



(...) You won't believe your ears when you hear the Lehmann Black Cube phono section, imported from Germany by Hy End Audio Imports. This \$695 MM/MC need not apologize for itself in any way at any price - that's how good it is.

The Black Cube consists of an outboard power supply with IEC AC jack so you can play with power cords and a small (114mm by 44mm by 108mm) metal-chassis main unit connected via a shielded, hard-wired cable.

The carefully filtered power supply (explained in great detail in the instructions) includes high-speed diodes and precision voltage regulation. RIAA equalization is accomplished passively between two amplification stages, with no series capacitors in the signal path except for the subsonic filter. High-grade Analog Devices op-amps are used (MF owns AD stock), and caps in the RIAA filter network are 5% tolerance

WIMA MKS - all taken from the same 'reel' to keep tolerances tight, according to the literature.

Internal DIP switches allow you to adjust for MM/47k ohms and four MC loads plus one custom for which you insert a resistor of a value of your choice. Given its cost, the Black Cube's specs are astonishing. For instance: 61 dB of gain at 1kHz in MC mode with a S/N-ratio of 69 dB.

The numbers tell you 'quiet' and so does the sound. The Black Cube had no problem handling the Parnassus D.C.'s low (250 μ V) output, and with its low output impedance (<100 ohms), drove the Ayre K-1's line section to very loud levels. What's more, raising the cueing lever yielded dead silence.

As for the Black Cube's sound, the first thing I noticed was how fast and detailed it is; how it got leading edges and transients essentially correct. The second thing I noticed was how well it handles large and small dynamic swings - which can spell the difference between hearing canned music and the illusion of live.

I've been playing Classic's excellent reissue of Dexter Gordon's A Swingin' Affair (Blue Note/Classic ST-84133) a great deal lately through the Ayre's built in phono stage and the excellent \$2000 Aleph Ono, and you know what? The \$695 Lehmann need make no apologies. It plays in the same league as the big boys.

Sonny Clark's front-and-center piano

may not be as fully fleshed-out as with the expensive phono circuits, but its focus is superb, and harmonically it's more than credible. Ditto Billy Higgins' drum kit off to the right. Yes, Dexter's not quite as grounded as can sound, or as richly presented as I've heard, but there's plenty of space around his tenor, and the whole thing swings like hell, even though the bass suffers a bit compared to the expensive spreads.

I don't know if it's offered with a money-back guarantee, but I'd say if you're unhappy - or, especially, bored with your phono section, and you're on a budget of \$1200 or under, get your hands on the Lehmann audio Black Cube. I don't know of anything at or near the price, that sounds this good.

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