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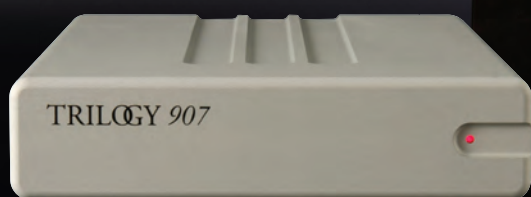
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IS TRILOGY AUDIO'S 907
THE ULTIMATE PHONO STAGE?

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Trilogy 907 phono stage

By Jason Kennedy

Trilogy is one of the hidden gems in the British hi-fi business. Founder Nic Poulsen has been working far too many hours for far too long producing superbly built and finished products to deserve the relatively low profile that the company appears to have. His Isol-8 products are possibly better known than the Trilogy electronics that have been around for so much longer.

Nic started off making pure valve amplifiers that were distinctively finished in chrome, his hybrid amps today are even more unusual looking as a result of the lustrous Chameleon paint finishes that the company offers. It's possibly because he goes in for such strong aesthetics and puts them in his advertising that Trilogy has not had the success it deserves. The hi-fi enthusiast in the UK and US is a pretty conservative beast and likes his hardware to look as traditional as possible if the big brands are anything to go by.

As the subject of this review reveals, the default finish on Trilogy electronics is bead

blasted natural aluminium, a pretty safe look one would imagine and possibly the angle that will raise the company's profile. I don't know if there will be space to include a picture of the 907 phono stage's chassis before its filled with electronics, because that alone is enough to inspire confidence in the product. The chassis is milled from solid aluminium billet in much the same style as megabucks products from some of the most fashionable names in the business, yet this is a sub £2k phono stage. It's a beautiful piece of engineering that seems almost excessive given its price point, but solidity confers enough advantages to make its addition to the final cost worthwhile. Fundamentally an incredibly stiff chassis like this will keep resonance to a minimum and acts as a very effective heat sink for what is after all a small amplifier. When you are dealing with the pitifully weak signal that comes out of a moving coil cartridge even small amounts of vibration in the amplifier and EQ stage will have a detrimental effect on the end result. The casework is also machined to provide screening of the incoming DC supply prior to LC filtering (inductor and capacitor).

The power supply design owes a debt to valve technology because it uses shunt regulation rather than the series regulators usually found in solid state supplies. Nic prefers shunt regulators because of their ability to not only source current but to absorb it as well, and when they are heavily biased into class A they have plenty of voltage headroom to deliver this current to the gain ►

"An incredibly stiff chassis like this will keep resonance to a minimum and acts as a very effective heat sink."



stages. The relatively noisy part of the power supply is housed in a separate and rather less elaborate stainless steel case in order to keep magnetic fields at bay. Here you can find a custom toroidal mains transformer in a copper faraday screen that feeds a choke input supply for minimal electrical noise. The DC supply cable is fixed at the phono stage end and connects to the PSU with a locking DIN plug. You know the stage is on because a pair of blue lights glows underneath the front in a style reminiscent of custom cars, they are not merely for style however and actually bias the class regulators).

The actual gain and EQ is done by two independent channels in the machined billet case using fully discrete components and precision matched input transistors. It is naturally a class A amplifier with no global feedback and variable gain, impedance and capacitance that can be adjusted with dip switches on the underside of the case. My only complaint here is that you need the manual in order to set impedance and capacitance, gain level is indicated in the graphics but the other settings would be

very difficult to guess at if you lost the manual. But it's very flexible with 12 combinations of impedance/resistance and four of capacitance. You will have guessed from this that the 907 can accommodate both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges.

Installation is unusual because of the parallel nature of the in and output sockets, this reflects the dual mono nature of the gain stages inside and is easily addressed by actually reading the legends on the back.

Nic builds amplification that is geared toward musical engagement first and foremost with resolution of detail being a useful by-product. So his products are not hyper detailed or geared toward making a spectacular first impression, rather you come to appreciate their qualities by degrees and so it was with the 907. First I noticed the quality of bass playing on Ian Dury's *New Boots and Panties*. Chaz Jankel is a very nimble player with a surprisingly funky approach for someone in what was almost a punk band. There is plenty of detail and it's extremely good at pulling out spatial information but you are constantly distracted by the music and the way it's played. Apply yourself however and it's apparent that it achieves this by bringing out the dynamics, the life in the recording and revealing the attack and decay of each note. These qualities allow you to hear the acoustic on Rickie Lee Jones' *Flying Cowboys* without emphasising the slight struggle she has in reaching the high notes. In fact I wonder whether that sense of stress might have been emphasised by other phono stages whereas this one plays it straight.

It's every even handed and capable of delivering a sense of acoustic solidity in both the highs and lows, this gives the image a fantastic sense of perspective. The space around each instrument and voice in a good recording means that the soundstage opens up and each musician's contribution is easier to appreciate. Good stereo recordings are remarkable things, far more convincing than so-called 3D TV where even electronic glasses can't fool you into perceiving real depth the way that closing your eyes and listening with vinyl and a phono stage of this calibre can.

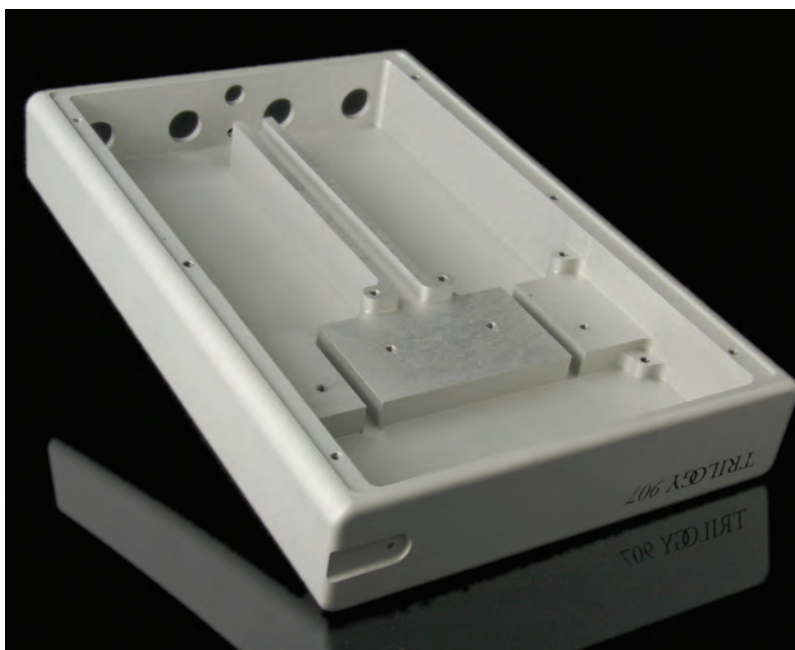
▶ The 907's strength is its dynamics and timing both of which are premium class, this means that there's never any shortage of power in the sound, but it's clean and refined power, directly proportional to what's on the record. It doesn't quite have the transparency of some more expensive alternatives; I had the opportunity to compare it with Leema's rather good Agena stage which is nearly twice the price (£3,495), which has considerably more features and greater subtlety but is no more musical. A recent repressing of the Grateful Dead's *Blues for Allah* on Audio Fidelity offered up truckloads of inner detail when played on the SME 20/3A with a Van den Hul Condor cartridge. Revealing that most laid back of bands to be more than capable of laying down a tight, sinuous groove when it felt the urge. The way that the bass is both muscular, fluent and tight is particularly entertaining when the musicians are this good. Who'd of thought that hippies could be so on the ball!

With the slightly hyped bass on Mofi's pressing of Little Feet's *Waiting for Columbus* the Trilogy manages to avoid letting the sound get bogged down and draws out the dynamics and rich detail across the band. It reveals records like this to be rather better than previous experience had suggested, maybe the Mofi balance isn't so bottom heavy after all. As I had a Brinkmann Bardo

turntable with the 10.5 arm and EMT Ti cartridge at the same time I gave it a spin with the 907, a move which revealed the totally different character of that front end with ease. I'll save the whys and hows for a Bardo review next issue but suffice to say that with this stage there was no danger of confusing these two heavyweight contenders, the 907 may be supremely musical but how musical does of course depend on the signal it's given to work with.

I also tried it with a rather more affordable player in the form of Rega's new RP3 with an Elys 2 MM cartridge on board. Rega has a similar approach to Trilogy in wishing to present the music in front of the sound and this unlikely pairing proved exceptionally entertaining. Not as revealing nor as refined as bigger turntables but thanks to the speed of the RP3 and it's lack of time smear it proved very easy to sit back and enjoy the music, unless that music was lively in which case sitting back was no longer an option.

The combination of build and sound quality in this Trilogy is way above what one usually encounters even at this price point. This is an exceptional phono stage that will do musical justice to the most aspirational of analogue front ends just don't expect audiophile fireworks – it's a whole lot better than that. +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Size HxWxD: 907 - 38x150x220mm, PSU - 57x132x225mm

Weight: 907 – 2kg, PSU – 2.85kg

Input impedance: 70 Ohms – 47 kOhms in 8 steps

Input capacitance: 100pF – 420pF in 3 steps

Gain: 50dB, 64dB or 70dB

Output impedance: 150 Ohms

Price: £1,895

Distributor: Symmetry

Tel: 01727 865488

URL: www.symmetry-systems.co.uk

Manufacturer: Trilogy Audio

URL: www.trilogyaudio.com