



Forward, always forward

With a wealth of experience spanning five decades of Symphonic Line - Rolf Gemein has long since found his unmistakable sonic signature - so one might think it is time to lean back a little? Far from it!

Associated Equipment

Turntables:1

- Thorens TD 1600 with Ortofon MC 30 Supreme
- Dr. Feickert Volare with SPU GM E
- Thorens TD 160 S MK V with Elac 796 H24

Preamplifiers:

- Accuphase C-280
- Acoustic Arts Tube Preamp II
- ModWright HPA

Power Amplifiers:

- Hypex Nilai
- Leak Stereo 20 and Stereo 50

Integrated Amplifier:

- Synology 925

Loudspeakers:


- JBL L300 and L26
- Neuron Acoustic Majestic M
- Audeze S26 On-Wall
- Davis The Stage

Accessories:

- Power distributors by PS Audio,

Silent Wire:

- Cables by van den Hui, Silent Wire



**Symphonic Line
Phonostage
MK 4**

The Symphonic Line Phonostage MK 4 is a statement. Modest in appearance - yet immediate in impact. What remains is what truly matters: pure, unrestrained energy, elegance, and musical truth.



Symphonic Line Phonostage MK 4

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Price: | approx. €11,000 |
| Distribution: | Symphonic Line, Duisburg |
| Telephone: | +49 203 3159656 |
| Internet: | www.symphonic-line.de |
| Warranty: | 2 years |
| Dimensions (WxHxD): | 440 x 100 x 360 mm |
| Weight: | 11 kg |



Solid and massive are the enclosures from the house of Symphonic Line - internally, too, one can sense the design language; the front panel may also be ordered in silver or even highgloss.

Because standstill would mean regression for the Duisburg pioneer, he once again refined his phono stage - already thoroughly matured in the current MK4 version - and endowed it with an even stronger dose of his distinctive sonic philosophy. Anyone who knows Rolf Gemein - and within the German hi-fi scene, everyone does - understands: here, marketing phrases are not fabricated. What matters is the vibrant tension between physical pragmatism and an almost fanatical search for musical truth. His trade-fair presentations are legendary (and amusing), his convictions as unwavering as the solid enclosures of his devices.

It is clear that precisely this stability also defines the Phonostage MK 4. No "chi-chi," no fashionable gimmickry, no superfluous gloss. It stands in the rack as if built for eternity. Symphonic Line does not chase trends. A standard was once set here - and it remains faithfully upheld.

Technically, Gemein adheres to his credo: everything that stands in the signal path must go. Whatever makes the signal "jump," whatever disturbs its flow, is removed with determination.

In the case of the Phonostage MK 4, the power supply and the big capacitors are deliberately oversized to an exceptional degree. Other manufacturers might power an entire integrated amplifier with that. In a Symphonic Line design,

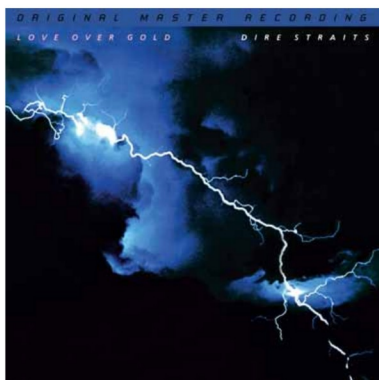
the 300-VA toroidal transformer "merely" serves to stabilize the supply voltages. Small interjection: The power consumption of the Phonostage is modest - only around 26 watts - which makes it all the more generous. And that is the point: ample headroom is to be created - either through nothing but space, or through storage capacity. In the case of Symphonic Line, carefully selected capacitors ensure that the signal is drawn as directly as possible from the source - almost directly from the Rhine, one might say.

In the actual amplifier circuitry, things continue in a similarly sober manner. Inside the generously dimensioned enclosure there is only a single input - the output sockets have taken the place of a second input of the larger model MK 4, whose enclosure design is identical. On the main board sit, stacked, two input and output modules each. Clearly ...



The generously oversized transformer is housed in a mumetall enclosure and is additionally damped by a gel pad.

Dire Straits - Love over Gold



Played

Gustav Mahler -
Symphony No. 1

The Rolling Stones -
Beggars Banquet

Dire Straits -
Love Over Gold

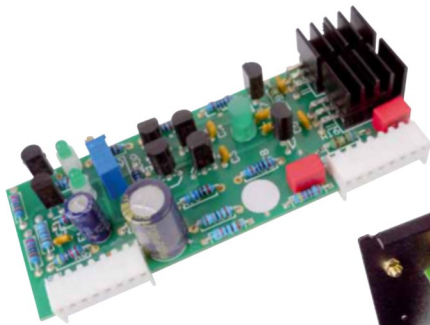
Gerry Mulligan -
Live at the Village Vanguard

Beck -
Morning Phase

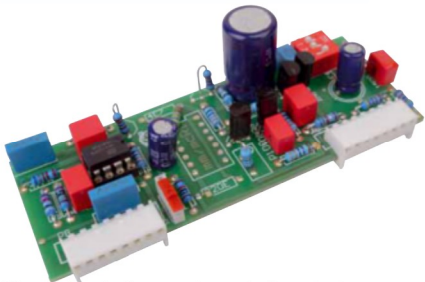
Sergei Prokofiev -
Romeo and Juliet

Kraftwerk -
The Man-Machine (Remaster)

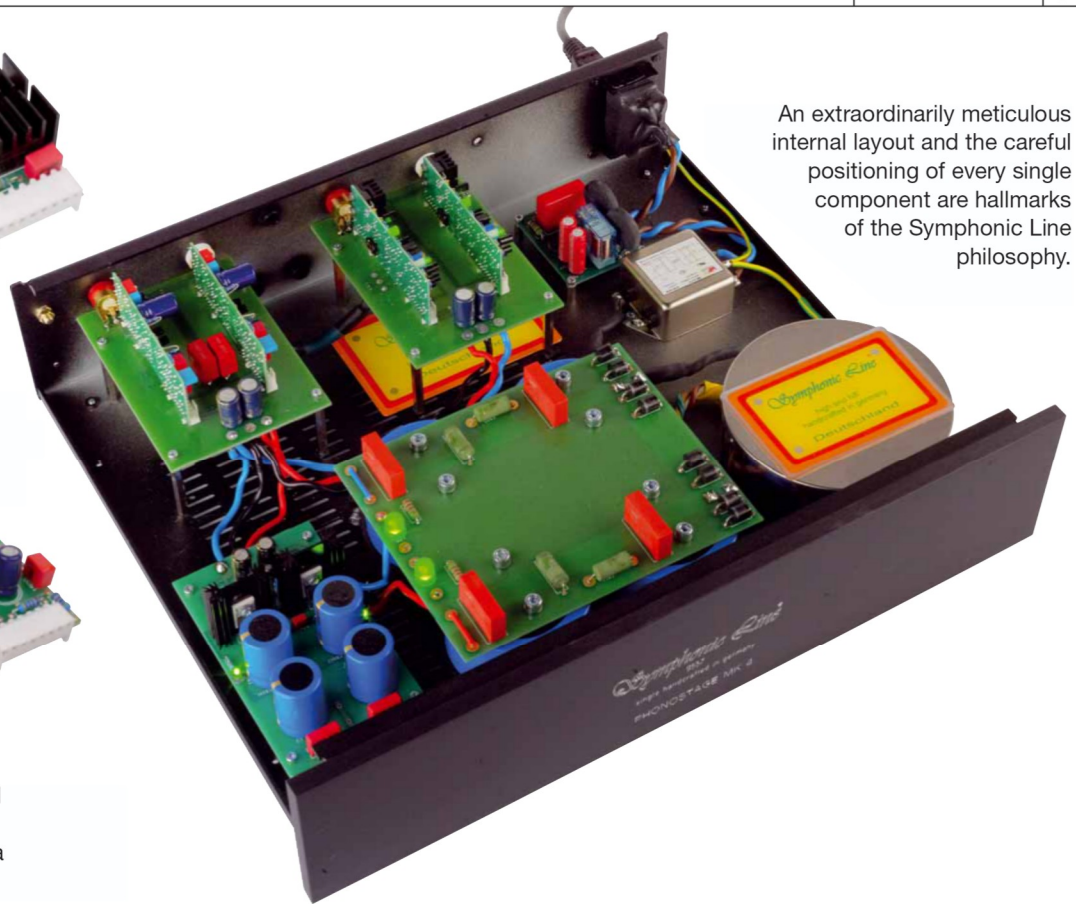
Helene Grimaud -
Reflection



The output stage is fully discrete in design and positioned directly at the output.



The actual phono stage is located directly at the input and can be adjusted in several parameters via a triple DIP switch.



An extraordinarily meticulous internal layout and the careful positioning of every single component are hallmarks of the Symphonic Line philosophy.

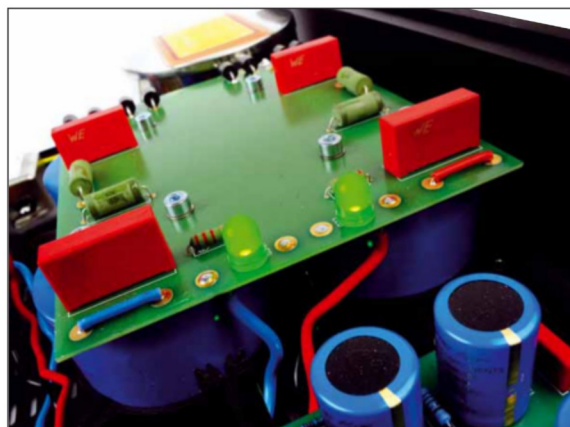
There is ample space for filtering, regulation and decoupling of the power supply - a aspect to which Rolf Gemein attaches the highest mechanical stability of the whole construction. The nearly oversized feet, featuring the distinctive Symphonic Line script, are bonded to a supporting wooden frame inside the chassis and constructed in multiple layers with gel filling to suppress resonances with lasting effectiveness.

Traditionally, the signal paths are kept as short as possible, the circuit operates in pure Class A, and the entire design is fully discrete - including a small "down-grading" compared to the

reference preamplifier, in which one would normally expect to see a board proudly populated with very small SMD transistors in IC form. Here, however, instead of the original IC seated in the phono stage socket, a component is employed that Rolf Gemein commissions exclusively from a specialist manufacturer for Symphonic Line. The designer places his trust solely in carefully selected parts - many of them chosen after years of listening evaluations. Less emphasis is placed on outward display. Anyone who searches for decorative showpieces on the rear panel or beneath the chassis will search in vain.



The custom-made smoothing capacitors produced specifically for Symphonic Line are no less impressive than the transformer.



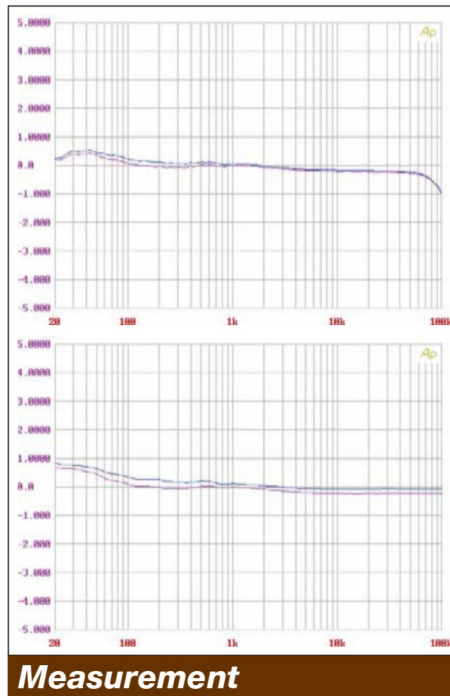
On the generously dimensioned power supply board, the components are allowed to "breathe freely."

Anyone searching for constant tinkering with the device will not find it here. The adjustment to MM or MC is made via DIP switches on the corresponding internal boards. If you want to alter capacitance or resistance values, you must open the unit.

Rolf Gemein would never place a sonically inferior switch in the signal path, just to spare the user a screwdriver. So you set it once, close the lid properly - carefully tightening the screws, because that matters - and then you devote yourself to music.

For the listening test deliberately avoided audiophile demo tracks" and instead reached straight for Beggars Banquet by The Rolling Stones. The needle drops - and what happens is what typically happens with Symphonic Line: the sound simply stands there. Charlie Watts' snare on "You Can't Always Get What You Want" is dry and full-bodied in the room, so tangible that one almost reflexively pulls back. The device presents the entire forward drive, the energy and inner propulsion of the band with an authority that once defined larger Röhr loudspeakers when driven hard - without that "compressed" box character some systems adopt.

But back to the phono stage: the MK 4 does not merely reproduce music. Somehow it finds a more immediate path, forging a spontaneous connection between listener and record. And it works. A change of scene: now for something more subtle. The dramatic dynamic swings in "Telegraph Road" by Dire Straits are a challenge



Measurement

Measurement comments:

The frequency response measurements of both operating modes MM and MC differ only insignificantly. In MM there is a slightly elevated upper treble - academically, perhaps, something to measure but practically irrelevant.

In practice, the Symphonic Line is very flat across the audible range. At 0.03% distortion at 0.09% at 1 kHz (?), it demonstrates excellent performance values.

With a load resistance of 38 dB (A-weighted) and 66 dB (A-weighted), the unit is extremely quiet. With a power consumption of 23 watts, the Symphonic Line operates efficiently and without excess.

even for a high-end phono preamplifier. The Phonostage does not merely overcome them—it celebrates them. When the drums enter, there is no booming or blurring, only pure energy. At the same time, it places Mark Knopfler's guitar so vividly between the loudspeakers that one can almost see the strings vibrating—and therein lies the true feat: the system between recording and listener simply vanishes.

But can the "Ruhr Valley hammer" also speak softly? I place "Réflexions" by Hélène Grimaud on the platter. And behold: the MK 4 treats the recording with an almost tender precision. The decay of the strings, the space surrounding the grand piano—every nuance becomes distinctly audible. All of it unfolds against a background of the deepest black, once again proving how vital an over-dimensioned power supply truly is. No noise, no distraction. Only music.

What strikes me most is that the MK 4, in direct comparison to other preamplifiers, appears more coherent and more inwardly gathered. Where earlier there may have been emphasis, today there is balance. The high resolution never becomes analytical coldness; it never forces information upon you. It reveals details that were always present in the recording. And according to Rolf Gemein, this is precisely the goal: a device that ages like fine wine and, after years, still permits the discovery of new tonal landscapes. You may allow yourself that journey.

Thomas Schmidt



The Phonostage MK 4 has a pair of phono boards - therefore one input and one output.