



Lehmann Black Cube Twin - double phono preamp

Two into one will go...

An odd review this because in effect this product has already been reviewed (brilliantly as usual) by Lucio - the Twin is nothing more or less than a Black Cube SE (that's with the big power supply) put into a bigger box so that there is room for another complete set of audio circuits. Get it? Two phono stages in one, and for a lot less than two separate Black Cube SE's as well.

So there you have it.

Sound? Well just go and read Lucio's text because he has got the characteristics of the stage absolutely spot on :-)

So I'm off for a beer and to watch the World Cup in the bar over the road :-)

Er... Whatdoyoumean I should write something more? You want my normal brilliant prose to brighten your day? Pics as well???

OK OK, it was only Outer Mongolia vs Baffinland or some such anyway...

Second go...

Right have a look at the pics, see the completely separate circuit? Like I said "two in

one". The power supply looks pretty impressive to, wouldn't disgrace a small integrated in size and all the bits look good :-)

Why two? Well I can see a lot of you scratching your heads out there but think for a moment. All those DJ maniacs will be able to do it all with one box for their two Pioneer decks :-) But I don't really think Norbert Lehmann had them in mind when designing the Twin. No, there are several good reasons for having two phono stages in a 'proper' hi-fi system.

A while back I was musing on the cost of running a really high-end cartridge. Depending on the state of your vinyl that 3000e beauty is going to lose its edge after about 1000 hours. A bit of basic math and you are looking at 2e per LP played... If this is of no importance to you then fine, but for many of us it's a horrific figure, I listen to 2 hours+ of music a day so that equates to more than I spend feeding the kids.

And how many of those 1000 hours is actually critical listening as opposed to background? For me I guess a 50/50 split, so it would make very good economic sense to buy a basic second deck - Rega 2 for example, a 50e MM and use that. The snag is that this means you either need two stages or do a lot of unplugging. I know I'm lazy, and the 'best' set-up would stay plugged in if I didn't shell for another stage... A quick

look at the economics and that Rega 2 + MM would pay for itself in about 300 hours - especially if you only allow your teenage children to use that one...

Or - There are more and more turntables out there that can take two arms. This too can solve the stylus cost issue by having one a 'cooking' arm (Rega) and MM and the other your exotic pairing.

OR... You may well find that certain arms/tt's sound better with certain types of music, so a two-deck/arm system is ideal.

And lastly it's just made for a mad reviewer bent on doing 'back-to-back' reviews of exotic turntables :-)

And so there is the market for the "Twin"... And it fills the role



perfectly. As you'll read in Lucio's review the BC SE can cope with any MM or MC and even allows you to custom load each cartridge by popping in the appropriate resistor (no soldering). For those bothered by the shared power supply Lehmann even offers a second power supply upgrade - though it's "gilding the lily"...

Sound Quality

This is where I should just copy and paste two of Lucio's copy but in deference to his wrath here goes.

When I first started the turntable reviews I actually (no don't laugh) went and has my ears syringed :-). Hey I take this seriously!!! After the Doc had dug out a couple of handfuls of putty I walked out on the street to have my ears assailed with incredible detail and brightness, sort of like walking out of a cinema on a bright summers day - ouch! But after a few hours everything settled down as the brain readjusted the frequency response and sensitivity (called 'habituation' for them that wants to know) and the sound as much as before.

This is what the Twin sounded like to begin with, for the first 30 seconds you thought wow! Then you began to wonder how long you could stand to sit in front of it. Thankfully over the next week or so things settled down considerably.



In essence the sound is clear, open, detailed with very good soundstaging, especially depth which is tough to do. It lacks the slightly brash top end of the Dino and replaces it with clean highs that do full justice to big cymbals ('Time Out') and distorted guitar. It also has a fast, tight bass performance, 'Chuckie' from Rikki Lee Jones has lovely bass with sharp

leading edges all beautifully on display. The ability to properly load the big Dynavector with 30 ohms gave good bass power, though using the Dynavector step-up (three times the cost of the Twin...) did make the bass go lower, something my bass-light horns need.



It doesn't sound like a valve stage, the highs are not quite as silky as with my Audion and the body of cymbals, acoustic guitar and some female vocals is a little less. This sort of this can be had with transistors (the Slee stages do it for me) but it's rare and very much a matter of taste. My horns like something that adds that body - and NO I don't mean a 'vintage valve bloom' - but other systems will push the other way. Otherwise I enjoyed every minute with the Twin. As you no doubt know, I'm using a pair of the Slee GramAmp2's in my turntable tests to give switchable 'back-to-back', something they've proved excellent for. The problem is that they are MM only so when I move on to MC's I have to do a lot of running back and forth and unplugging into my Audion valve stage and Dynavector step-up - hardly ideal. With the arrival of the Twin the 'back-to-back' extends to the MC area as well so greatly helping in the task of separating out competing designs. As with the GramAmps the Twin is more than capable of showing up differences between closely

matched front ends.

Conclusion

The Lehmann bandwagon continues to roll, another interesting and unusual product and excellent value to boot. It will fill the requirements of a growing number of vinyl 'nuts' with two sources, and more to the point stands out as a fine stage in its own right. Here I'm just grateful for another excellent tool for review purposes...

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