

REVIEW: MOON BY SIMAUDIO 110LP V2 PHONO STAGE - THE SECOND COMING



by Jay Garrett
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Simaudio's MOON 110LP has been a fan favourite phono stage for many years. Recently, the Canadian hi-fi company has seen fit to update and upgrade the analogue pre-amplifier, and we've been giving the 110LP v2 a good listen. Simaudio launched its MOON reference-grade series in the 1990s and much of what is on offer also still carries reference grade asking prices. That is not to say there aren't more affordable items in MOON's catalogue though, take the 240i integrated we reviewed back in August. Similarly, the 110LP v2 can be yours for less than £400. The original 110LP has been available for several years now and, although boasting an excellent signal/noise ratio as well as levels of harmonic and intermodulation distortion, Simaudio saw that it could be improved. The v2 gets entirely new circuitry as well a new look to more closely match its larger sibling, the £1,800 Neo 310LP.

The MOON 110LP v2 offers a wide range of impedance loading (47k, 475, 100 and 10 Ohms), capacitance (0, 100, 330, 430pF), and gain for both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) (40, 50, 54, 60, 66db). Additionally, you also get a choice between IEC and RIAA EQ curves. All of those options should enable precise matching with the broadest possible range of cartridges.

Selecting those settings is achieved via small dual in-line package (DIP) switches on the MOON's underside. Simaudio even bundles in the pen-like Grayhill DIPstick to use when changing switch settings. There is also a handy little set of diagrams showing how to configure the DIPs.

If those specs have already started to impress you just wait a second. All of that flexibility is packed in a pint-sized phono that only measures 5- x 1.65- x 6.5-inches (WxHxD).



The little rectangular black case features an elegant curved top to its fascia, the MOON legend just above a blue power indicator LED (and who doesn't dig blue LEDs?) and, in the bottom right-hand corner, the model number.

Just because it's possibly the smallest MOON component doesn't mean that Simaudio has skimped any on build quality. It weighs in at 1.5 kg and is put together just as any of its larger stablemates are. We're talking top-notch Canuck quality here, folks.



Around the rear, you'll find two output and two input RCA jacks, and a ground post, all of which are gold-plated. There's also the input jack for the 24V power supply which remains on at all times. Don't worry though; this thing sips at the juice. Even the wall wart power supply looks better than average with its fabric-covered cord.

After plugging everything in and setting the switches to where they needed to be it was time to get going.

Now, unless a component has already done the rounds before landing on my doormat, I will make sure it's 'burned in' before passing judgement. I know that there are those that won't see the point, but I believe it makes a difference, and so does Simaudio. However, once plugged in and with the Musical Fidelity M6si switched on I slowly increased its volume before playing anything. The dial was almost at 12 o'clock before the background hum was really audible. I have heard noisier phonos at twice the price of the 110LP v2.

Sound Quality

I first reached for Paul Simon's Graceland, an album with great basslines, plenty of vocals and percussion, not to mention fab tunes.

My initial thought once settled in, was just how good the instrumental balance was through the 110LP v2. But it wasn't only balance; there was increased depth when compared to the Musical Fidelity's in-built stage. As a bassist, I do tend to get drawn into basslines and of significant note were Bakithi Kumalo's chord play in Boy in the Bubble, along with the highly tasteful breaks in Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes; both of which came through full, woody and expressive.



As Andre Previn sadly passed away during this review it only felt right to play my copy of his recital of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with the London Symphony Orchestra. The LP110 v2 picked its way masterfully through the dynamics of the titular piece. Contrasting the weight of the low-end brass and drums was deft handling of the intricate piano-work by the maestro. High notes had room to breathe and then we were back into thundering orchestra without missing a beat.

Grooving back to 1963 and Guitar Boogie from The Best of Al Ciaola and this United Artists pressing

that my dad has handed down to me sounds like the purest distilled 60s. Ciaola's guitar playing is wonderfully twangy, and the accompanying saxophone cuts through without being shrill. There is an inherent warmth to the pressing, and the 110LP v2 retains this but is also able to discern all the necessary information from the track without adding or, more importantly, taking anything away from it.

My Generation, the mono version as it appears on The Who Hits 50, was originally released a mere two years after Alexander Ciola's offering but is a world apart. Yes, there is some overloading but, again, the MOON doesn't attempt to dilute or titivate. Instead, here is The Who at their most vital, angry and untethered. It might not be enough to excite some of 'the kids' these days, but I can definitely understand the fear that this band must have instilled in parents at the time as the eyes of teenagers widened upon hearing their new anthem.



A change of mood and the gentle opening bars of Dog Days Are Over by Florence + the Machine. Plucked and strummed strings give a bed to Ms Welch's soft vocals. Hand claps come from the dead centre, and more plucked strings appear from the right. The build begins, and the track becomes punctuated by thumping drums. A slight break as Flo goes ethereal for a moment before the piece gathers momentum again. Here, it could quite quickly get very messy, but there is just the right amount of air between the instruments and vocals to prevent such an occurrence.

Conclusion

It was not too long ago that I was impressed by another entry-level phono from a brand that generally demands big bucks for high-end kit. Applause AwardYes, I was impressed, but it didn't engage me as much as the MOON 110LP v2 has. The VPI Prime that both pre-amps have partnered is excellent at not getting in the way, but I do feel that the mini MOON managed to make my vinyl collection even more involving. Bass was powerful, highs clear and mids projected without the feeling there was anything untoward being added or altered by the MOON 110LP v2. Then you add in the rock-solid build quality, quietly confident looks and sub £400 asking price - you'd be daft not to buy one.

Little 110LP v2, go and grab yourself an Applause Award.