



Pathos Aurium

A distinctive **headphone amplifier** that doesn't believe in compromise

Profile

Price £850 ★★★★★

Highlight Pathos's distinctive hybrid electronic design that couples a valve preamplifier stage to a solid-state output stage

Consider if You value the headphone listening experience as a priority and are prepared to pair the Aurium with a source and headphones of comparable quality

Few companies combine style with substance as well as Pathos. Based in Vincenza, Italy, this hi-fi specialist has consistently turned out products that are as pleasing to the eye as they are sweet to the ear. We're happy to report the Aurium headphone amplifier continues that fine tradition.

We've had no reason to complain about Pathos's build quality in the past and we don't need to start now. The Aurium feels beautifully made and is as solid as you like - the company has taken a great deal of care in getting the fit and finish just right. Some may not take to the extrovert appearance, but for us it's preferable to the usual anonymous black or silver box. If we were to criticise anything, it would be the volume control feel. We think it could do with more resistance in its movement to reinforce the product's quality feel.

Pathos has long favoured hybrid amplification that mixes valve and solid-state electronics - the idea is to combine the sweetness of valves and the grip of solid state. In our experience, most components that try the hybrid approach never quite manage to pull it off. The Aurium, like most Pathos products we've heard, gets it right.

Under the skin

This distinctive headphone amp uses a pair of small 6922 valves operating in Class A to handle pre-amplification duties, while a solid-state output stage does the donkey work of actually driving the headphones. The power output is claimed to 3.6W in total into a 32 ohm load. We tried Beyerdynamic's T1s, the Grado RS1s and Sennheiser's HD595s, and didn't have an issue driving any of them to high levels.

The Aurium's power supply is an external unit that connects by a decently long umbilical cable. External power supplies are usually a good thing, because they take high currents and potentially large magnetic fields away from the sensitive audio circuits.

By headphone amplifier standards, the Aurium is well equipped. It has four line inputs, one of which is balanced. We're glad to see a balance control, even if it is on the back panel, and wish more headphone amplifiers had a gain control like the Aurium's. This lets us fine-tune the volume according to the sensitivity of the headphones being used.

We like this headphone amplifier a lot. Its sound is a wonderfully seductive combination of transparency and grip. From the midrange upwards the Aurium is as detailed as you like: listen to the violin in Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* and the

TECH SPECS

Power 3.6W
Line-level in 4
Finishes 1
Dimensions (hwd)
6 x 20 x 23cm

In detail Unusual features



1 Close control

The provision of Balance and Gain controls is smart. Both are a help when it comes to fine-tuning performance and system-matching

2 Balanced XLR inputs

These three-pin connections are usually associated with high-end or professional equipment, and increase the unit's flexibility

3 Twin valves

By showing off its valves in this way, the Aurium ensures they keep cool, can be easily changed and create a fun stylistic feature

The Aurium's sound is a wonderfully seductive combination of transparency and grip



Generous featuring is rare on a headphone amplifier, but the Pathos is well equipped

clarity is spellbinding. Not only does the amp have a firm grip of the leading and trailing edges of each note played, it shades the bits in between, revealing far more of the sonic texture of the instrument in the process.

The same applies to vocals, as a 24-bit/44.1kHz of The Unthanks' *Here's the Tender Coming* shows. On this track the group's voices sound as subtle and communicative as we've heard through headphones, possessing a good degree of solidity and weight too. Thankfully, despite resolving plenty of detail, the Aurium never sounds overtly analytical.

It's in the bass that this Pathos surprises, and the solid-state part of its circuit makes itself felt. The lows on The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* are super-taut, and pack a hefty punch with it. There's everything you'd want in bass performance: power, reach and agility. Such is the Aurium's muscularity here

that it would be easy for bass to dominate the proceedings, but that delicate and expressive midrange is perfectly in proportion. It's a neat balancing act.

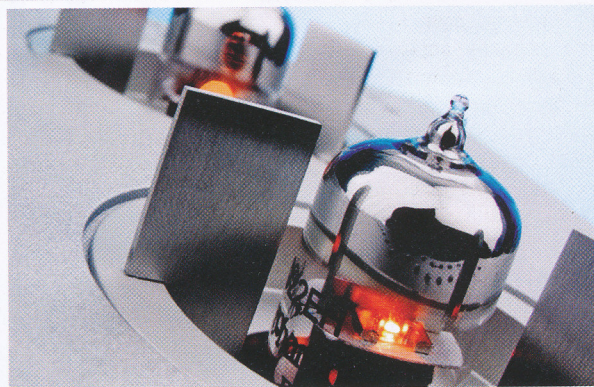
It's only worth spending this kind of money on a headphone amp if you've got a source and headphones worthy of such a product. That means a source of at least Audiolab 8200CD level and the likes of Grado's SR325is headphones as a minimum. With kit that good (or better) the Aurium will give you a large slice of high-end sound in a neat little package.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sweet, insightful midrange; bass power and grip; excellent build and finish; plenty of inputs; distinctive appearance

AGAINST If price isn't an issue, nothing

VERDICT If you're serious about headphones in the home this Pathos is a top class choice



As well as being beautifully made, the Aurium has neat design touches

