



**Audion Silver Night Premier 2 Preamplifier
and Silver Night Anniversary Triode Monoblock Amplifiers**

For: Gorgeous open sound, dynamically capable

Against: Requires the right speakers

Verdict: Audion's amps can produce breathtaking clarity, and a suitable weighty drive when partnered with sensitive speakers

These are a bit special. We loved the company's entry-level amp in June (Sterling Stereo) and now we're looking at the Silver Night Anniversary edition combination - a four-box amplifier consisting of a preamplifier with a separate power supply and two mono power amplifiers. It's called the Anniversary, incidentally, because Audion celebrates ten years of design and manufacture this year.

This is extremely low-power audio: the power amps produce only 25W apiece. They need careful partnering with speakers - we used 94dB/W/m-sensitive £1860 Audio Note AN-E/SPs.

These amps are gorgeously finished in gold-plate metal casework from which the triode valves stand up, glowing like bottled sparks in the dark. The preamp features five inputs, one of which is a phono stage to cater for record players with moving magnet or high-output moving-coil cartridges. There is a tape loop for recording and two sets of pre-outputs for the power stages or a headphone amp. Source selecting is via toggle switches on the fascia. The Anniversary power amps use audiophile-favourite 300B valves made in China, then selected and matched by Audion, and given a year's guarantee (as are the smaller triodes). Of course these valves can be replaced to tailor sound somewhat, and Audion can supply different driver triodes - so you could have one set for listening to rock music, another for chamber orchestras! These hand-made models are reconfigured versions of the original Silver Night power amps, with silver wiring throughout and polypropylene capacitors instead of electrolytics - much of the circuit has changed to improve the overall speed of the design says Audion.

With a comparatively low output, you might think the sound wouldn't have much attack. However, the amps deliver as much energy as you can take, and those who say you can't play rock and roll with a valve amp should get a blast of these. We played ZZ Top's Rhythmien from the album of the same name and found they drive as hard as the Electrocompaniet, while exhibiting exemplary control over the twists and turns in the music. The silver wire tends to smooth the signal as it speeds up, but these amps are also more revealing, the Audions having an extremely rare openness. This works both in terms of timing and dynamics, creating extra space so you hear more of the musical timing as well as the character of instruments.

This gives well-recorded music an almost ethereal character, and our disc of 18th-Century Overtures from Philips with Raymond Leppard and the New Philharmonia Orchestra was presented with new levels of insight. The violins had an extraordinary rasping sweetness, while the timpani came across with awesome acoustic depth.

You can be spellbound by music from a transistor radio - our ears are masters at dealing with almost any economy of truth that electronics put in the way of music from when it was played to when it reaches you. But given that hi-fi components set hurdles in the way of musical signal, we would have to say that these amps come close to giving that signal a pretty clear run of things. There were times when the level of clarity was staggering, and the focus afforded an almost uninterrupted view on recordings.

While we enjoyed playing these amps loud with live music levels they really excel at delivering decent dynamics and bandwidth at very low volume. This is one of the great boons of a well-designed valve amp. Listening to Mighty Sam McClain singing Give it up to Love during one hushed late-night session we marvelled at the amount of music coming through to the speakers, with the bass sounding full and resonant and the high hats retaining the brittle metallic character they have when the amps are steaming. Bit of an amp for all sessions really...WHAT HI-FI

Silver Night Push-Pull monoblock review

by Dan Mazza

The Silver Nights (SNs) were delivered to my store by Randall Bankert of O.S. Services. From the beginning I knew these amplifiers had to sound good (I believe in "things usually sound the way they look") because looking at them sure was a delight. They are elegant and simple in form. Being fairly low in profile, for a tube amp, is a nice touch. On the front panel is a variable input adjustment. The back panel consists of a gold RCA input jack, four nicely done knurled speaker posts (1 negative and 3 positive - 2, 4, 8 ohm), a detachable power cord, and something all tube amps should have, a ground lifting switch. The 300Bs are branded "ROD Hot Tubes" and appear to be Chinese in construction. All in all, fit n' finish appears to be fairly good.

The Nights saw duty in two different systems: System one consisted of a CAL CL-15 or ARC CD2 CD Players, Cary Audio SLP98 Preamp w/phono, Diapason Adamantes II speakers. Comparison amps on hand consisted of Cary CAD805Bs. Cabling was WireWorld Polaris III throughout. The front end equipment was plugged into a AudioPrism Foundation III AC Filter. The amps were run directly off the dedicated wall outlets. An Arizona Tube Audio NF-1 Bass Notch Filter was used to tame a room resonance hump at 79Hz. Various RoomTune acoustical treatments filled out the rest of the room taming duties.

System two, which is my home system, consisted of a CAL DX-2 CD Player, home built turntable w/Rega RB300 modded for VTA adjustment, Blue Point Special cartridge, Anthem Pre 1L line stage, ARC PH3 phono stage. Comparison amplification was VTL Tiny Triode Limited Editions and an antique original Harman Kardon Citation II. Nordost Blue Heaven and WireWorld Atlantis interconnects, homebrew speakers and power cables. Mild RoomTune acoustical treatments provide the finishing touches.

SOUND: Lets just say that right from the start there was something special about these amps. They just seemed to grab hold of the music and really boogie! Very similar to my Citation - believe it or not, this amp rocks! The 25 watts of the SNs sounded more like 70 or 80. The bottom end was very robust. Forget what you think you know about 300B amps' bass. These will convince you that 300Bs will go low with authority. Occasionally, a little bit of tubbiness came through, but it in no way distracted from the presentation (This showed up more in system #2 - so, it probably was room/speaker interface related and set off by the SNs' bass

authority/extension). The rest of the stuff happenin' down low made up for it though. Bass lines were very well separated. On a lot of pop albums, bass lines usually get buried in the mix. The SNs unravelled them and made them easy to follow. Upper bass had that slight warmth to it, but the speed of the bass mixed very well with it.

The top end was very extended also yet retained the 300B silkiness. Vaughn Bros.' Family Style CD is one that never really sounded all that good (somewhat irritating). With the Silver Nights, I could listen to this recording over and over without fatigue. Try that with solid state amps! Cymbals had a lovely sheen to them without sounding like typical white noise that CDs can often have.

Soundstaging and imaging (my priorities) were good. Soundstage depth wasn't as deep as very good single-ended amps, but layering was portrayed well. Side-by-side spacing was mapped out well also. Image height seemed to be well rendered and appropriate.

The one true test for me is "Am I paying attention to the music or the equipment?" With the SNs, I was just going along with the rhythms. I think that this factor is often overlooked when auditioning equipment. I really didn't listen to the SNs to do a review on them. Instead I listened to them to enjoy the music. To me - this is what it's all about! - Dan Mazza, USA