

# hifi & records

Das Magazin für  
hochwertige Musikwiedergabe

Preamp III & Amp V:

# Accoustic Arts



AMPLIFIERS

# Heavy Metall



When it comes to the planning, development and construction of amplifiers, a lot of manufacturers will sooner or later get to the point where they design their reference model. Here we see a worldwide competition that's connected to questions such as: Who's got the heaviest one? Who's got the most powerful one? Which amp has the highest or lowest damping factor? And which one is the most expensive? This is like a global amplifier quartet where at least one of those keypoints must take the trick. And this isn't a

Review: Accustic Arts Preamp III und Amp V

Monumental amplifiers can look back on a long tradition in high-end. With the Preamp III and Amp V Accustic Arts is fielding two genuine heavyweights.

current development, either, it already began in the 1980s with devices among others from Threshold, Mark Levinson, Krell or MBL; another competitor was Dynaudio's Arbiter that boasted a six-digit price tag already in the 1990s. Setting benchmarks does cost money. These amp giants evolved into crowd pullers at trade fairs, but were rarely budgeted as mainstays of revenues. By the way, from the same era also dates the blasphemous designation of the »walk-in power amp«. Whereas aficionados couldn't find any sonic fault with the big boys, their opponents often criticised a lack of fine detail and stolidity. »The amp is simply too heavy to walk«, was one of the common sound descriptions.

One who's definitely not under the suspicion of doing an ego trip with his colossal high-end components is Jochen Voss, the owner and CEO of Accustic Arts. It's easily noticeable that he's a lateral entrant. Because for him high-end is not a religion, and absolutist claims are definitely not his cup of tea. He takes pleasure in a healthy competition, and it's here that Accustic Arts can regularly score big time under his leadership. For Voss those successes, which he doesn't like to call that way, are due



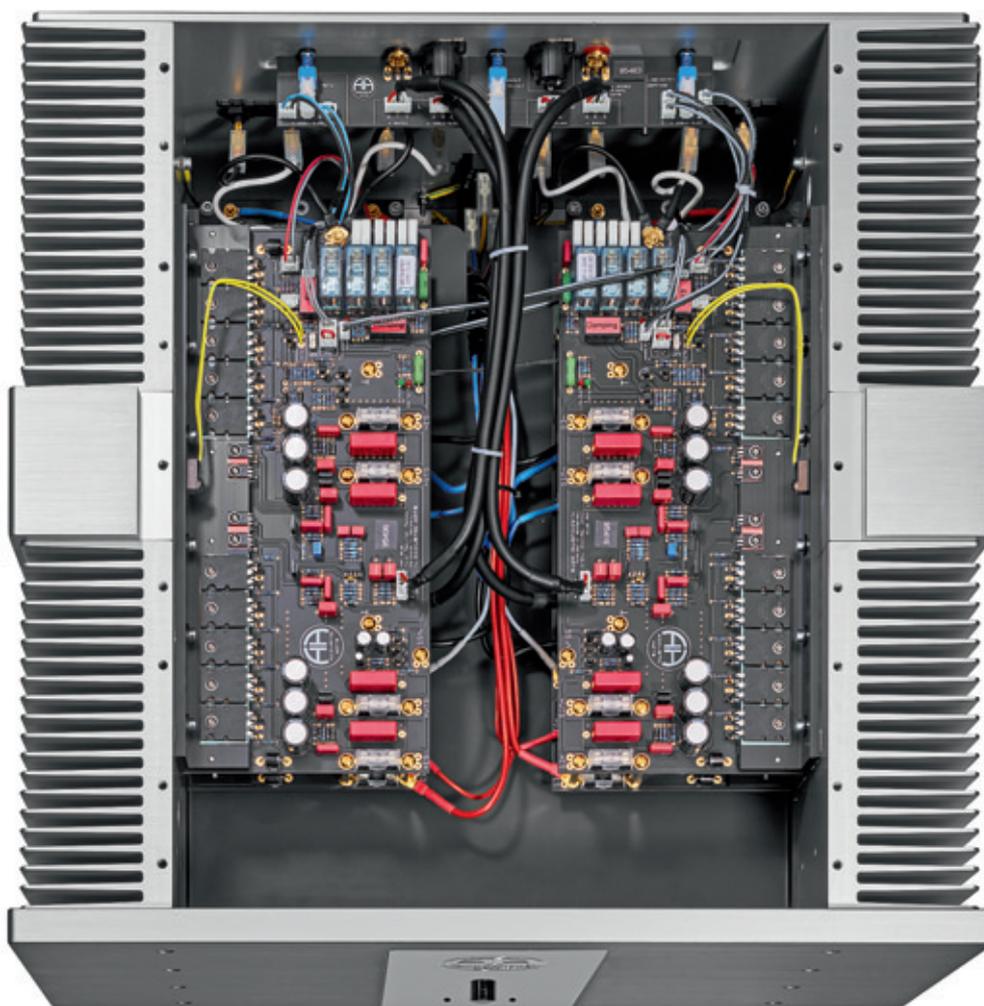


among other things to the circumstance that his slant on the devices is not so very far from that of his customers. So he keeps a watchful eye on his partners in the supply chain and enjoys the fact that he can personally decide who may ultimately supply housings or electronic parts. Jochen Voss admits with a smile that not least his meticulousness and quality concepts, also in the field of production, have caused the delayed market introduction of the Preamp III and the Amp V power amp. But now this amplifier team is ready for sale, and one of the first sets has made its way to hifi & records.

The round about 80 kilogrammes (177 lbs) of the power amp are practically stored in a flightcase on castors. By comparison, the 15-kilo (33 lbs) preamp with its fully balanced layout is literally a featherweight. The Preamp III is equipped with six line-level inputs, three of them with balanced layout. For connections to power amps or active speakers it has two RCA and XLR output pairs respectively, one of which can be switched between AC or DC coupling individually.

And there is still one more balanced out for docking an external headphone amplifier. Yet the Preamp III also features its own onboard headphone output which disappears behind a little cover cap when not in use. This takes us to the front panel with its strictly symmetrical design that exudes tranquility and sovereignty. Right

in the middle sits a high-res display which is adjustable to the ambient light in a multitude of brightness steps. On the left we have a massive input selector rotary knob, on the right side its twin brother takes care of the digital level control. But how will I turn this guy on, how do I enter the menu system? By pushing the »Input Select« knob. In my case it takes a few times until the operation works intuitively and I can recall the menu structure, but first of all I know how to get out again. Better convenience than with the direct control on the device is provided by the solid, equally beautifully crafted metal remote control.

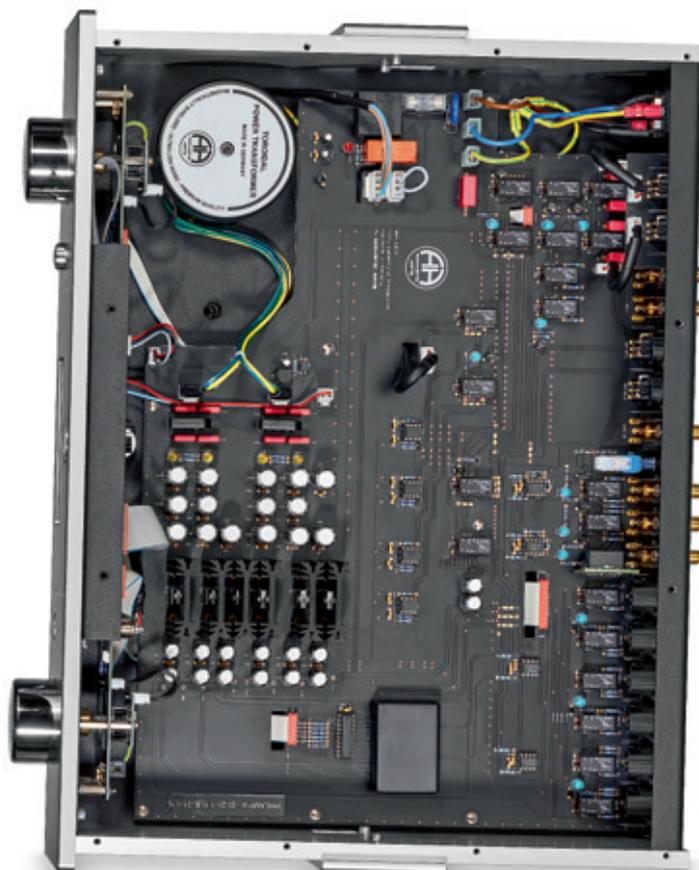


About the Amp V it can rightly be said that it accommodates two mono amplifiers in a single enclosure – with two mains sockets and high-grade WBT Nextgen terminals that are even available in a bi-wiring configuration. While the front panel simply houses the circular mains switch, the back panel of the power station, in addition to the balanced and unbalanced inputs, also offers a »Mute« switch that I've come to love in particular for swapping cables. After all, it spares us turning the unit on and off, and our ears will not be maltreated by popping or humming noises. With a second pushbutton the »Damping Factor Linearisation« can be activated, which instantly reminds me of a demo of another amplifier with just the same setting options. The result of that previous test: most listeners favoured a medium damping factor. Too low resulted in a spongy playback, too high sounded artificial. Now this is what the Accoustic-Arts designers did: without the linearisation the damping factor of the Amp V shows a distinctly frequency-dependent curve; up to five kilohertz it's very low, above this mark a rather steep drop-off follows. With activated linearisation the damping factor characteristic is now more balanced; up to five kilohertz it shows slightly lower values, yet with less drop-off up to 20 kilohertz. This setting option is anything but dispensable, as the field test on the Dynaudio Confidence 30 reveals. We're not talking about worlds apart here, but rather a tendency towards greater precision and focus or the aesthetical rounding with the »Damping Factor – On« activated. That's also how I was listening because control is simply the hallmark of this amplifier duo. The more than one kilowatt of output power per channel is delivered by 40 selected mosfet transistors. They can draw on a huge energy reservoir of 220,000 microfarads. Two shielded toroidal transformers provide the basis for the technically neat construction.

In the listening room I was at first searching for the appropriate connection

type and the matching cables. As was to be expected, the balanced version won the race. Already with the Concertato-XLR from HMS one can enjoy an excellent music reproduction. Despite many years of experience, one point that's easily overlooked every so often is the break-in time. Normally I'd have no need to talk about this any more since it's part of the standard procedure that, prior to

have natural timbres, every decay period appears to be very credible and not the smallest detail gets lost. All this is accomplished by the Accoustic Arts duo not only as requested, but the two of them go even one step further in terms of spatial imaging. This is an art that is mastered by very few amplifiers: a clear picture of the stage size is painted, just like when you close your eyes in a church.



the real listening session, the components should be connected to mains for at least 48 hours. This, however, I skipped with the Accoustic Arts amps because I was just too curious about their performance. As a reward I could witness to what extent the combo can come into bloom, for especially the Preamp III needs time on the power grid and hours of music playing until you can hear the proverbial burst of a bubble.

The intense interpretation of the ballad »Margit Hjukse« by pianist Bugge Wesseltøft and violinist Henning Kraggerud can only come to life if the instruments

This insight leads me straight to Musorgsky's »Pictures at an Exhibition«, recorded by Jean Guillou on the Kleuker-Steinmeyer organ at the Tonhalle Zurich and now brought back to life with verve. No doubt, the amp duo is able to handle the lowest octaves with frightening lightness which cannot only be heard, but felt as well. Yet I'm amazed at the speed on the whole. »Too heavy to walk?« The Amp V has nothing in common with that. Given how Guillou's hands fly over the manuals, an amplifier may now and again lag behind or run out of steam. Here we get a very different picture in-

## AMPLIFIERS

stead, no boundaries seem to exist any more. For example, the mighty organ is standing between the speakers, and from the soft little melodies to the opulent final at »The Great Gate of Kiev« there is not one moment of decreasing suspense. This has only little to do with what a classic hi-fi amplifier can deliver, as a quick crosscheck demonstrates where I have a feeling of watching the organ through an acoustic keyhole.

But audiophile material is not required to illustrate the Accoustic Arts qualities. »The King Will Come« by Wishbone Ash is equally suitable for this purpose, a live recording which dates back to the year 1973 and thus to a very different time. From the first note one can hear for almost one minute how the instruments are checked. Interesting when we consider the fact that the TikTok videos which are hip among teens are barely 15 seconds long. Then the British rock musicians get going. Of course, it's more about the music than the sound. What is transported in a dependable way is the characteristic live atmosphere. True, not every note hits the spot, but listening fun is nonetheless



guaranteed one hundred per cent. The fact that the Amp V's energy reserves are many times larger than what is needed gives me a sense of deep relaxation. And this impression lasts which I appreciate with the highest esteem.

For the finale furioso a wonderful and also excellent sounding live recording by the Yuko Mabuchi Trio was chosen. When the Japanese lady digs into the keys you don't get the impression that she's just playing note by note. Her tonally incarnated world of feelings is backed by a delicate accompaniment from drums and bass, and what can hardly be described correctly as »record listening« then is a concerto which, owing to its multifaceted nature, lets you naturally say good-bye to everyday life completely. After the last sound has faded away, I feel like at the cinema when after a captivating film the lights go on again. To keep on listening with Accoustic Arts is the sure recipe against this »shocking blues«.



### Accoustic Arts Preamp III

WxHxD	48 x 13 x 38 cm
Warranty	3 years
Price	19.800 euros
Distribution	Accoustic Arts Audio Hoher Steg 7 74348 Lauffen
Phone	071 33 - 974 47-0

### Accoustic Arts Amp V

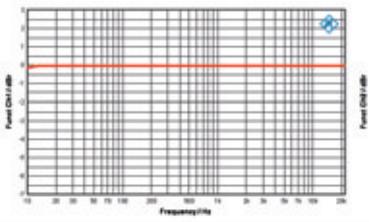
WxHxD	53 x 33 x 55 cm
Warranty	3 years
Price	39.800 euros
Distribution	Accoustic Arts Audio Hoher Steg 7 74348 Lauffen
Phone	071 33 - 974 47-0

## Result

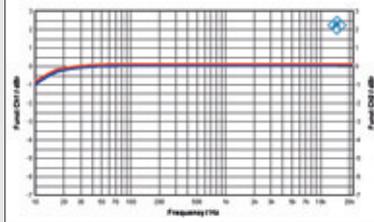
With the Preamp III and the Amp V Accoustic Arts makes a clear statement for high-end amp building »Made in Germany«. Flawless workmanship, timeless aesthetics and serious technology are blending with this pre- and power amp combination to form a phantastic sounding overall package the price of which is on par with its performance. *Olaf Sturm* ■

## Lab-Report

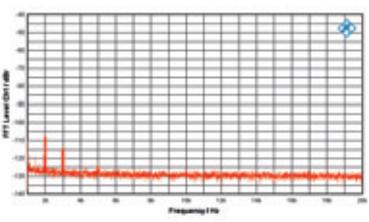
Frequency response: Accoustic Arts Preamp III



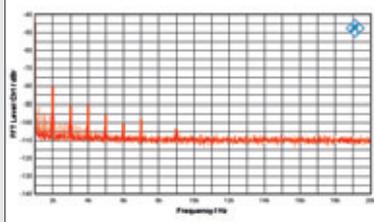
Frequency response: Accoustic Arts Amp V



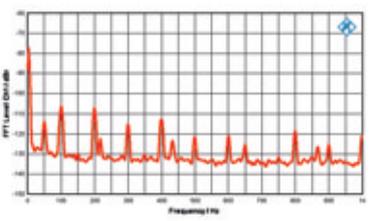
Distortion spectrum: Accoustic Arts Preamp III



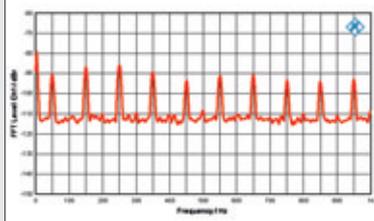
Distortion spectrum: Accoustic Arts Amp V



Noise spectrum: Accoustic Arts Preamp III



Noise spectrum: Accoustic Arts Amp V



### Accoustic Arts Preamp III

Gain factor	3,15-fach / 10 dB
Output voltage	6,3 V
Distortions (THD+N, 10W/4Ω)	0,0023 %
IM distortions (SMPTE, 5W/4Ω)	0,0007 %
IM distortions (CCIF, 5W/4Ω)	0,0004 %
Unweighted noise voltage	-92,3 dB
Weighted noise voltage (A-weighted)	-95,8 dB
Upper limit frequency (-3dB/10W)	> 185 kHz
Channel deviation	0,02 dB
Input impedance (1kHz)	101 kΩ
Output impedance (1kHz)	95 Ω
Idle power consumption	8,5 W

It's in the nature of things that the Accoustic Arts power amp is somewhat stealing the show from the preamp: with 1,401, watts into four ohms the Amp V ranks among the illustrious club of »kilo-watt amplifiers«. Even on the eight-ohm load resistors the Amp V still delivers 907 proud watts of output power. Both the sloping distortion spectrum and the interference spectrum of the big power amp are impressive, the S/N ratios are also ok. A channel deviation practically doesn't ex-

### Accoustic Arts Amp V

Nominal output power 8Ω (1% THD)	907 W
Nominal output power 4Ω (1% THD)	1.401 W
Gain factor	35,3-fach / 31 dB
Distortions (THD+N, 10W/4Ω)	0,0041 %
IM distortions (SMPTE, 5W/4Ω)	0,035 %
IM distortions (CCIF, 5W/4Ω)	0,0042 %
Unweighted noise voltage	-90,8 dB
Weighted noise voltage (A-weighted)	-93,9 dB
Upper limit frequency (-3dB/10W)	> 185 kHz
Channel deviation	0,07 dB
Sensitivity (for full drive 4Ω)	2,0 V
Input impedance	10 kΩ
Idle power consumption	231 W

ist with the dual-mono concept. Like the power amp, the Preamp III is very broadband (measured over the »DC« out), the frequency response is accordingly dead straight. The distortion spectrum with only two low harmonics k2 and k3 is ideal, the intermodulation distortions are very low. The Preamp III also shows virtually no channel deviation. All measurements on the Accoustic Arts amplifiers were carried out in balanced operation. ■

