

Marchand Electronics LN108 Phono Preamp

Manufacturer: Marchand Electronics Inc., PO Box 18099, Rochester, NY 14618; 585/423-0462; www.marchandelec.com

Price: LN108-AA (assembled), \$495; LN108-EZK (EZ kit) \$396; LN108-KK (kit), \$297

Source: Manufacturer loan

Reviewer: James T. Frane

Marchand Electronics makes a number of products, including tube and solid state active electronic crossovers, MOSFET power amplifiers, preamps, bass equalizers, attenuators, and power supplies. Most of the products are available assembled or in kit form. The review unit was the factory-assembled version.

The tube-powered Marchand Electronics phono preamp requires an external transformer. Its RIAA network is passive. An internal voltage regulator supplies the 12VDC power for the tube filaments with a 15VDC input from a wall transformer. A DC/DC converter steps the 12V to 240VDC plate voltage. The manual states the LN108 has an 8 Hz subsonic filter (really an infrasonic filter). Its purpose is to prevent signals 8 Hz or lower from reaching the speakers and possibly causing odd sounds and/or damage. Frequency response is given as 20Hz-20kHz +/- 0.25 dB. Input impedance is 47 kOhm + 120 pf, output impedance is 500 ohm, and gain is 40 dB@ 1kHz. Maximum output voltage of the LN108 is 7v rms.

The LN108's black metal enclosure is 6-inches long x 3-1/4-inches wide x 2-inches high. On the top cover are imprinted the response curve, Marchand name, the model number and identification of the input, output, power and grounding connectors. Input and output are gold-plated standard phono plugs, while the connector for the grounding wire from the turntable is a binding post type connector. Marchand products have a two-year parts and labor warranty, as well as a 30-day return/refund policy.

When I first connected the Marchand Electronics phono preamp to my system, I found out three things. First, it required a short time to

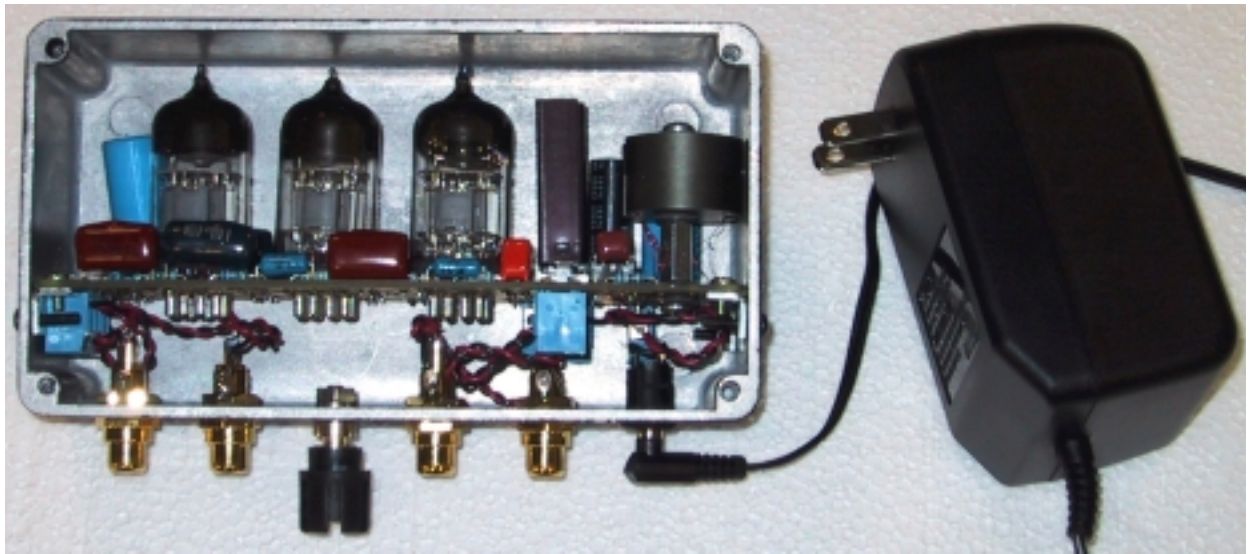
warm up because it is a tube preamp, rather than solid state (transistor). Second, the three tubes in an enclosure with no vent holes get a little warm. A thermometer set directly on top of the Marchand read 98°F in a room with an ambient temperature of 66°F. The Marchand temperature, measured the same way in warmer weather, registered a high of about 118 degrees. I left the unit plugged in all the time with no ill effects [Marchand reports that the unit has subsequently been modified by adding some vent holes to the case. - KWN]. Third, I was unable to compare it to my solid state Parasound phono preamp with any degree of assurance about sonic differences. By the time I turned off the system, unplugged the Marchand from the turntable and reconnected the Parasound, I had lost any sense of whether there might be any differences. Clearly, a means of switching between the two units was needed. The main preamp provided adjacent connections that could be used for two phono preamps. I wasn't sure my turntable could be connected to both phono preamps without interferences, hum, or other artifacts. It seemed unlikely there would be

feedback, as only one phono preamp would be connected at any time to the system preamp. I bought a pair of Y connectors and connected the turntable cable to both phono preamps. I put a Y-connection on the grounding wire from the turntable and

ran a wire to the grounding connectors on each phono preamp.

The tubes in the Marchand amplify the sound higher than Parasound. This was 2 dB as measured at one speaker using a Radio Shack digital sound level meter. It was thus obvious I would not be able to put on a record, simply switch between the two phono preamps, and learn anything about their relative merits. The louder of two sounds, if not in the painful decibel range, will generally sound better. My solution was to apply strip of white tape to my Bryston preamplifier at the volume control knob. I then used the sound level meter to identify and mark volume settings for each phono preamp that would provide equal sound levels. Switching between the two phono preamps gave comparative results as long as I simultaneously adjusted the Bryston volume control to match the

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proper mark on the tape.

I auditioned a large number of records, including *Dave Brubeck's Greatest Hits* (Columbia CS 9284), *Sarah Vaughan Sings George Gershwin, Vol. 2* (Mercury MG 20311), The Dave Brubeck Quartet, *Time Further Out* (Columbia CS 8490), *Oldies But Goodies Volume 5* (Original Sound Record Co. OSR-LPM-5007), Ramsey Lewis, *The Movie Album* (Cadet LPS 782), and Andre Previn's *Like Love* (Columbia CS 8233). The sounds of the Marchand and the Parasound phono preamps were very much alike. There were three differences—two minor and one larger—between the two phono preamps that were audible on most recordings.

The Marchand slightly softened hard edges on loud brass, cymbals, bells and similar sounds, and the Parasound preamp presented a slight bit more spaciousness on some stereo recordings compared to the Marchand. I judged that neither of these differences was large enough to be readily identifiable without a direct comparison.

There was one difference that was easily identifiable on many records, and that was more bass from the Marchand. Out of curiosity, I monitored the direct electrical outputs by frequency using my ADC SS-525X analyzer and the Soundcraftsmen ITR-3292 test record "Continuous All Band Pink Noise for General EQ Use." I found that the Marchand had 2 dB more output (once the overall higher output of the Marchand was accounted for) at 25, 40, 100 and 160 Hz, and 1 dB more at 63 Hz. Of course, the greater the bass content of the record, the more this difference became audible. This test also

revealed a flatter output from the Marchand at frequencies below 100 Hz.

When the tubes need replacement someday, the cover is easily removed as it has only four screws. Marchand's 30-day return/refund policy assures a fair trial period in your system. I don't think the warmth generated by the tubes will pose any problems, as I have left it on for a couple of months.

If you are in the market for a phono preamp, the Marchand Electronics LN108 has good sound. It also (for those of us who enjoy building electronics) offers two kits, one with the circuit board assembled, called the EZ kit). Building a kit can be not only fun and rewarding in its sense of accomplishment, but rewarding monetarily as well. This is a sturdy and attractive piece of equipment for us record buffs, and I have enjoyed its presence in my system.

-JTF

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