

Trilogy SPD H1



The SPD H1 is the first model in London based Trilogy Audio Systems' new skunkworks Special Products Division—hence the 'SPD' prefix. These are models that fit outside of the company's usual amplifier range. As the SPD H1 is designed specifically as an upgrade on the electrostatic energiser/amplifiers used to drive Stax Earspeakers, it fits that skunkworks notion well (if London had skunks, of course—maybe a 'hedgehogworks' instead).

Trilogy designer Nic Poulson started out by basing his first prototype on a Stax 006/007 energiser circuit (solid-state input, tube output stage) as a core and built it to Trilogy's standards. A month of prototyping later, and Nic realised that while this makes a better 007, that's just gift-wrapping. Instead, Poulson went back to basics and made the SPD H1 from scratch, to better fit the requirements of an electrostatic design.

The SPD H1 features a pair of 6C3 triode input tubes and a 6H6 high conductance output triode per channel. It uses two toroidal transformers; one for the tube heaters, the other to power everything else. Tube life is projected at around 5000 hours, and the tubes themselves have been chosen for their linearity, their longevity, and their lack of self-noise. However, these tubes are not user replaceable, because the bias circuit requires fine-tuning. I don't agree with that idea, but Poulson is adamant replacement and biasing is beyond the ken of the home user. Of course, this also means no tube rolling but given the variability of tube rolling 'improvements', this may not be a bad thing.

The audio circuits are pure Class A, wide-bandwidth designs, designed from the outset to be a fully balanced symmetrical circuit with zero feedback. All wiring is point to point, using silver-plated copper wire with Teflon insulation. The output sockets for the Stax Earspeakers are made of Teflon, too, while its connectors are gold plated.

The amp features four inputs (two XLR balanced and two RCA single-ended) and there is a remote to control volume, balance, input, and mute. The Trilogy SPD H1 is also available in a similarly priced Direct Mode Version. This DMV version bypasses the remote for volume, balance, mute, and issues driving licenses. This last might not be entirely true. DMV allows the customer to connect directly to their amp or source, and all volume and adjustments are then made at that point.

Trilogy's UK distributor—Symmetry—is also the distributor for Stax and loaned me a pair of flagship Stax SR-009 headphones for the duration, as these are likely candidates for use with the SPD H1. However, Symmetry also loaned a pair of SR-L700 earspeakers, the current top of the company's long-standing Lambda range. Both made for fascinating listening.

There is an immediacy and substance to the sound that struggles to make it out of the standard issue Stax energisers. That's not something you notice in the Stax designs, but the moment you play the Trilogy, it's hard to go back. Everything just sounds that bit more earthy, gutsy, and real here. It's not just about detail, or dynamic range—it's about realism: visceral, solid realism.

EXOTICA: \$3000 AND UP

Swapping between the two Stax headphones shows the SPD H1 does not enhance the sound staging (on the S-009, it doesn't need to), but also shows a potent underpinning of bass depth and slam that closes the gap between the two designs. I like the SR-L700 anyway; it sounds excellent in and of itself, and only really shows its limits when compared directly to the likes of the S-009. But through the SPD H1 it gets its full voice, and that voice is extremely entertaining and insightful.

The Trilogy SPD H1 takes the already excellent performance of a Stax Earspeaker and improves it significantly. If you have a pair of Stax and you want to know what they really sound like, the SPD H1 is one of the best options available right now. **Alan Sircom**

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Direct coupled tube amplifier for Stax electrostatic Earspeakers

Tube Complement: 2× 6C3 input tubes, 1× 6H6 output tube per channel. Non-user replaceable

Frequency Response: Not specified

Power output: Not specified

Weight: Not specified

Finishes: Natural or Stealth Black. The component can be finished in any car paint of the buyer's choice, at an additional cost

Options: Direct Mode Version, for systems with existing amplifier or source with variable outputs

Price: From £4995 UK depending on finish (US pricing not yet established)

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

Trilogy Audio Systems

London, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 8856 0616

URL: trilogyaudio.com

Summary

Voicing: Detailed and dynamic with detailed, deep bass.



(All ratings relative to comparably priced Digital Audio Players.)

Resolution/Focus:



Soundstaging/Imaging:



Dynamics/Expression:



Value:



Pros

- Great upgrade for all Stax users.
- Powerful sound with excellent treble slam.
- Excellent dynamic range.
- Outstanding instrument solidity.

Cons

- Tubes are not user-replaceable.