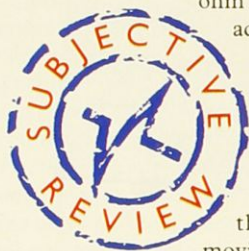


Good grief! A moving-coil head-amp! Haven't seen one of these since, well, Harold was PM. OK, so maybe it's not that long ago, but stand-alone head amps were one of the most obvious victims of digitisation. When the line-level pre-amp became the norm and phono stages became options, the obvious money-and space-saving solution was the separate all-singing, all-dancing phono amp. It's why, for example, EAR's marvellous 834P is such a boon for the impoverished analogophile: it'll accept just about any m-m or m-c cartridge and also act as a phono-only pre-amp for directly feeding a power amp. Not so Trilog's 905 valve head amplifier (£375).

Designed first and foremost for connection to the (m-m) phono input of the identically-sized 900 pre-amplifier, the 905 has only one job to do: amplify the signal of a moving-coil cartridge so it can drive that pre-amp's 47k ohm m-m phono input. No adjustments, no gimmicks, with nothing to tweak like the 'universal' head amps of yore, it promises only to add gain. Maybe older audiophiles will miss the

The 905 runs cool and quiet and is pretty much a model of refinement



our lid-off picture) the power supply and the lone ECC88 have ample, isolationist space in a box worthy of a pre-amp or power amp. So the 905 runs cool and quiet and is pretty much a model of refinement. It's physically substantial as well, and that counts for a lot for those who bemoan the kit-like appearance of too much current valve gear.

What foils any attempt the 905 may make at universality is its 47k ohm input impedance. Although it adds 21dB of gain and produces a signal that will work into any 47k ohm m-m input, the 905 is still limited to m-cs of medium-to-high output. It's a grey area, where you find the cartridges with outputs greater than the vintage/traditional moving-coils, for which some form of step-up is absolutely essential, but lower than those of the kind of m-c cartridges which appeared toward the end of the 1970s, whose outputs were high enough to drive a moving-magnet input anyway.

What remains are inbetweeny cartridges which could work with or without a step-up, the former case

Technicas and a Denon — because they simply don't need the extra decibels. The 905 didn't exactly overload, but it wasn't happy, the cartridges weren't happy and neither was I. So the rest of my comments refer to the Koetsus and Lyras, which — logically — seem to be the sorts of m-cs for which it was designed.

Using the 905 with the Trilog 900 and GRAAF WFB TWO m-m-phono-equipped pre-amps, and the EAR 834P phono amp (on m-m setting), I was struck immediately by two consistent and repeatable characteristics. And they're important enough to make the 905 'recommendable' as the head amp to own for certain types of listeners. Admittedly, vinyl users have built up an immunity to low-level and background noises, a sort of Darwinian response to surface noise and vinyl whoosh. It's as if our ears (or our brains) self-generated their own filters. Whatever, even the inveterate user of second-hand, poorly maintained LPs will note the impeccable behaviour of the 905. It's just so damned quiet, as if designed so as not to frighten anyone who discovered the LP after CD.

Virtue No 2 is the 905's refinement. While I positively adore the 834P, which offers an absurdly low price, glorious bass, incredible dynamics and brilliant attack, it is nonetheless a bit of a wild man, like Warner Bros' Tasmanian Devil reincarnated as a piece of hi-fi equipment. And I write this knowing that I will have to face the Wrath of Tim, who cannot cope with criticism even in context. But what the hell. It simply reinforces my belief that the designer's personality lurks within his designs, which makes the 834P the product of an excitable genius. Anyway, Nic Poulsen of Trilog is — biker fetishism aside — so damned refined that it's worrying, and that's reflected in the 905. The 905 is designed by (and for) a person of taste.

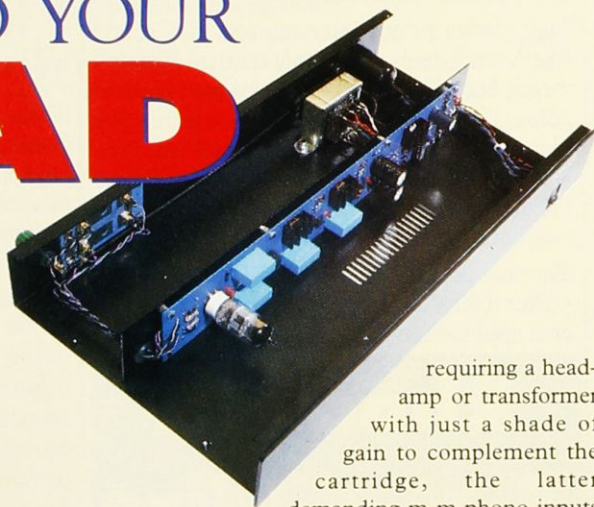
It's transparent, clean and clear. While the 905 copes with wide dynamic swings, the presentation is matter-of-fact rather than in-your-face. If I have to damn it with musical preferences, then the 905 is far more at home with Frank Sinatra than Frank Black, the music of Kurt Weill rather than Kurt Cobain. There's an awful lot of subtlety and composure and delicacy for so little outlay — probably less than most of the cartridges it will host. But that's an irony we should welcome. Along with a sigh of relief: Trilog has produced a head amp worthy of the 900 itself. And that's a little miracle. †

GOING TO YOUR HEAD

British valve specialist

Trilog offers a moving-coil head-amp, the 905

by **KEN KESSLER**



requiring a head-amp or transformer with just a shade of gain to complement the cartridge, the latter demanding m-m phono inputs with higher-than-average gain. Unsurprisingly, this usually excluded all but high-end pre-amps, the sort which allowed Koetsu owners to feed their Reds and Blacks directly into 47k ohm inputs — the preferred, politically-correct audiophile impedance.

Which is why Trilog settled on 47k ohm instead of some generic setting like 10 ohms, or 10-100 ohms, or 40 ohms. Fortunately, most of my 'coils fall into the middle category, Lyras and Koetsus and the like, but I also managed to get a squeak or two out of the low output Ortofon SPU-A, this success almost entirely a result of the 905's useful 21dB of gain. Conversely, there was nothing to be gained (groan...) by feeding high-output m-cs into the 905 — I tried a couple of Audio

switches or banks of resistors which allowed you to tailor a head amp to cartridges as disparate as early Audio Notes and classic Denons, Ortofon SPUs or most Koetsus. Trilog instead offers you an on/off switch with a red LED above it — that's the entire front panel. The back? Gold phonos in and out, a sturdy binding post for earthing and an IEC mains input. Pretty sparse, huh?

So why a box measuring 430x65x270mm (whd), when elder head amps were typically of the smaller-than-a-Walkman persuasion? A number of reasons, not the least being dimensional uniformity with Trilog's 900 budget series. The money saved through using a one-size-fits-all case means a lowering of costs, and you get a substantial piece of kit for your £375. On the sonic side, it means that (as you see from

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