

Accustic Arts
Tube Preamp V

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NOBLE PURE SOUND

Dynamics and
harmony

Exquisite amplifier
technology in a fully
balanced design



The fifth generation of the Accustic Arts Tube Preamp V also stands out with its attractive appearance in aluminium and chrome and its unusual housing architecture.



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Noble pure sound

The high-end manufacturer Accustic Arts presents the fifth generation of its reference preamplifier Preamp: Scoring points in the "Tube" version with its "Tube Hybrid" concept, the updated Class A amplifier is even more accurate. As such, it offers the connection and equipment convenience for which the preamplifiers and integrated amplifiers from Lauffen are famous - such as the numerous balanced and unbalanced inputs and outputs, the different sound characteristics through AC or DC-coupled outputs or the headphone connection options. In the test, we experienced the noble pure sound that the Tube Preamp V delivers on all channels.

It's always a celebration: With their breathtaking design and high quality materials, Accustic Arts components exude an aura of nobility that makes them real editorial magnets. This is also the case with the Tube Preamp V:

As soon as we have this high-end preamplifier on our desk, it seems to exert an irresistible attraction on our editorial colleagues. No wonder: The Tube Preamp V is also a dream made of aluminium and chrome. The surfaces of the thick-walled, solid metal housing are superbly micro-polished and anodised - the fine line pattern of the surfaces creating a noble shimmer when exposed to light. This elegant look is emphasised by the artistic engravings and the milling on the top. They also have a practical use: The perforations underlaid with a perforated grid serve as heat dissipation for the tube-reinforced electronics. The multi-layered design of the housing is also artistic: Instead of flat surfaces, the body has raised planes and areas with a fascinating, almost relief-like structure.



The top of the amplifier is adorned with the excellently milled lettering and the Lauffen-based manufacturer's logo realised as a cut-out. This visual eye-catcher has the technical function of a housing ventilation system to dissipate the heat from the amplifier electronics and in particular the tubes.

Excellent material and manufacturing quality

When exploring the Tube Preamp V, the excellent material and manufacturing quality for which Accustic Arts has been known for a quarter of a century becomes apparent once again: The Lauffen-based manufacturer produces its components to the highest standards – and so this preamplifier also radiates the same grandeur that we experienced with the Preamp III or the Tube Preamp III Phono but also with the power amplifier Mono IV power amplifier. The soft shimmer of the Tube Preamp V's housing is also contrasted by the high-gloss chrome used to finish the controls and front panels. First and foremost, these are the two large, solid brass adjusting wheels. With their weight, exquisite ease of movement and the soft, springy, defined detent, they offer a superb feel when handling. When do you ever turn the wheel with such pleasure?

Clean switches, precise controls, sharp display

The left-hand dial on the Tube Preamp V is used to select the input. When turning, we hear a pleasant clacking sound: Mechanical relays with gold-plated contacts ensure absolutely clean switching. However, the adjusting wheel can also be pressed: This switches the preamplifier on or puts it back into standby mode. The right-hand dial, on the other hand, is used to control the volume – in the finest increments from one to 115. The operation conveys the desired analogue feel, but actually a digital volume control is at work here. It has a four-channel design, as the Tube Preamp V is fully balanced from start to finish. This digital level control therefore works with the highest precision and maximum synchronisation. Along with all other settings and menu items, the current le-

**lite**

Verdict
2024

100+
Luxury Class

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Model:	Accustic Arts Tube Preamp V
Product category:	Preamplifier (stereo)
Preis:	- €25,500.00 - with MM/MC phono module: €27,300.00
Designs:	Silver, Black
Distribution:	Accustic Arts, Lauffen Phone +49 7133 97477-0 www.accusticarts.de
Dimensions (HWD):	128 x 482 x 379 mm
Weight:	14.6 kg
Inputs (analogue):	3 x line balanced (XLR) 2 x line unbalanced (cinch) 1 x unbalanced line (RCA), configurable as "Surround bypass"
Inputs (analogue):	2 x balanced (XLR), 2 x unbalanced (cinch), 1 x headphones (stereo jack, 6.35 mm), switchable 1 x Fixed Out balanced (XLR) 1 x Fixed Out unbalanced (RCA)
Tubes used:	4 x ECC83S
Power consumption:	- Operation: approx. 25 W - Stand-by: <0.5 W

Scope of delivery

- Accustic Arts Tube Preamp III
- System remote control
- Batteries for remote control
- Mains cable (2.0 m)
- 2 spare fuses
- instruction manual (German)
- Quality verification certificate

Score

Overall rating:	100+
Class:	Luxury class
Price/performance:	reasonable



Superb quality: The fine micro-polishing and the perfect anodisation of the solid aluminium surfaces ensure a fine line pattern and an elegant shimmer.



The control knobs are made of chrome-plated solid brass and offer a real haptic highlight during operation with their smooth movement and spring-loaded detent. Here you can see the "Input Select" on the left. It is used to change the input by turning the knob. A long press switches the amplifier on and off, while a short press takes you to the "Settings" menu, where you can make all the settings. The "Phones On" switch next to it is used to activate the headphone output, which also mutes all other outputs.

vel is shown on the OLED multicolour display - a feature that's impressed us with its sharpness, high resolution and rich contrast since its introduction with Accustic Arts components. With its fresh design, this display gives the entire preamplifier an ultra-modern look.

Connection variety with balanced and unbalanced inputs

If we turn the Tube Preamp V over, it reveals an impressive number of connections. In the input section alone, it offers us six playback paths. Here, three inputs with XLR sockets are balanced and three inputs with RCA sockets are unbalanced. As the amplifier is fully balanced, these unbalanced signals are immediately balanced. From now on, they are routed twice in the amplifier: once normally and once inverted - in other words phase-rotated by 180 degrees. This cancels out interferences such as humming or buzzing. The Tube Preamp V thus enables the kind of signal routing that is standard in recording studios and characterises high-quality audio components in the consumer sector. The unbalanced input 6 now has another special feature: It can be converted by pressing the adjacent "Surround bypass" switch. The signal is then looped



Opulent entrance section: The preamplifier has six line inputs, three of which are balanced with XLR sockets and three unbalanced with RCA sockets. Input 6 can be converted using the corresponding switch so that the signal already processed by a receiver can be looped through in "Bypass" mode.

through unchanged to a receiver or surround processor. This means that the Tube Preamp V can be integrated into an existing home cinema system.

Opulent output section including headphone connection

The exit department is also extremely comprehensive. This starts with the triple offer for headphone fans: If you remove the magnetically attached button cover, the amplifier has a jack plug socket on the front. As befits a high-end amplifier, it has a robust 6.35 millimetre format. This allows you to use the Tube Preamp V's excellent integrated headphone amplifier. If you want to use an external headphone amp, there's a "Fixed Out" on the rear panel. It scores with connections in both balanced and unbalanced versions. This full control continues with the outputs for the subsequent output stage: The Tube Preamp V impresses here with two balanced and two unbalanced outputs. This even enables bi-amping in both connection variants. That allows two separate power amplifiers to be connected per channel - which then drive the subsequent transducer individually in the mid/high range and bass via separate cables.

Fine output finesse: AC or DC coupling

These four outputs now score with a fine finesse: They are available with both AC and DC coupling. AC coupling means: The signal passes through a capacitor and resistor. That's a kind of fuse: It prevents unwanted but unavoidable DC components from being transmitted in the music signal. These DC voltage components are harmful to loudspeakers and tube amplifiers. This fuse is not used for DC coupling. That means there are fewer components in the signal path that influence the sound and limit the lowest frequency range to zero Hertz. This "direct coupling" should therefore provide a better sound. However, not all power amplifiers are suitable for DC coupling - and in practice, the power amplifier structure also plays a major role in the sound. In some cases, AC coupling enables more subtlety or greater three-dimensionality - especially with unbalanced connections. Personal taste also plays a role in the choice. You can try this out for yourself with a suitable power amplifier. The Tube Preamp V makes it possible with both types of coupling.



The headphones are connected to the integrated headphone amplifier via the Phones socket. When not in use, the jack socket is elegantly concealed by the removable, magnetically attached cover button. It's visually matched to the "Phones On" switch, which forms the visual counterpart to the left of the display.

Official features, aristocratic remote control

In order to keep the coupling method both balanced and unbalanced in one way, the DC-coupled outputs can also be converted into AC-coupled outputs via the menu. In the Settings menu, we encounter even more clever features: These typically include the balance setting – which can be changed in fine 45-step increments towards each side – or the "Volume Offset", this latter enabling the level of each input to be raised or lowered by up to six decibels. This allows you to equalise the levels of different players and thus avoid volume jumps when changing sources. With "Output Phase", the music signal phase can be rotated by 180 degrees – a feature that may be advantageous for some music productions. The colour, brightness and display duration of the display can also be changed. These and other settings can also be



Two balanced and two unbalanced connections are available on the output side – in both AC-coupled and DC-coupled versions. If the downstream output stage is designed for DC coupling, you can choose between the two coupling methods and thus between two different sound characteristics. For connecting an external headphone amplifier, the rear panel also offers a balanced and an unbalanced "Fixed Out".



Accoustic Arts supplies an elegant, aluminium system remote control with the amplifier. This can be used to conveniently operate all of the preamplifier's functions.

made remotely. This is made possible by a system remote control that perfectly matches the preamplifier with its weighty, surface-finished aluminium housing and shines with the defined pressure point of its buttons.

Exquisite amplifier technology in a fully balanced design

The high-end level continues inside the Tube Preamp V. Accoustic Arts' amplifier concept is based on the fully balanced signal routing mentioned above. As a result, the amplifier structure comes with a total of four amplifier trains. The consistent channel separation and dual signal routing avoids mutual interference and ensures excellent crosstalk attenuation. Separation of the left and right channels – so crucial for the impression of spatiality – has been further improved by optimising the circuit board design, as has the distortion factor. This makes the preamplifier even more accurate. The clean amplification is also ensured by the output stages, which guarantee highly linear amplification in Class A circuitry. High-quality, close-tolerance components, which Accoustic Arts selects in line with its own standards, also contribute to this. On the hand-assembled circuit board we also find two 75 volt ampere toroidal transformers. They supply the tube and transistor sections separately and offer ample reserves here and there thanks to their generous dimensions. This again favours the calmness and purity of the reproduction.

"Tube Hybrid" technology

This brings us to the second amplifier concept that Accoustic Arts uses for its tube preamps: Here, tubes and transistors amplify in coexistence. The fifth generation of this amp is also a hybrid amplifier. However, the glow bulbs are not primarily used to achieve a warm tube sound, as is usually the case with other amplifiers of this type. This amplifier stage can be switched off at certain times because it's used solely for the sound design. Accoustic Arts, on the other hand, favours the self-developed "Tube Hybrid" concept: The glow bulb stage is an integral – in other words indispensable – component of the amplifier. According to Accoustic Arts, interaction with the transistor stages results in very low distortion values and a "good-natured", perfect distortion spectrum – enabling an exceptionally precise, "analogue" sound experience. What's more, the "Tube Hybrid" technology should ensure a very high bandwidth of the amplifier stages: According to the Lauffen-based company, the constant amplification covers several hundred kilohertz.



The relief-like, multi-layered housing structure also extends over the cheeks: They appear to be framed by an aluminium band. The plaque embedded in this band on each side rounds off the premium look. Here the Tube Preamp V is presented in silver, alternatively it is available in black.

Audiophile tubes in an exclusive selection

In der Röhrensektion agieren hierfür vier Doppeltrioden. Four ECC83S double triodes are used in the tube section, i.e. one glow bulb per channel strip. The ECC83S stands out with low noise and minimal microphony. This makes it insensitive to external mechanical stimuli that impair the sound. That's why this type of tube is extremely popular in the audio sector. The microphonic poverty should also be promoted by the special design trick: In the S-type of this ECC83 tube, the control grid wires are not coiled, but rather tightly tensioned. The principle of the greatest possible equality also applies to the tubes: Only products whose operating values lie within the narrow tolerance range specified by Accoustic Arts are used here. This leads to a reject rate of around 50 per cent – even though the Lauffen-based company already purchases calibrated, i.e. matched, premium tubes from the renowned manufacturer JJ Electronic. The glow bulbs finally deemed worthy of installation then need to

complete a break-in period of one hundred hours – only then will these tubes have earned their place in the Tube Preamp V after a final amplifier test.

The Accoustic Arts Tube Preamp V in practice

The Tube Preamp V is pretty much ready to play so we can integrate it directly into the sound chain in the listening room – and it's extremely harmonious: The source device is the Accoustic Arts Player IV CD player – while the power amplification is provided by a pair of Mono VI speakers, also from the Lauffen-based manufacturer. The Dali Epikore 11 and later the Audio Physic Tempo are used for sound conversion. The Tube Preamp V takes around two minutes to warm up after switching on. This is a good thing, because the tubes are heated gently. The glow bulbs reward this with a significantly longer service life. For this reason, you should also briefly press the "Volume" button during longer listening breaks, which switches off the tube section alone. We use the warm-up time to pop Donald Fagen's excellently produced album "Morph The Cat" into the CD player and select Fagen's airport romance with "Security Joan" – and it's fun from the very first second.

Transparency and openness

Drummer Keith Carlock introduces the number with a powerful hit on the snare and a fat kick on the bass drum – and the two hits come so suddenly and impulsively out of the quiet nothingness that we immediately flinch. That's quite an announcement in terms of dynamics! The combo then joins in, comprising 14 musicians over the course of the song: The line-up includes solo and backing vocals, three electric guitars, piano, organ, bass, percussion, handclaps and drums. The musical composition of the song is correspondingly dense – but the Tube Preamp V presents the powerful line-up with outstanding clarity, transparency and openness. This lets us to hear every instrument – and because Fagen has gathered the



After switching on, the Tube Preamp V allows itself a two-minute "warm-up". This slow and therefore gentle heating of the tubes significantly extends the service life of the glow bulbs.



The OLED display significantly characterises the modern look of the amplifier. It shines with excellent sharpness, superb contrast and provides the most legible information in one of the selectable colours white, red, green, blue, yellow, violet and, as here, turquoise. Above and beyond this, the brightness can be adjusted in 99 levels and the duration of the information display can be set thanks to the time-out function. The simple, elegant typeface is complemented by the successful way in which the information changes: The letters glide gently to the side.



The volume can be finely adjusted between 1 and 115 using the "Volume" button. You can mute the amplifier by briefly pressing the button. Press and hold to switch off the tube section - if you want to take a break from listening and don't want to leave the tubes in continuous operation.

guard of studio and session musicians around him, it's a double treat: Besides the superb sound reproduction, there's an understanding of what's happening here musically - how the musicians harmonise perfectly with each other or react to each other.

Purity and tranquillity

This harmonisation is evident here for instance in the interplay between drums and bass: Keith Carlock and Freddie Washington play with fantastic timing. They're precise to the point - and yet we can easily distinguish the bass drum from the bass figure placed exactly on top of it. Carlock and Washington lay the foundation for the great groove of the number - and this is exactly what the Tube Preamp V delivers to perfection: The reproduction is absolutely coherent, calm and relaxed, so it couldn't be any other way. There it is again - that marvellous purity and tranquillity that we know from Accustic Arts components! Thanks to the great audibility, we also experience how the musicians react to each other, passing the balls to each other - for instance when Ted Baker on the piano and Donald Fagen on the Fender Rhodes piano play a question-and-answer game, while the guitarists Wayne Krantz and Hugh McCracken repeatedly insert small, complementary melody interjections from the left and right into the short piano breaks.



The balance between the left and right channels can be finely adjusted in 45 steps per side. This makes it possible to equalise level differences due to the installation.

Dynamics and harmony

We also enjoy the wonderful freshness of the entire rendition: Despite all their groovy composure, the band doesn't come across as brusque, but plays with vitality and drive. The Tube Preamp V therefore fulfils in excellence what Accustic Arts promises with its Tube Hybrid concept: The amplifier is extremely precise and dynamic, offering a harmonious and coherent reproduction - but it's not a warming softener, as one might expect from a tube amplifier. Next master line: The Tube Preamp V succeeds in maintaining the integrity and balance of the sound both at high levels and at low volumes. Now we utilise the preamplifier's wide range of options: We're switching from the previously unbalanced connection to the CD player to balanced cabling. The instruments - especially the solo guitar - immediately come across as more catchy, the drums more robust and Donald Fagen's vocals even more present. The holographic reproduction offered by the preamplifier is thus even more intense and impressive.

Imagination and immersion

We also experience this at the opera gala: The mezzo-soprano Eline Denice Risager and the baritone Thomas Sigh, accompanied by the LiveStrings, sing "Il core vi dono" from Mozart's "Così fan tutte". With symmetrical cabling, the vocal duo appears even more physical and the chamber ensemble - playing behind the duo - seems all the more present. The reverb they're embedded in creates even more spatiality. These are nuances - but overall we're moving at a level of reproduction where such nuances make a difference on the way to perfect imagination and immersion. In addition to this choice between balanced and unbalanced signal routing, the Tube Preamp V also offers us another option for optimising the sound: AC or DC coupling of this preamp with the subsequent power amplifier. Our mono VI amps used here make both variants possible. This confirms the experience we've already discovered in previous tests of Accustic Arts amplifier combinations: The differences ...



The "OUT DC" outputs can be converted via the "Output Coupling" and are then available as AC-coupled outputs.

Sound selection: AC or DC coupling

... are more noticeable with unbalanced cabling. Here we experience a slightly richer bass – somewhat rounder, but also more restrained sound with the AC coupling. This is more noticeable with Fagen's "Security Joan" or other low-frequency pieces such as Yello's "Kiss In Blue". If we select DC coupling, the sound becomes a little more powerful, more gripping, slightly more wiry in the bass – and slightly more compact and focussed in the spatial imaging. This is evident in all recordings – including the Risager/Sigh duet "Il core vi dono", where the strong Kunsthall imagines a much more intense spatial signature than the Fagen production, which is more discreet in this respect. That's why you automatically focus on the musicians, who now move a little closer together. But the same thing rings true here: It's about nuances that sometimes only become audible when the sound chain up to the loudspeaker is operating at the highest level. Which sound characteristics you prefer is purely a matter of taste – and can be changed quickly thanks to the switchover option in the preamp's settings menu.

Enjoying music under the shells

Finally, let's test the headphone connection. We begin by connecting our Ultrasone Edition 5 unlimited – and also enjoy the wonderful openness and clarity of the reproduction via these closed, dynamic over-ear headphones. This allows us to maintain a clear view, or better: audibility, even in headphones mode. The true benefits here are in the densely orchestrated "Security Joan", where we can hear all the details – right down to the ride cymbal of the drums, whose decay we hear effortlessly and without any masking effect. This is confirmed when switching to the Dan Clark Aeon Closed 2. This magnetostat is a little more impulse-focussed and sober, but confirms the listening impression – and also enables an extremely relaxed enjoyment of music. With both headphones, we achieve a wonderful sonority right down to the bass – even at very low levels. The headphone playback also proves that the combination of tube and transistor amplification guarantees an excellent combination of harmonious sound and accurate, precise, dynamic reproduction.



The Accoustic Arts Tube Preamp V in the listening room: Here it amplifies in combination with two Accoustic Arts Mono VI. These power amplifiers drive a pair of Dali Epikore 11 speakers. The Accoustic Arts Player IV CD player acts as the source device.

Conclusion

The Accoustic Arts Tube Preamp V presents itself visually and acoustically as a breathtaking preamplifier. In its fifth generation, it's truly resplendent with a superb design, outstanding material and manufacturing quality – and in terms of amplifier technology with an updated, much more accurate Class A circuit in a fully balanced design. In the tube version, this reference preamp also combines tube and transistor amplification – and thus achieves an absolutely harmonious reproduction with outstanding purity and quietness. At the same time, the Tube Preamp V offers a marvellous resolution and openness. Thanks to the excellent impulse fidelity and dynamics, the reproduction also sounds fresh and vital – and thanks to the perfect timing, it sounds as natural as it could be. So you can back, relax... and enjoy music at the very highest level. The preamplifier provides this via an armada of balanced and unbalanced connection options, variable AC/DC coupling and headphone connectivity. The Tube Preamp V delivers a noble pure sound on all channels.