A translation of a review of the Perreaux Reference Classic 750 Power-amplifier and SM6P Pre-amplifier in as appeared in the Norwegian Hi Fi magazine "Lyd & Bilde" Issue: 10 Oct. 2001

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Few of us think about New Zealand as a country with Hi-Fi production companies. Even less of us are thinking about Hi-End producers, but from the country with kiwi, fish and lamb on the menu, comes Perreaux. Definitely High-End! We test three units from Perreaux.

The two islands on the other side of the globe are a little larger than the British Isles. With a population of 3.8 million, there are even fewer than the population of Norway! It was in 1974 on these green islands east of Australia that Perreaux first saw the light of day. The first amplifiers produced immediately received positive reviews, but the trickle of units that came to this part of the world all those years ago can hardly be compared to where Perreaux is today. The general perception is that all large and heavy Hi-End amplifiers comes from the USA, but the truth is that Germany, France and also Japan all make Hi-End as good as any. We should not forget to mention good Hi-End made in Norway, but as we all know, "it is not easy to be a prophet in ones own country". The export market is therefore very important for small countries such as Norway and New Zealand. Their home markets are simply not big enough to maintain a sustainable market. While Krell and Mark Levinson have no problem surviving in the North American market with over 310 million citizens, it is not that easy to make a living of Hi-Fi with a population only with 3.8 million!

With Brawi in Skien, Norway, Perreaux have got their 21st distributor. They have taken on most of the Perreaux range, and it isn't few. Beside the Reference Series, which include both the "Classic" and the "P" series, there are also a less expensive "E" series. All series have Tuner, CD-Player and several amplifiers to choose from. Recently Perreaux also included the first Home-Movie power-amplifier and AC3/DTS processor.
In this test we are dealing with the best Perreaux has to offer, the Reference “P” series SM6P Pre-amplifier in matt black and 2 x Reference “Classic” series 750 Monoblock power amplifiers finished in black chrome.

The Perreaux reference series comes in two distinct styles. One style is called the Reference "P", represented in the review by the Pre-Amp SM6P. The Mono-Blocks are the Reference "Classic", and can also be delivered in the "P" look. Perreaux makes many amplifiers, so you should find something to suit your tastes over all price categories, except the cheapest ones. You will hardly find Perreaux at "Elkjøp" (a series of electronic / housekeeping shops).

Power to the people!
"There is just no substitute for cubic-inches", the Americans say about their cars. It looks like Perreaux build their amplifiers around the same concepts. Not only are the 750’s huge, but also under the very special cabinet sits enough electronics to deliver 750 Watt into 8 Ohms, and 1300 Watts into 4 Ohms. Enormous power, but do you need it? With thoughts of all the low efficiency loudspeakers out there, the answer can be yes! When you are driving low efficiency loudspeakers not only do you need "enough" power, but also stability and dynamic highs!

The finish is very good on both the pre and the power amplifiers. The special Classic design does not look like anything we have ever seen previously. You can discuss if it is good looking or not, but it’s instantly recognizable as a Perreaux. The front panel is cast in solid aluminum, which is electroplated to provide a lifelong tarnish free and durable finish. Besides the black chrome finish as pictured the front can be delivered in gold, silver and chrome. If you choose the more traditional “P” series look, as shown on the SM6P pre-amp we are testing, you get a 1cm thick aluminum front, with a matt black electrostatically applied finish, made after been "baked" at 230 degrees. Perreaux does not do these things for finish only, but also because the cabinets are designed to provide maximum mechanical, thermal and electrical stability for the transformer and internal components. Inside the amplifier are carefully selected components measured and sorted by Perreaux before they are used in one of their units. Much of the production is pure handwork. In the end the amplifier goes through a "torture test", where they are subjected to extreme things, such as unstable power supplies and powerful transients from the power net. The amps are driven to full power while switches and buttons are being exposed for far more than they ever will experience in "real life". Finally after that the product is packed and shipped to the customer. Only in this way is Perreaux able to ensure that the product exceeds customer’s expectations.

The philosophy inside is as simple as the outside. The internal electrical and electronics are not cluttering up the inside of this large and powerful amp. Rather it is the specially designed toroidally wound transformer and the attention to cooling that takes up most of the space. Instead of several different systems, which are designed to alter and correct the signal on it's way through the amplifier, Perreaux believes in doing it right from the beginning. Because of this there are few components in the signal path, and as we already have stated, they have hardly been chosen as lottery numbers. The principle is simply explained, "to make a wire with an amplification".
The specially designed toroidally transformer with heavy copper wiring, feeds the capacitors with power to the very carefully selected MosFet transistors, which deliver power to the speakers.

At 750 watts into 8 ohms, and a peak of more than 160 amperes, these are the largest power-amps available from Perreaux. On paper this represents an insane amount of power, but as we all know: there is a big difference between theory and practice in this business. It is in practice that we find out if the promise comes true. The huge Perreaux 750 is so powerful that it has to come in two units. Because of this they are quite imposing, unless you have a very large room to hide them in. The amplifiers are fully balanced and have inputs for both XLR (balanced) and RCA (unbalanced). They get hot, but have effective cooling, so you won’t burn your hands.

The SM6P pre-amp has 6 line inputs and two sets of unbalanced outputs and one balanced output. As in the 2 x 750-watt power amps, the SM6P is a fully balanced unit. The changes of input are either done with small push buttons on the front, or by the remote control supplied. The volume of the pre-amp is done digitally, but the signal is analog, regulated by high quality components. High quality relays are used at the input, and all inputs pass in pure class A with ultra-low distortion. The same also happens in the 750 power amps.

Full contact sound
If listening to the Perreaux amplifiers should be contrasted with sport, this is full contact experience. It is not very often that we hear such physical reproduction of music as we have experienced in the months we listened to the 750’s and the SM6, on different speakers and with all kind of music.

With as much power available, it doesn’t mean that all you can do is you can play as loud as you want. The biggest advantage is a "bottom-stability" and control you never hear unless in the "Hi-End" world. To listen to the tightest drums of a drummer like Jack De Johnette is a really shocking experience. Everybody who has stood beside a drum-set knows what I am referring to! These large mono-blocks make everything else sound like a small transistor radio on the beach, in the case of power. The 2 x 750’s compare with the best from Krell, Mark Levinson and Dynamic Precision.

Can it play loud? Terribly loud! How loud depends on your speakers, and your room. But... other qualities are more important. Among others the Quad ESL-989 (electrostatic loudspeakers we tested in our last issue) were used a lot together with the Perreaux set. No other amplifiers managed to give so many details in the base. You could hear dynamic differences which were previously masked by other amps more limited base response, and seldom has a Steinway-clavier played so deep and powerful on an electrostatic loudspeaker, without losing the lowest octave.

Even if the sound picture is overwhelming in its size and scale, I think it is rare that it was not projected a larger depth in the sound picture. With all respect! It's nothing close to bad, but with "soul settings" experience with ex. Krell amp fresh in memory, I had expected just a little more depth. Instead you are being presented with a sound as if you are leaning forward. This can be compared to sit nearer to the scene with a panorama of a sound picture before you. "Instant connection" you can say.

It is really an exiting experience to listen to the Perreaux units. One thing is how direct and unmasked the music is reproduced; another thing is that you notice immediately what you have been missing previously. The dynamic differences in the base we have already mentioned, but also in the mid-range it appears that the Perreaux set plays on a larger dynamic range than most amps. The sound balance is warm, almost glowing, but not without details.
Vocals get a pleasant, soft and non-aggressive character, which can be touching in their realism. Voices are reproduced with body, lungs and mouth, not only the vocal chords and creates a very involving experience of jazz and opera presentations.

The tonal commitment is in the best I have ever heard, no matter where, but a little more diffusion, especially in the upper tones is preferred. But not to be misunderstood - nothing sound "canned" here. The texture and the sound stage are as stated previously very "transparent", but with a little more "air" at the top.

The times I disconnected the Perreaux set and coupled other things, I was immediately reminded how much I was missing when using simpler and cheaper electronics. It was after all not only Hi-End on the price tag! The sound picture scrimped in all dimensions, the dynamic was very reduced, and the decrease of the sound quality gave a larger distance between the music and the listener.

It is only when you review a product like Perreaux that you realise what you’ve been missing.

**Conclusion**

There is quite a lot of money at stake here to spend on amplifiers. You must also have a CD-Player, loudspeakers and the best possible cables to put it all together. Our little Norwegian market for High-End is already well covered by several importers who want their share of this little market. We believe Perreaux can fight with the best of them. They are different to look at, and they come from a country that we don’t traditionally associated with HI Fi, but Brawi / Perreaux have proved to us that this brand not only has the right to live, but should have serious judgment before such amount of money changes hands. We cannot find any points that these products lack quality. To listen to them on good speakers is not only a full contact sport, they drag you even closer by their involving and highly realistic way of handling with the musical dynamics. But, you don’t know how good these really are before you have tried it yourself - and after auditioning them, gone back to your old set.

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