbial quart into a pint pot! ⚡

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm (0.1 to 1nF) / 100ohm-7kohm
Input sens. (re. 0dBV, MM/MC)	16.8/5.35/1.7mV / 1558/496/158µV
Input overload (re. 1% THD)	168mV (all MM) / 15.7mV (all MC)
Max. output (re. 1% THD) / Imp.	8.95V / 51ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	88.8dB / 77.7dB (MM/MC)
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.9dB to -0.14dB / -1.2dB
Dist. (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00035-0.0027%
Power consumption	7W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	110x50x280mm (each) / 2.8kg (total)