

Why wander far away ...

... when good is so near? This quote from Goethe is more current than ever. Again and again friends and acquaintances tell me about special vacation experiences. Thousands of miles away one meets neighbors and co-workers that are coincidentally in the same place or hotel. "All Inclusive" of course. If you ask them about the tourist attractions of their home region, you will often find that they have a huge lack of knowledge or interest. Even so, our home country, Germany, is rich in culture, nature and historic landmarks. Only the weather isn't what everyone wishes for – that's how it is in our part of the world.

Our country produces audio developers whose products are just waiting to be discovered. Knut Cornils, founder of the company Valvet is one of those. In 1985 the engineer had already built his first Class-A amplifier. Six years later he founded the company Valvet in the north German town of Bargteheide. What – you don't know Bargteheide? Don't worry – I didn't either. The town, north of Hamburg and southwest of Luebeck, only has a population of 15.000. The tube pre-amps are equipped with external power supplies with tube rectification. An amplifier, mono-blocks and an MM/MC phono tube amplifier complete the "Blocks and Bricks" product portfolio. I chose the E1 Mono-Blocks. Another brick in the wall? "NO!" The thing that makes this amplifier so interesting for me, being a tube freak is their design.



This is not an ordinary solid state amp. Here is just one single transistor in the output: single-ended Class-A with an output of 10 Watt per channel at 8 Ohms. According to the developer, he uses a sophisticated circuit with short signal paths. I believed this when I looked at the measurements of the chassis: 120 mm wide, 60 mm high and 360mm deep. The weight of 2.5 kg per Mono-Block testifies to one definite advantage: they are easy to transport. That means that it's very easy if you want to amaze your fellow audiophiles or convince them about the musical quality produced by the output of 10 Watts per channel.

Here are some more detail about the amplifiers: Hidden under the simple, ribbed aluminum chassis, is a 80 VA torodial transformer. The capacity of the eight high-quality capacitors is a total of 25.000 μ F. The chassis and front-plate are available in either silver or black anodized (for a surcharge), also in ultra shiny chrome-finished brass. The quality of the handwork is excellent, everything fits perfectly. If I could wish for something, it would be a thick front-plate with sunken 6-sided screws and the company logo in a subtle blue light in the center of the front-plate. Of course, that's a matter of personal taste. The main concerns are the sound quality and the price.

On the back side are an RCA input jacks, massive binding posts, an on/off switch and a mains socket to connect the power cord. Due to the rear dimensions speaker cables with banana plugs are recommended. The practical ohm input impedance of 50 kOhm is also worth mentioning.

Exceptional products should be fed with exceptional music. Let us be faithful to the late musician Frank Zappa, who died much too early. Come with me to New York where in 1976, this live recording was made (Zappa Live in NY, Rykodisc). Celebrated for seven nights before a total of 27,500 spectators. We hear the last part of the first CD - Zappa at his best, "The Illinois Enema Bandit", just under 13 minutes of the most dignified musical entertainment. Zappa's distinctive guitar solo and the growing tension at the end of the piece, with the accompanying increases in volume pose a difficult task for every system.

Soon it will become obvious whether the live atmosphere and mood of the audience reach the listener and captivate him in the recording or not. The monos do that with ease. One characteristic becomes clear: Artificially induced air and high frequency resolution in nebulous space are not their thing, but rather concentrating on the essentials, that are associated with the sound of the instrument.

Another example: Patricia Barber brought out a recording in 1994 that is still current. Café Blue, currently available in various forms. Analog with 33 rpm or 45 rpm (MFSL-3LP-Box). Digital as a simple CD, HDCD and hybrid SACD from MFSL.

"Ode to Billy Joe", the SACD published in 2002 is playing. The bass is a real challenge for the 10-watt output power. That 75-watt tube amp will be able to present this instrument gnarled and plastic, is beyond question. However, regarding the output of the monos, one is amazed that low frequencies are not underexposed. The sound is powerful, natural and warm in the tone. The sound of finger-snapping also profits from this, which can be tested by snapping one's own fingers. Or when she sings "The thrill is gone," it works note for note.

If I were to spontaneously answer the question, what the most important vinyl releases of the last three years have been for me, I would say that the triple-LP, published in 2005 by Lucinda Williams stands at the top on my personal hit list. (Live @ the Fillmore, Lost Highway Records). Lucinda's smoky, lascivious and wicked-sounding voice really turns one on. One can literally taste the smoke-filled air of this club. We listen to the second LP. If you are not inclined, at least once, to get up out of your favorite listening chair to let the pent-up emotions free through physical action, please don't blame it on the recording. The Valvet-Monos transfer exactly the right mood.

I could show many examples of other music, but at this point let's leave it at the above examples, from which say things clearly enough.

Summary: The single-ended Mono-Blocks completely convinced me. In my opinion, they have the stuff to be classics. Their natural warm tone, blessed with vibrant tone colors, invites you to listen a long time. Knut Cornils must be a contented person.

The question, whether you get more musicality for your money, is one that I am very critical about. If the output is sufficient for your system, you will get high-quality components at a reasonable price, with a guarantee of long-term satisfaction. One look at the price reveals that luckily, high product pricing is not one of Cornils main interests. The monos cost 1,500.- Euro (2,290.- USD) per pair, of course. Genius engineering, development, manufacturing (by hand) and technical measurement testing are all done in Germany. So why "wander far away".



Listened with:

Turntable: Kuzma Reference
Arm: Kuzma Stogi Reference
Cartridge: Transfiguration Spirit
Phono: Dusan Klimo Viv, with Picatron transformer instead of MC tube
CD-Player: Electrocompaniet EMC 1 only as CD-Transport
CD-Filter: Dusan Klimo Bod (tube)
Tuner: Grundig T 9009 Fine Arts
Integrated amp: Unison Research Simply 845 Triode
Preamp: Michael Lamm VV1
Tube Mono-Amps: Michael Lamm V75
Loudspeaker: Zingali Overture 4 S
Cable: Signal: Cardas Golden Reference, MagnanVi, Aural Symphonics AS-One Generation 5, MIT HE 330, Beck ECK 1
Speaker: Magnan Signature
A/C: Aural Symphonics Cubed Generation 2 I
Power strip: Henseler NL 7
Accessory: Acapella Fondatio Silencio (2x), Perfect Sound, The Rest (2x)
Record cleaner Loricraft PRC-3,
CD DeMagnetizer Furutech RD-2
Listening room: brickwalls, 4.5m x 8.5m, 3.1m high