

Seven Complete High-End Budget Systems



No feature on recommended systems would be complete without a tube-amplifier alternative, and we've got just the solution. We start with PrimaLuna's ProLogue One, a gorgeous sounding integrated that epitomizes the glories of vacuum-tube audio. The ProLogue's lush, but not overly romantic, midrange is simply unmatched by similarly priced solid-state integrateds. Throw in a spacious, beautifully defined soundstage, and the ProLogue One delivers on the promise of tubes at a remarkably reasonable price.

We match the ProLogue One to the new \$975 Dynaudio 2/8 for those looking for a stand-mount speaker, or to the \$1500 DALI Ikon 5 floorstander for those with enough space. With a sensitivity of 88dB, the Dynaudio will play a little louder than most mini-monitors for a given input power—a good thing with the 35Wpc ProLogue. In addition, the 2/8 delivers big dynamics from a small package. (If your budget can handle it, also consider the outstanding Paradigm Signature S1 at \$1499, reviewed this issue.)

The DALI Ikon 5 is an excellent choice for this system, both because of its intrinsic quality and because it represents an easy load for an amplifier. Consequently, this Danish speaker will get the most out of the ProLogue One's 35Wpc. The DALI will give you deep bass extension (a respectable 39Hz), and DALI's hybrid dome/ribbon tweeter module delivers a sweet and extended treble.

Choosing a CD player for this system was easy: Rotel's RCD-1072, our 2003 Product of the Year Award winner, is still "best in class." With remarkable resolution, superb tonal accuracy, a silent background, and excellent imaging, the Rotel is hard to beat at the price.

For those wanting to spin vinyl, the Pro-Ject RM 5SE is a terrific bargain, particularly when bundled with the excellent Sumiko Blue Point cartridge (\$899 complete). You'll need an outboard phono stage, and two good candidates are the Parasound Z-Phono at just \$149 or the more upscale and refined Gram Amp 2SE at \$399.

Put it all together with AudioQuest's Diamondback interconnect (\$150 per meter pair) and AQ's excellent CV-4 (\$435 per 8' pair) and you've got a supremely musical system. —Robert Harley

TUBED NIRVANA

PrimaLuna ProLogue One integrated amplifier (\$1599, TAS 151)

Dynaudio 2/8 stand-mount loudspeaker (\$975, TAS 183) or DALI Ikon 6 floorstanding loudspeaker (\$1599, Ikon 6 reviewed TAS 164)

SYSTEM PRICE:
\$3860
w/o analog option

AudioQuest Diamondback interconnect (\$150 per meter pair) and AudioQuest CV-4 speaker cable (\$435 per 8' pair)

Rotel RCD-1072 CD player (\$699, TAS 147)

ANALOG OPTION:
Pro-Ject RM 5SE turntable with Sumiko Blue point cartridge (\$899, Issue 180); Parasound Z-Phono (\$149, Issue 172) or Gram Amp 2SE (\$399, Issue 134) phono stage