



PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid Integrated Amplifier

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When you say PrimaLuna, you mean electron tubes. There is nothing to discuss. In its nearly 20 years of existence, the company has convinced many, many lovers of colour and richness, that they can find a warm Nirvana in its instruments at a relatively reasonable price. And it is at the upcoming milestone of the second decade of its existence that something surprisingly new comes into the portfolio - a hybrid amplifier.

The EVO 300 Hybrid is an integrated amplifier that, at first glance, you'd hardly be able to tell apart from the rest of the company's range. There's the typical low front panel with a pair of rotary controls (volume on the left, input switching on the right), there's a clear LED to indicate operational status, and there's the nice bonus of a headphone output.

There's also the characteristic arched grille protecting the front-mounted row of tubes. However, there are fewer tubes than usual, and the grille is somehow smaller, so the "hood" with vents and side radiators takes up more space. There is also the switch button on the side, the classic big cradle with excellent resistance and click, which gives an intuitive feeling that you are switching on the "machine".

On the rear surface, a surprising number of connectors are squeezed into the low profile of the base - on one side, there is a power socket, followed by the speaker terminals around the edges, and lots of cinch connectors in between. The five classic inputs are complemented by a 'hanging' phono option chassis with a ground pin, and there's a direct input to the power stage for home cinema applications. And there's a pair of outputs - both a line output and a regulated subwoofer output, which you can switch between mono and stereo mode.

The relative compactness of the EVO 300 Hybrid's chassis (and also of the company's other amps) is achieved by its two-tier construction. The internal structure is straightforward - when you remove the cover, you're looking down on a large encapsulated transformer for the rear end, power stage modules on

large heatsinks and a fair set of twelve rather large capacitors. When you remove the bottom from the unit, you'll see two more enclosures for the preamplifier transformers and a space used by the preamp with tightly fitted circuit boards - these are 2.4mm thick, and the signal paths made of thick gold-plated copper.

But let's get back to the essentials - the EVO 300 Hybrid combines PrimaLuna's know-how and the Floyd Design development centre. A team of people who have been designing semiconductor circuits for Durob Audio (PrimaLuna's parent company) for many years. PrimaLuna engineers designed a preamplifier based on 12AU7 tubes, while Floyd Design engineers developed dual-mono end stages based on JFETs from Linear Systems and custom-made MOSFETs. The circuits incorporate an "AC Offset Killer" circuit or a DC filter to eliminate potential mechanical noise from the transformers.

The amplifier's large (40.5 x 38.5 x 20.5 cm) and heavy (29 kg) chassis is packed not only with components but also with interesting technical features. The power output of "over 100 watts" into 8 ohms and 150 watts into 4 ohms in Class A/B is sufficient. The operating frequency range extends from 10 to 80,000 Hz (-3 dB), and at full power, the amplifier achieves a total harmonic distortion below 0.2%. The signal-to-noise ratio, weighted by the A curve, is over 105 dB. The damping factor of 160 is also worth mentioning.

We listened to the PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid in the main editorial lineup. The amp connected to the Métronome DSC1 and compared to the Norma Revo SC-2 LN / Norma Revo PA 160 MR, but we also brought the Grandinote Shinai. We wired with Nordost Heimdall 2 cables, fed through a GMG Power Harmonic Hammer 3000P, and listened to through a Xavian Quarta Evoluzione, of course.

The intense bass component in Katie Melua's "Never Felt Less Like Dancing" ("Ketevan" | 2013 | Dramatico | DRAMCD0095) didn't sound with that "PrimaLuna" richness and warm juiciness, but there was a fair amount of power and confidence. The taut and confident lower octaves nevertheless have a decent proportional representation, and the surprising change in style offers you a non-dominant, well-integrated and calm bass. However, you might subconsciously expect a slightly more pronounced sense of weight from an electronic device. The rendering of texture and variety of positions is excellent, and the overall bass is simply realistic, unadorned, very readable, accurate.

The separation of the vocals of the Chapelle du Roi choristers in Tallis's "Gloria" ("The Complete Works" | 2004 | Brilliant | 93612) is also perfect, in fact, excellent and telling of the accuracy. Their vocals are settled, evident and very easy to understand. There's no great sense of electronic richness or timbre here either. On the contrary, it's a very realistic performance without artificial prettiness. But because this is an excellent recording, the resulting sound is also nice, pleasant to

listen to, although any sharper hisses and other "cores" (at least compared to other PrimaLuna products) come through clearly and distinctly.

Just plain pretentiousness, just plain edginess, just plain some colour, that's how the calm and elegant top notes sound in "The Red One" by Pat Metheny and John Scofield ("I Can See Your House From Here" | 1994 | Blue Note | 7243 8 27765 2 9). The amp doesn't add energy or punch anything out, and the tinkling comes through clear and clean, very disciplined and feelingly accurate. There's a touch of smoothness from the distant kiss of the tubes, but otherwise, it's a very balanced, specific and naturally distinct sound.

Chesky's graduating "Ben's Farm in Vermont" ("The Ultimate Headphone Demonstration Disc" | 2014 | Chesky Records | JD361) graded with the elasticity inherent in PrimaLuna's electronics. You can directly feel that the EVO 300 Hybrid has very good control and it's almost impossible to get it into any uncomfortable situations in real listening situations. The dynamics are not "pumped up", even here the amp lets the string in front of it flash a lot. Still, at the same time, the music had a solidity and calm detachment that suggested the certainty of a sufficiently sized performance and a solid power supply.

The presentation carries a kind of overall calmness, but it doesn't imply that electronic "coolness", although you can also find a touch of it here. EVO 300 Hybrid details from "Fuori il Denaro!" from Puccini's "La Bohème" (Solti / LSO / John Alldis Choir | 1988 | BMG | 74321 39496 2) don't really assert themselves. On the contrary! You have to listen for a while and immerse yourself in the recording. Still, then they wash out and pour out, organised, clean, nothing peeks out of the subjectively continuous whole, it's not a firework of nuances and yet there's enough of everything, it's already a very well worked-out reproduction.

Exquisite discipline and apparent refinement are also evident in Elgar's "Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61", performed by Hilary Hahn and Sir Colin Davis, conducting the LSO (2004 | Deutsche Grammophon | 028947487326). Here the non-violence of the overall style comes across well - the space is not like carved out of granite. It is not a hologram with perfect articulation but instead a kind of casually unfolding surface. And despite this, you don't get the feeling of non-concreteness; moreover, the depth, in particular, is worth paying attention to. There's a lot to feel in the differences between the recordings in this respect too, and the EVO 300 Hybrid is a reasonably honest instrument in its neutrality.

How enjoyable the result is, though, depends on the recording and what you play it on more than the amp. When a more substantively spectacular track comes along, albeit in a technically compromised form, such as Ultravox's "Hymn" ("Dancing with Tears in My Eyes" | 1997 | EMI Gold | 724385513220), you hear an equally controlled, if perhaps to its detriment, unspectacular pop rhythm, along with biting highs and a limited sense of the recording's depth. The sound is rather more honest, but nevertheless superbly controlled, tight, everything fits together and has order.



PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid is a rather surprising step aside from the current direction of the famous manufacturer. Outwardly, it differs only slightly from its pure tube contemporaries. Still, under the hood, it is much more so and sonically almost diametrically so - it is practically a pure "transistor" sound, only marginally softened by the warmth of tubes. But if you value neutrality, transparency and the absence of generous gestures, the EVO 300 Hybrid is a beautiful instrument that respects its original character and interferes little with it. If you automatically expect tonality, richness and juiciness from your amplifier thanks to tubes, reach for the company's classic series. Still, if you want an honest and natural-sounding amplifier, wet your ears with how the EVO 300 Hybrid plays - for the company's first foray into the world of semiconductors, it's an excellent result.

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