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Lamm Industries' M1.1 Monoblocks

From Russia With Love

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Specifications

Price: \$15,980.00
Rated power: 100 Watts per channel Class A
Rated Output Voltage: 40 Volts peak into 8 Ohms, 28.28 Volts into 4 Ohms
Input Impedance: 41Kohms
Output impedance: 0.24 Ohms
Outputs: Two Sets of Brass, gold plated, six-way binding posts
Features: AC Voltage Selector, Bias Setting Switch



Address:
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New Yawk City, New Yawk

Brooklyn, N.Y. is long famous for it's delicious cheesecake at Juniors, and world class hotdogs from Nathan's at Coney Island. Once upon a time, it too was home to the legendary Brooklyn Dodgers, but now is the proud resting-place to a new celebrity, Vladimir Shushurin, president and designer of Lamm Industries. He builds "battle ship tested" designed audio components such as the one under scrutiny here in the Lamm M1.1 mono amplifier. Vladimir's also gaining notoriety from an all-new state of art single ended amplifier (\$29,000) known as the ML2. (I've had the opportunity to hear these sweethearts at the home of Jerry Gladstein, and My, Oh My how good they sound.) So, virtually unknown, one may wonder why I chose to term Vladimir the boroughs latest celebrity. Do yourself a favor, and listen as I did to his Lamm M1.1's. Then, probably they'd ask in Brooklyn "ye'see where I'm comin'from m'man?"

Run For your Lives....it's The Half Solid State....Half Tube Monster!

The Lamm M1.1's a hybrid design with one specially selected 6922 vacuum triode in the second stage. The M1.1 is masterfully built and engineered - simplicity at it's best to insure an easy pathway of uncontaminated signal. Ladies and Gentleman, what you have is a well-oiled machine that's reminiscent of well-made German automobile. Consider these impressive stats: 100 (conservatively rated) watts per channel in Pure Class A operation. Designed with high-speed MOSFET transistors in the output stage with zero negative feedback. A selectable bias/voltage toggle switch allows for 8 or 4 Ohm taps.

Each amplifier is carefully hand crafted with matched parts of the highest quality, like military grade low noise DALE metal film resistors and PRC wire wound resistors. Capacitors include Electrocube and Roederstein film capacitors, Cornell Dubilier electrolytic capacitors, and Bourns multiterm potentiometers. RCA jacks are Esoteric Audio, along with gold plated Neutric XLR connectors. Now, so much for the design goals and good intentions....on to the show.

Lamm Industries amplifiers have received all the raves one designer could wish from audio critics in the press. (Receiving nothing less than Class A recommended Components list in Stereophile magazine)

Okay, you might say "their dated pieces." So what am I doing on a new mag doing an old amp review? Well, sorry to tell'ya this, but it's not old, and it's still available today as it was originally back in 1993 without a single change in status! Vladimir Shushurin is, in my opinion, not just *the man* behind what makes this amp such great sounding. But should be considered *the reason why* these amps have existed virtually unchanged from their original designation dating back more than six years. When I asked Vladimir the question of their unusual longevity, he answered quite matter-of-factly, stating "There's nothing to change or upgrade in my amps. They're a finished product from day one." With that being said, don't bet on seeing any monikers attached to Lamm Industries signifying MK 1, MK2, MK3 etc., ad nauseam.

The Way It Sounds

How much of this would matter if the M1's didn't deliver the kind of sound quality that makes you forget issues like single ended versus push pull and tubes versus solid state. My love affair with Sade, has started up once more. Her lovely *Love Deluxe*, (Epic EK53178) disc has been getting lots of attention of late. From top to bottom, I've come to realize the Lamm M1.1's overall frequency balance and timbre is exquisite, easily besting the many amps I recall having here on these premises.

The Lamm M1.1's it seems, [at first] to be very smooth and sweet, but slightly dark or lacking upper-octave energy. Then, however, you become aware that you are hearing all the upper-octave sounds of the music and what you're missing is any trace of upper-octave noise and glare. The result is excellent overall integration of each and every aspect of its frequency response. The Lamm M1.1's have a bit less upper-midrange energy or presence than my reference single ended KR Enterprises VT800SE's, but this is a matter of judgment and taste-not a question of accuracy. The midrange is virtually flawless, benefiting I have a hunch, from the single 6922 vacuum tube in its output section. This level of midrange richness used to be the prerogative of all-tube single ended devices. No longer. This hybrid, designed amplifier outshines any solid state amplifier I've heard or owned in the midrange.

The bass is quite impressive as well. It is here where the solid state designed devices in the Lamm M1.1's outshine even my reference KR800's, (*I should note*) not by a close margin. It seems no amplifier ever seems to offer the best of both sheer power in the deep bass and the kind of clear differentiation of bass notes and detail you hear in live music. Again, judging against my reference KR800's, the Lamm M1.1's, I've discovered, bring the best of both worlds to the table in terms of *both* bass power and control. The Lamm M1.1's physical application of low bass energy is startling while simultaneously control the stop-and-go excursions of the Von Schweikert VR6's woofer section, unlike any amp I've heard. Its bass response conjures up the likes of my old reference Mark Levinson ML20's, but sounds even faster, clearer and more articulate.

Interestingly enough, the musical dynamics of the Lamm M1.1's are, despite their incredible speed, power, and control, sounds very natural - not forcefully stunning or artificially emphasized, just simply a closer portrayal of *real life* sounding. Low level transients seem to come through the floorboards with exceptional clarity and genuineness rather than just appearing in a falsely advertised or shocking fashion. I find this to be a hallmark of this amplifier, and a quality that eludes many lesser amplifiers with the same power ratings.

Imaging, Soundstage and Focus: Food of the Audio Gods

This amplifier will cure the claustrophobic audiophile stuck with an amplifier suffering from a closed in soundstage. The Lamm M1.1's provided an excellent soundstage that is a touch forward in its presentation compared the KR 800's. That being said, It still somehow produces a stage that is realistically *life sized* in proportion while *life like* in its placement. I doubt it's the amplifier for those who prefer the sound of their system recessed way behind their loudspeakers. It will, I've discovered, suit the audiophile who wants to hear all of the ambient information sometimes hidden on CD due to its amazing harmonic integrity. In terms of soundstage width, the Lamm M1.1's seem to expand the edges of the soundstage while deadlocking images across its vast stage with an uncanny sense of focus.

The ability to keep images in place in their own space is quite a stunt for any amplifier, but the Lamm M1.1's do it like nothing to it. Again, naturalness, rather this lack of pretension, is the only word that comes to mind when you hear the way they flesh out the cardboard cut out images the way some of the very finest tube designs are famous for. The Lamm M1.1's somehow keep intact the harmonics of the instruments, (the meat) avoiding that hifi-ish, etched character that sometimes accompany this level of precision imaging and focus. The consummate amplifier has the ability to localize images of many instruments at once and the Lamm M1.1's do this with alarming dexterity. Listening to *Parker's Mood* by the Roy Hargrove/Christen McBride/Stephen Scott Trio, (Verve 314527907-2) proved I was really in the big time amplifier game. Roy Hargrove's performance on track 3, "Marmaduke," showed the Lamm M1.1's excellence in its ability to lock and load multiple images against a velvety jet-black backdrop.

I have no idea why some amplifiers do this finer than others, but the Lamm M1.1's are certainly getting my vote as *one of the best*. My reference KR VT800 SE's offer a bit better layering and three-dimensionality but only in relative terms. Furthermore, Keep in mind that the KR amp's a pure vacuum tube device, therefore it should come as no surprise that it bested the Lamm M1.1's in this category. However, coming to

this conclusion was no walk in the park, cause this isn't just "way different" or something that can be quickly determined unless you compare them for many a hour, as I did, through various setups, assorted speaker systems and cables (not counting tweaks and room treatments).

Conclusions and Caveats

Frankly, given the current state-of-the-art in amplifiers, or at least my exposure to them, I would have difficulties finding fault with the Lamm M1.1's. I haven't heard the latest Krell 250 mono's at Arnie's (Balgavis) home, though I did listen at length to the mighty new Levinson 33h's at Mike Silvertons. [Read my comments in his review.] I did have the opportunity to hear the new Spectral amplifier at Harry Pearson's Sea Cliff home, running, I should add, the quite impressive and very large Melos Pipe Dreams. [Some sound!] Bill "The Brass Ear" Brassington, is back to his old tricks as master setup man *emeritus* with the wonderful sounding Audio Research VT200 strapped to his new pair of JM Labs . Perhaps if I did have them all here, maybe, just maybe, the weaknesses of the Lamm M1.1's wouldn't be so elusive. But as it stands now I cannot find any fault with these magnificent sounding beasts. Whether using the VR-6 or (Bopro Inc.), Hologram 5.2's. (review forthcoming) the sound always conveyed the music as truthfully as one could ask. That being said, getting these amplifiers to sing was a cinch. And sing they did. I really enjoyed the Lamm M1.1's and can even admit I've found a new reference in terms of their sheer ability to (both) convey power and control without forsaking the music's cozy natural sense of warmth. Hats off to Brooklyn's newest celebrity Vladimir Shushurin. Anybody for Cheesecake?