



EINSTEIN AUDIO

LIGHT IN THE DARK

Reviewer: Edgar Kramer

Source Digital: Metronome T-1i CD player

Preamp/Integrated: Supratek Sauvignon with NOS RCA and Bendix tubes

Amplifier: NuForce Reference 9 Special Edition monoblocks

Speakers: Wilson Audio Specialties WATT/Puppy System 6

Cables: Cerious Technologies Digital; Harmonic Technology Magic Digital; Cerious Technologies; Harmonic Technology Magic and Truthlink Silver; DanA Digital Reference Silver; Eichmann eXpress 6 Series 2; Bocchino Audio Morning Glory interconnect cable; *PSC Audio Pristine R30 Ribbon* [on loan]; Cerious Technologies and Harmonic Technology PRO-9+ loudspeaker cables; Cerious Technologies AC; Harmonic Technology Fantasy; Shunyata Research Diamondback, Eichmann eXpress AC power cables; *PSC Gold Power MKII AC cable* [on loan]

Stands: Finite Elemente Pagoda

Powerline conditioning: PS Audio P-300 Power Plant (digital equipment only)

Sundry accessories: Burson Audio Buffer, Bright Star Audio IsoRock Reference 3, Bright Star Audio IsoRock 4 isolation platforms and BSA IsoNode feet; Bocchino Audio Mecado isolation diodes; Black Diamond Racing cones; Stillpoints ERS paper in strategic positions around DAC, Shakti On Lines; Densen CD demagnetizer; Auric Illuminator CD Treatment; ASC Tube Traps

Room size: 17' w x 35' d x 12' h in short wall setup, opens to adjoining kitchen

Review component retail: \$10,900



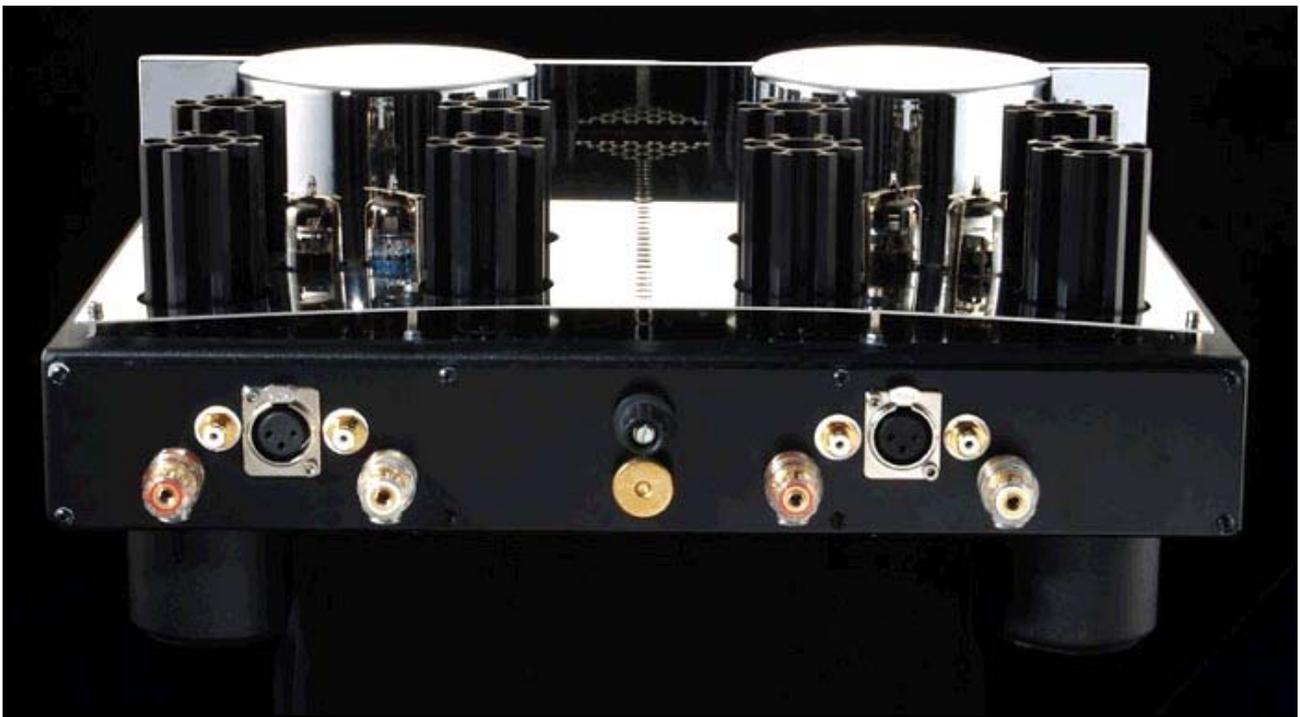
Let There Be Light

Is there such a thing as coincidence or pure chance? Are events predestined or freely created? Can true genius be a freak accident? It's possible that true genius may be spawned from a modest family tree lineage or even directly from mediocre parentage. Conversely, it may be the result of an academic or intellectual ancestry. Regardless of heredity, somehow, by chance or predestination, our universal DNA mix sporadically produces superlative brilliance that sheds light on intellectual shadows.

And although such philosophical and religious meanderings are best left for other writers and publications, given its name and origin, these ideas are relevant to our subject at hand. Has the collective high-end audio DNA spawned an amplification genius? Are we truly seeing a light in the dark?

"Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."

The Light In The Dark (LITD) power amplifier from Einstein Audio has to be one of the most gorgeous components extant. Slotting it into its allotted 'for review' space, it was striking to admire the design similarities to our Australian Supratek reference preamplifiers. Pure happenstance? Let's just say it's all chrome, gloss black and jutting transformer protrusions. Perched together on the superb Finite Elemente racks, these components make a statement that's an industrial designer's wet dream. The LITD's fit and finish, build quality and aesthetics are second to none, absolutely flawless. Ogling the full frontal, you'll see a chrome-surrounded black acrylic fascia to which mount the large on/off and identical mute control. A small centrally located glass window indicates the unit's status: one central blue LED for power is flanked by left and right channel mute indicators.



The rear panel is just as simple, with high quality WBT speaker posts, a ground post and both single-ended RCA and balanced XLR inputs. Unusually and commendably, the LITD sports a centrally mounted attenuation knob which allows user control of gain for accurate mating to any preamplifier. Anyone suffering system noise by way of a high-gain preamplifier/amplifier and efficient speakers would testify to the merits of such a feature. This control's other purpose is to serve as a gain matching feature when bi-amping speakers or connecting to a subwoofer where the RCA inputs will act as outputs when using the balanced connections from the preamplifier.



But where's the power cord? Here Einstein does things a little differently. The LITD has enormous isolating feet that allow enough clearance for the IEC connector to mount to its underside. Only right-angle terminated IECs are suitable of course and Einstein Audio provides its own quality cord. The LITD is a fully balanced, dual mono hybrid design with a valve input stage consisting of four E88C/6922 dual triodes and a solid-state output stage producing 80 watts into 8Ω and 115 watts into 4Ω. Valve life expectancy is 3000 hours. Damping factor into 8Ω is 250. The LITD weighs in at a healthy 20kg. The real estate towards the rear is taken up by the input valve stage which is protected by a removable wire cage.

This from Einstein Audio's designer: "Due to the sophisticated circuit design, we have an extremely good signal-to-noise ratio, better than 96dB. So the amplifier is really quiet, no hum or other noise will cover even the tiniest musical signal. Due to the dual mono design, channel separation is also very good, better than 80dB, which guarantees a very good focus and stable imaging. The output stage is a very unique transistor design, which uses only one type of transistor: N-channel FETs. We use two transistors per channel, N-channel MOSFETs.

"This is only possible because we use a true balanced design. It is very similar to our OTL (output transformer less) design, *The Final Cut*, not with tubes here but transistors. If you look at the circuit diagram of the output stage, it looks really very similar to our OTL design, a real circlotron with transistors. Due to this design, all the transistors use the same data since they are all of the same type. Hence harmonic distortion at the output stage is not measurable. It really acts as a pure current amplifier. The only harmonic distortion we have is the harmonic distortion of the tube driver which is a typical triode design.

"The harmonic spectrum of our amplifier is absolutely similar to a triode amplifie, but distortion of course is much lower, less than 0.02%. So effectively, what makes the 'sound' are the four dual triodes in the driver/input stage (two for each channel) and the control comes from this special circlotron output stage.

"To make the amplifier fast without any phase problems, the amplifier has an ultra-wide bandwidth. The level adjustment knob on the back of the amp is of course not in the signal path and can be used to match our amp perfectly to any preamp."



I used the LITD in Einstein's preferred and recommended mode, connected via the balanced inputs from the preamp's balanced outputs. Einstein Audio make this very clear in their literature: with this amplifier, balanced is best.

One word to describe the packaging is *outstanding!* The LITD comes wrapped in a luxurious red velvet string bag and in turn is boxed in a wooden crate, lined with the same crimson material. White cotton gloves are supplied to keep the perfect chrome finish glistening. You wouldn't want it any other way.

"The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education."

We're all victims -- or at the mercy -- of our prejudices and experiential scholarship. As reviewers we perceive and judge a product based on personal bias, the products that have come before and what we are presently subject to in our reference system. Sometimes, however, a product comes along that alters existing attitudes or transcends personal predilections. Einstein's LITD is such a product. The LITD's presentation is so finessed -- almost romantic -- that it relaxes the listener yet, paradoxically, is totally involving in the musical experience. This effortless presentation in no way equates to the amplifier lacking in detail, dynamics or pace and excitement. Actually, it excels in all of the above while treading the fine line between the musical versus analytical divide. And although marginally laid back in comparison to other amplifiers, the Einstein presents a strong argument for the validity of its interpretation as opposed to the other more forward designs.

A perfect example for the Einstein's tonal qualities is illustrated

by my long-term reference CD, Curandero's *Aras*. On track 3, "Segue", the complex mix of instruments and vocal effects can throw and confuse lesser amplifiers. The LITD separates the multiple instrumental strands and conveys them in a totally believable and coherent fashion that avoids any hint of brightness or confusion. The guitar's and tabla's timbres are utterly realistic and in conjunction with the vocalists, presented in a hugely deep and wide soundstage. The LITD can convey a beautiful sense of air around the upper octaves too, enhancing presence and the impression of the recording venue's ambience.

Bass is another of the standout LITD's strengths. Listening to "Suck My Kiss" from the Red Hot Chilli Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magic* is an exercise in sadomasochistic assaultiveness. The LITD punches the bass through with astonishing pace and thump, controlling the beat with an iron fist. Flea's bass and Jack Iron's drum antics are truly awesome over this amplifier. Deeper and lower, where the lowest piano notes and organ lives, the LITD is a little lighter of touch, slightly leaner in balance but still satisfying. What's more, Jack's snare cuts through the mix with a snap, crackle and pop that although dynamically effortless, didn't swamp over Keidis' vocals.



While on the subject of vocals, male or female, the Einstein's vocal reproduction was outstanding. Inflections and accentuations were lifelike and voices were present and totally convincing in tone. Orchestral and chamber music CDs were put on ultra heavy rotation with this amplifier in situ. The Einstein's way with timbre, its refinement and delicacy with microdynamics and detail are transcendental, evidenced when playing violin and piano recordings. David Wilson's beautifully captured *Sonatas for Violin and Piano* was a prime example of both these instrument's reproduced qualities via the LITD. Gut string and felted hammer strikes were discernable to the extent of enhancing the facsimile of reality without interference on the musical whole. Frequency-wide, the piano's tone and attack were rendered with accuracy, density of body and a sense of presence that almost put it in the room as a physical entity.



"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction."

So, if we had to summarize the sonic qualities of this brilliant piece of equipment, we'd use such descriptors as tonal beauty and texture, filigreed detail, bass control, dynamic brutality and image spaciousness. It's a sound that will appeal to the sophisticated and experienced listener, an intellectual rather than an immediately visceral experience.

The designers of the Light In The Dark hybrid power amplifier have managed to combine the inherent tonal beauty of valves with the control and dynamic expression of solid state

to create a superlative amplification instrument. This Einstein is sheer genius. And it won't take an advanced degree to understand and appreciate its brains ...



Edgar Kramer

Manufacturer's [website](#)