

The Whisper has finally been completed after many years of research and development into the very sensitive nature of low-level signal amplification. This is probably the most difficult and time consuming project we have ever taken on, and by no means have we taken the last steps on this subject either. For now however, and certainly for a fair amount of time into the future, we have decided to take stock of what we have learnt about this subject matter.

Our first design aim as mentioned was low noise, and then the implementation of both solid state and vacuum tubes in a fully balanced in to out topology. Another consideration was gain. Many of the favourite moving coil cartridges of today boast a very low output, in the region of 0.2 mV only. This presents a problem to many of the available phono stages and step-up transformers. However, gain comes at a price....noise in the form of Johnson noise, hum and sometimes instability. We are rightly proud to state that we have found a welcome balance between all these criteria.

The Whisper is aptly named so for its ability to extract and amplify the lowest of low-level signal buried in the grooves of your vinyl treasures without adding audible artifacts of noise and hum. It has a signal gain of 72dB at 1KHz. We decided against active RIAA equalization in favour of passive equalization. To our ears this sounds less constrained and more natural. The headroom that this unit is capable of, far exceeds that available from normal opamp based units with limited supply voltages. Injecting a 5 mV, 1 KHz signal into the MC Input will swing a clean undistorted signal of around 20 Volt. Increasing this signal to saturation provides almost 50 Volt of output swing. Clearly, no headroom constraints here.

We thought it prudent to also design the Whisper into a very user friendly one-box component, which naturally match the Valve Audio equipment in appearance and build quality. Do not therefore expect a small one or two box device with a simple wall wart power supply of some sorts sourced from the Far East as an afterthought. The massive power supply – for a phono stage at least, resides in its own separate mild steel enclosure behind the left side of the all aluminium alloy grade 6082-T6 front panel of either 8mm, or 24mm thick depending on the version ordered. The South African manufactured VPI process toroidal transformer is part of what goes into this highly regulated power supply with sophisticated standby and start-up features for both HT and LT supplies. The unit is always in standby mode with filament and HT supplies at 60% when switched off. This ensures a long vacuum tube life and very short warm-up time to full sonics.

We have also kept any kind of microprocessor based control functions out of this design to minimize generated power supply noise injection. This meant that we had to opt for good old fashioned latching type switches in place of the usual tactile switch / logic control as used in most of our other designs. However, being aware of the notoriously unreliable nature of these open, sliding contact switches, we only use them to activate reliable switching circuits to select any combination of cartridge loading.

This is also an outstanding user friendly feature....the ability to select the correct cartridge loading on the front panel by selecting and deselecting the appropriate loading impedance. Furthermore, the unit offers the flexibility of either one MC or MM input, OR one MM and one MC input / OR two MC or two MM inputs simply by the addition of two extra modules as specified per customer requirement. You can now run two turntables each connected to its own dedicated input each into its own internal gain module, OR two arms with different cartridges mounted on one turntable, also each connected to its own electronics. You now only need select a different input on your amplifier to listen to either of the two.

The separate channels are true balanced, monoblock construction each residing in its own dedicated housing featuring aluminium alloy construction with a mild steel base for LF shielding. The physical appearance as can be seen from the photos, clearly and graphically demonstrate the true monaural construction even up to the point of two or four modules depending on the version ordered.

The Whisper has the ability to create a total blackness from which music just flows, highlighting the tiniest slivers of detail with utmost neutrality and honesty. This we find, after all this time of research and testing. Running the gauntlet of discerning critics and customers, to be the greatest of the attributes of this amazing creation. We believe we can for now at least say, FULL STOP. We have arrived.