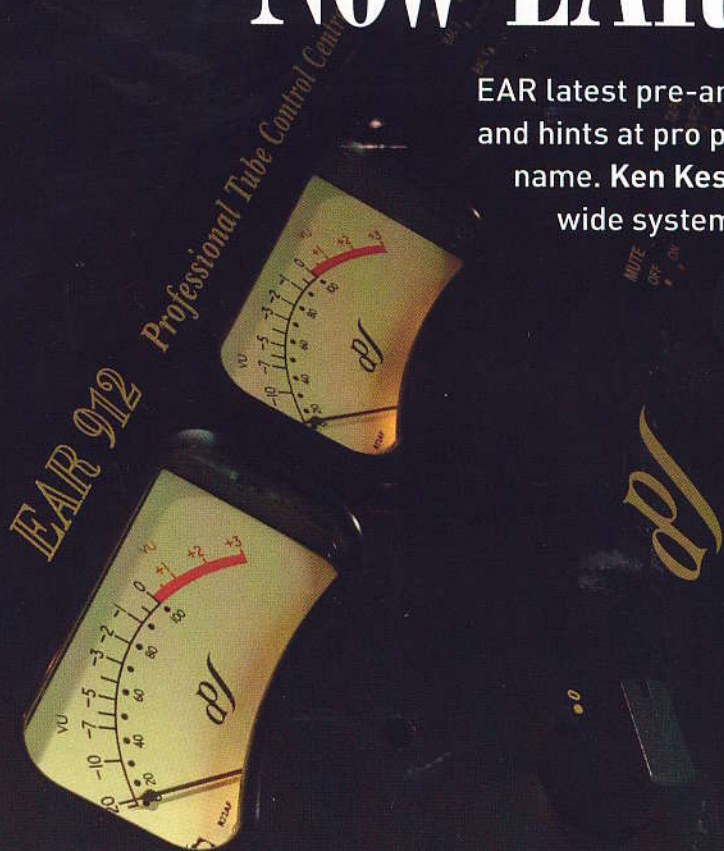


Now EAR this...

EAR latest pre-amp uses tube technology and hints at pro performance in its model name. Ken Kessler settles down with a wide system of sources to test it out



designed by Tim de Paravicini © 2004

made in England by EAR Products

DETAILS

-  EAR-Yoshino 912 pre-amp
-  £4950
-  www.ear-yoshino.com
-  0223 208877
-  Great control
-  Want lush? Not here...

The EAR 912 is not a budget product, but is a candidate for 'World's Best Pre-amplifier'. EAR's Tim de Paravicini has no qualms about using valves or transistors and he's opted for the former in the 912.

It's a fully featured unit designed to cater both for the vinyl lover and the modern multi-source line-level system. So, it's loaded with facilities, and it's as flexible as any two-channel system owner could hope for in a sector increasingly

DETAILS



ABOVE: On the left hand side are the phono section controls; also note the mono/stereo button and the gain matching rotary control with three settings



ABOVE: The back of the 912 features beefy connectors and two sets of balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA) outputs

'The 912 joins the very short list of equipment that could find a home in either a studio or domestic system, without ever seeming like an interloper'

known more for minimalism.

Here the dominant feature is the extensive use of transformer coupling. Transformers are one of Tim's specialties, so he's designed all-new ones for the 912. Of particular interest is the moving-coil phono input, which could turn out to be the 912's major selling point.

In the 912, the m-c stage is transformer-coupled with four different taps to provide a wide range of impedance matching: 40, 12, 6 and 3 ohm. What we have here is an m-c step stage so quiet, yet so wide in its dynamic range, that you might consider it one of the most successful juggling acts in recent (analogue) history.

Although the m-m section is fixed at 47k ohm, and thus without the variable settings of the dearer standalone EAR phono amps, it welcomed the input of both the mono and stereo Deccas and the [astounding!] Shure V15 V MR. LPs ranged from the glorious 1950s mono and stereo of certain RCAs and Capitols, to Richard Thompson's latest, and the variety of surface conditions uncovered a delightful phenomenon: the EAR 912 places any tracing noise below the music. You have to strain to hear it, even on my worn-out Mickey Katz LPs.

I played with enough other cartridges – a couple of Grados, the Lyra Dorian (mono), the Transfiguration Temper V and the Blue Angel Mantis – to exercise both phono stages, and although I would have liked

some way of fine-tuning the Deccas, I couldn't find a single reason to whinge about the 912's handling of LP sources.

But let's not presume that the phono section is this pre-amplifier's sole raison d'être. A glance at the photos tells you it has a professional look to it, as its name suggests, and not just because of the metering. Once you get past the chassis you notice that aesthetics are firmly of the form-following-function school. No, that's not a euphemism for 'ugliness': I adore the looks for their sheer no-nonsense muscularity.

AUDIOPHILES' DRIBBLE

The metering is provided to give a visual indication of signal level, not just to add something for audiophiles to dribble over. EAR feels it is useful when setting up a system.

There are plenty of controls. At the far left are what constitutes the phono section controls, three knobs providing,

WE LISTENED TO

LPs

- Harry Belafonte, *Belafonte Sings The Blues* (Classic Records/RCA Living Stereo LSP-1972-200)
- Ray Charles & Cleo Laine, *Porgy & Bess* (Classic/Rhino/Jazz Planet JP-1831)
- Jefferson Airplane, *Takes Off* (Sundazed LP5186 180g)



- vinyl, mono)
- Richard Thompson, *Front Parlour Ballads* (Diverse Records/Cooking Vinyl DIV009LP)

CDs

- Eric Bibb, *A Ship Called Love* (Telarc Blues CD-83629)
- The Persuasions, *The Persuasions Sing U2* (Chesky JD306)

