

# TONEAudio.

The e-journal of analog  
and digital sound.

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**DAY TRIPPIN'**  
TAKING IN MUSIC  
FROM THE 80S

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**REEL-TO-REEL**

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# Encore Presentation: The PrimaLuna Prologue 7 Monoblocks — JEFF DORGAY

## The PrimaLuna Prologue 7 Monoblocks

Here at TONE-Audio, (along with almost everyone else in the audio world) we like PrimaLuna products for a number of reasons; they offer great value, are stylishly understated, extremely well built and sound great. There has only been one collective request from reviewers and owners alike – more power!!



As we just recently reviewed the ProLogue 5 power amplifier in issue one, this will be a fairly short review, because that's what the folks at PrimaLuna did, serve up more power.

The basic sound and character is intact here, albeit a bit more refined. If you enjoyed the other products from PrimaLuna, but shied away because 35 watts per channel just wasn't enough, your answer is here. I first saw them in the Upscale Audio room in January at the CES show and was amazed to see that they had these amps (and the PL preamp) hooked up to a pair of 28 thousand dollar Sonus Faber speakers.

Ambitious for sure, and while the little PrimaLuna amplifiers did not possess the control and resolution as some five figure electronics I heard elsewhere, it had a very musical sound that was fundamentally correct and a lot more fun than some of the other systems I heard that cost more.

### Family Resemblance

As you know from reading my last review of the PL preamp and power amp, I really

enjoyed them and thought the PL preamp, with its dual mono power supply and tube rectification was the real jewel of the pair, but the amplifier needed a bit more juice. The Prologue 7 answers that issue, with 70 watts per channel, using four KT88s per channel instead of the two in the Prologue 5, which uses one chassis. Spreading this out to two chassis with separate power supplies really gives you the Prima Luna sound with more authority. Now you have to buy another fancy power cord, but hey, that's what being an audiophile is all about, buying stuff.

Success has not gone to their heads at PL. Everything is still triple boxed and the white gloves are of higher quality than the ones that came with our ProLogue 1 two years ago. Call me wacky, but I really like the smell of new PL gear in the box. It just has a unique, very electronic smell to it. You can smell the resistors and the transformers. I can see it now; "Ralph Lauren introduces Electron for the nerd in you!" Well, maybe I better keep my day job for now.

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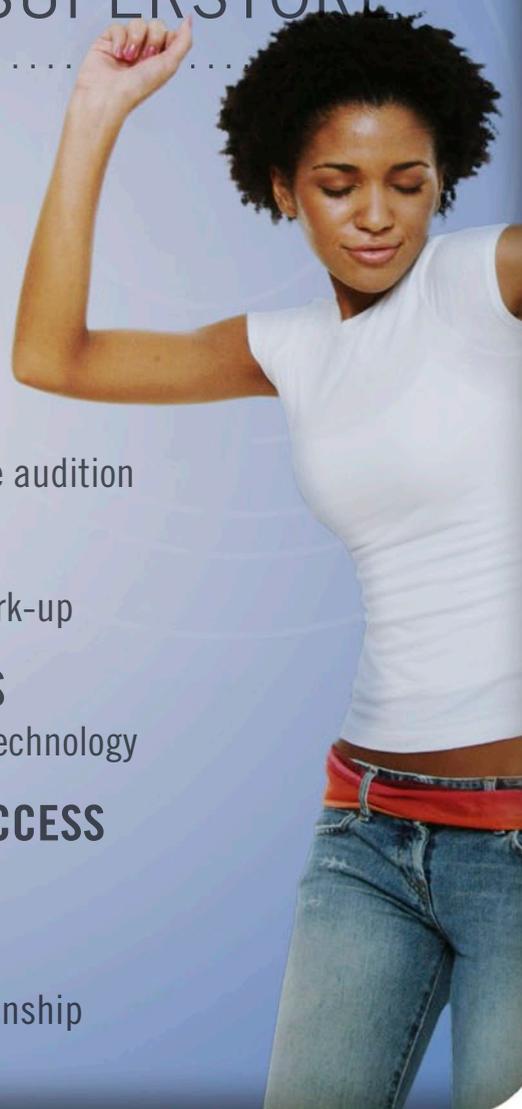
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**I can see it now; "Ralph Lauren introduces *Electron* - For the Nerd in You!" Well, maybe I better keep my day job for now.**

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—Thomas J. Norton, *Ultimate AV*

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The PL sevens use the same chassis as all past PL products, which no doubt keeps production easier and costs reasonable. A pair of Prologue 7s will set you back \$2699 and there are now some affiliate dealers around the country, so it might be a bit easier to find them in your hood. You can spend the 100 bucks you would have used on shipping to buy some more records! Pricing is the same at Upscale or an affiliate dealer.

## Set Up and Burn In

The ProLogue 7s popped right out of the box and only required a few days of break-in to sound their best. 50 hours max. and they will be at their full potential, though they will sound pretty good after an hour. The initial break-in was done with stock power cords and tubes before we started tweaking a bit.

Most of my test listening was done with digital as a source, split between the Ah! Tjoeb 4000 player on its own and the rest using the AT4000 as a transport and the outstanding Benchmark DAC-1. (Also in this issue) I also spun some LPs with my Rega P25/Shelter 501/BAT VK-P5 combination with excellent results. All system interconnects were DH Labs Air Matrix, along with the DH Power Plus AC cords on all three boxes. I felt that this was keeping in with the cost of this system, yet still provided better sound than the stock cords. I also borrowed a Running Springs Haley from my local dealer, which also made a dramatic improvement in the system in terms of noise reduction and improved transient attack.

## Power, Power, Power

Just like the difference between the stereo PL power amplifiers, the KT-88 equipped model has a bit beefier power supply and some upgraded

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capacitors. Thanks to Prima Luna's Adaptive Auto Bias, you don't need to match output tubes, which makes operation reasonably priced and allows you to try a couple of other flavors of output tubes, to have the option of tuning the sound to your taste a bit.

In addition to the adaptive auto bias, the tubes also have a soft start feature, which should contribute to long output tube life. Our ProLogue 1 has two years on it now, with almost continuous use at music editor NB's house with not as much as a burp.

When you use a moderate efficiency pair of speakers, the monoblocks really sing. If you have a pair of Vandersteens or something else with about an 86db sensitivity, you will really love this pair of amplifiers. I also heard the monoblocks at CES along with the outstanding ACI Sapphire speakers which feature an 85db efficiency. Once I got a pair for review, the monos weren't here yet and I started the review with the PL 5 amplifier. While this was fine for Miles Davis, I just couldn't crank the Sapphires with 35 watts as much as I would have liked.

Once the monoblocks got here though, it was a different story. Now when I wanted to wind out Deep Purple's *Made In Japan*, I was in business! Ritchie Blackmore's lead solos had some guts and were well separated from the keyboards. Everything had that last bit of dimension that only comes with power. Everything that sounded good with

the stereo amplifier, sounded GREAT with the monoblocks.

Keep in mind that these are not just the stereo amplifiers with another pair of output tubes added in parallel. The input circuit has been modified somewhat (see the Upscale Audio website for a full description) and the power supply beefed up as well. If you look close, you will also notice a 2-ohm tap on the speaker outputs.

Kevin Deal mentioned that he was surprised checking out some of the audio forums and seeing what people were connecting these amplifiers up to; Martin Logans, Magnepans, etc., so I had to give them the ultimate test, my Apogee Calipers. These have to be one of the most difficult speakers to drive and has the potential of turning your amplifier to a puddle of goo in a hurry. I made Jean get the fire extinguisher ready and hooked them up, but there was no drama, just good music.

For what it's worth, the ProLogue 7s played just as loud as my McIntosh solid state amplifier that is rated at 200wpc. This is a VERY impressive little pair of amplifiers.

### A Small Detour

As I mentioned earlier in this and my other PL review, thanks to the Adaptive Auto Bias, you can change the output tubes for different effect and system tuning. If you want dreamy midrange, switch to a set of EL-34s. (Might be really nice for driving a pair of Quads) The stock KT-88s are very good and a good all around compromise, but my favorite tube in this amplifier is the 6L6GC. It gives these amplifiers a bit warmer, more vintage character, almost like a pair of modern MAC 30s. (That won't ever require service) While I found this combination dreamy with most speakers, it will really help tame a set of overly bright tweeters. I don't measure gear for output yet, but it did seem like the 6L6s had just a touch less power than the stock KT88 tubes.

## THE VERDICT

The ultimate question, is twice the power and a bit more refinement worth an extra \$1300? No question about it! If you can only afford the stereo amplifier, I won't call you a bad Smurf, but if you can scrape up the extra cash, go for the monoblocks, you'll be glad you did. ●

## IMPORTER

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## PERIPHERALS

**Line Stage** PrimaLuna ProLogue 3, Modwright Instruments 9.0 SWL

**Digital Source** Ah! Tjoeb 4000 CD player and Benchmark DAC-1

**Analog Source** Rega P25/Shelter 501, BAT VK-P5, Teac A-4300

**Speakers** ACI Sapphire XL, Vandersteen 2Ce Signature, Apogee Caliper

**Cables** DH Labs Power Plus AC cords, DH Revelation interconnects, DH Labs Q-14 Speaker Cables, Cardas Golden Presence Digital interconnect

**Power Conditioning**  
Running Springs Audio Haley

## FAVORITE TEST TUNES

**Deep Purple** Made in Japan, LP (Warner Bros)

**Richard Thompson** From Parlour Ballads, LP (Diverse)

**Cat Power** The Greatest, LP (Matador)

**Death Cab for Cutie** Plans, CD (Barsuk)

**Al DiMeola** Land of the Midnight Sun, LP (Columbia)

**Van Halen** Van Halen, CD (DCC)