



M-ONE for all

Gifted Audiolab amp/DAC builds on M-DAC success

Focal point

EXCLUSIVE: Luxury Elear cans are home-listening heroes



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 416

November 2016

Quad star

Z-3 floorstanders hit the sweet spot

WIN!
Musaic multi-room setup worth £1,269



HALLOWEEN SOUNDTRACKS

A chilling collection of creepy cuts and spooky scores

Ultimate hi-fi

Preview of the UK's only high-end audio show: p13

26

PRODUCTS ON TEST:

Audeze, Lehmannaudio, Pro-Ject & Sonus faber

THE KNOWLEDGE

Five best-buy standmounts & room tuning made easy

GROUP TEST

Head of the class

Six supreme amplifiers to give headphones a boost





“The Trilogy 931 delivers a sonic performance with all the virtues of a great headphone amplifier. The spec isn’t huge at the price, but it has great build and looks and its sound quality abilities with a range of headphones means that it’s worth the extra outlay.”

Trilogy 931



Trilogy 931 £895

A pure solid-state amp from a brand best known for its hybrid designs, this offering proves a big success



DETAILS

PRODUCT
Trilogy 931
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Headphone amplifier
WEIGHT
1.7kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
140 x 50 x 244mm
FEATURES
● 6.35mm
headphone socket
● Impedance range:
10-600ohm
● 2x RCA inputs
DISTRIBUTOR
Symmetry
TELEPHONE
01727 865488
WEBSITE
symmetry-systems.
co.uk

Best known for its capable hybrid amp and preamp models that mix valve and solid-state circuitry, Trilogy Audio is not so wedded to the idea of amps that it won't go solid state when the need arises. The 931 is evidence of this and is the more affordable of two headphone amplifiers in its range without a valve in sight.

This is a single-ended design that runs in Class A and the circuit itself contains a single output device per channel with no output capacitors or similar in the circuit. Power is provided by a low-flux toroidal transformer and while Trilogy doesn't supply any figures for the output, it claims it is sufficient to drive any commonly encountered headphone. There is a pair of RCA phono inputs switched via a front panel control, but there's no looped output. Usefully though, Trilogy has provided an on/off control on the front panel for those of us not keen on leaving components running all the time.

Aesthetically, the 931 is simple but undeniably attractive, although the smart blue top plate of the review

sample is a cost option (see box out). The distinctive single curved edge of the chassis works well in the flesh and the unit is assembled to a very high standard. The volume control is an ALPS pot and has a lovely resistance to it. Like the Pro-Ject (p33), the Trilogy gets pretty warm during operation, but unlike the Head Box RS the heat build up is dissipated by the heat sink on the left-hand side of the chassis and so it never becomes more than warm to the touch.

Sound quality

Having comfortably hit the test level, the Trilogy's price premium over the rest of the pack leaves it with something to prove, but it doesn't take long to establish where your money has gone. Robert Plant's *Silver Rider* sounds lifelike and tonally accurate, while never forgetting that it exists to impart a little musical joy.

This combines to exceptional effect with Peter Gabriel and Youssou N'Dour's *In Your Eyes*. The 931 effortlessly recreates the space and size of the venue and proceeds to fill it with musicians that are perfectly positioned in relation to one another and that have a truly exceptional realism to their performance. Underpinning this is a bass response that – while perhaps not able to plumb the depth of some models here – has a speed and texture that is incredibly compelling.

Where it really opens up some distance from the rest of the pack is the performance it has in the upper registers. With *Dance Of The Infidels*, the high notes on the piano are

RAINBOW BRIGHT

If you have some specific ideas about how audio equipment should look in your listening room, Trilogy offers a service that might make you sit up and listen. As well as the standard silver finish of the 931, it can also be ordered in a choice of Mediterraneo Blue – as seen on the review sample – or Nero Carbonio colour options. This raises the price of the unit to £1,075. If you have a specific finish in mind and it exists as a paint finish used in the motor industry, Trilogy can supply a 931 (or indeed many other members of its range) in your chosen colour for an additional fee and on the understanding that the product will be built to order. It might sound a little gimmicky, but it does mean that Trilogy products can be décor-matched in a way that most rivals can't. Contact a Trilogy dealer for more details.

beautifully differentiated from one another and have enormous energy and at no stage is the performance ever anything other than immensely refined. It manages to provide huge amounts of detail and excellent realism while maintaining a smoothness and civility that nothing else here can come close to.

The final piece of the puzzle is that this is an extremely capable device rhythmically. Possibly as a result of doing without that last fraction of bass weight, it never fails to sound anything other than fast and controlled. Its performance on *Home Computer* is wonderfully energetic and entertaining and delivers a real sense of the live venue and the people in it. The Trilogy 931 is the most expensive model in the group and despite the fact that the specification is nothing to get overly excited about, it has a quite superb sonic performance that will win it many fans ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Refined yet exciting sound; great build and looks
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Slightly restrained bass; limited features
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: An excellent headphone amplifier that delivers a truly compelling sonic performance
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



Group test verdict

He's had his head bobbing to the beat with this month's contenders, but to find out which headphone amp gets the nod of approval, it's over to **Ed Selley**

RARELY HAS A Group Test demonstrated such a depth of talent across all six units. It is on very fine margins that the ranks are decided and why I have awarded four models recommendations. This means that while it is the first to fall, the Pro-Ject Head Box RS is still a very likeable amplifier with an impressive spec. It sounds big and exciting and has some interesting features, but it's not quite a genuine all-rounder at the price. The Audeze Deckard is excellent value and the USB Type-B digital input is a useful feature, but there is a sense that some of the fine detail in

recordings goes astray, and it can be a little hard at the top end.

The Lehmannaudio by contrast is a truly lovely listening experience and has a cohesiveness that takes some beating. It sounds best in its low gain mode and the single input might prove limiting for some users.

The TEAC HA-501 and the Graham Slee Solo Ultra Linear Diamond Edition are very different units, but each has its own strengths and weaknesses. The TEAC is well finished, extremely well equipped and is capable of producing a sound that is accurate, detailed and

ultimately hugely entertaining when required. The Graham Slee by contrast is neither terribly exciting to look at or overburdened with features, and yet it delivers a performance that combines realism detail and a wonderful sense of excitement in a way that makes it a great amp to listen to across a wide selection of music. Given their differences and that each model is likely to appeal to slightly different purchasers, the two units share second place in this test with an identical total score, and should be considered as very fine options.

WINNER

The Trilogy 931 delivers a sonic performance with all the virtues of a great headphone amplifier. The spec isn't huge at the price, but it has great build and looks and its sound quality abilities with a range of headphones means that it's worth the extra outlay.

Make/model	Audeze Deckard	Graham Slee Solo Ultra Linear DE	Lehmannaudio Linear Pro	Pro-Ject Head Box RS	TEAC HA-501	Trilogy 931
Price	£600	£670	£675	£700	£700	£895
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	Excellent-value headphone amp with 32/384 USB input capabilities	A highly likeable and talented headphone amplifier with superb sonic abilities	An accomplished amplifier that's easy to listen to for long periods	A great design with many likeable features, but not a true all-rounder	A well engineered headphone amp that does a great deal right	An excellent amp that delivers a truly compelling sonic performance

Key features

Headphone jacks	1x 6.35mm	1x 6.35mm	2x 6.35mm	1x 6.35mm	1x 6.35mm	1x 6.35mm
Impedance	Up to 600ohm	16-600ohm	Up to 18kohm	Switchable	16-600ohm	10-600ohm
Input	1x RCA line	2x RCA line	1x Neutrik XLR	1x RCA line; 1x XLR	2x RCA line; 1x XLR	2x RCA line
Output	1 x RCA line	No	No	1x RCA line; 1x XLR	1x RCA	No
Built-in DAC	32/384 USB	No	No	No	No	No