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Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL Signature Phono Preamplifier | REVIEW

By Marc Phillips

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In the case of the Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL Signature phono preamplifier, the first question to myself must be, "Do I deserve to review a $45,000 phono preamplifier?" My usual question in these circumstances veers closer toward "do *you*, an audiophile, need all this to be happy?" But frankly, in this case, I feel that this massive, two-chassis beast with 16 tubes, four inputs and four matching sets of phono equalization curves is such a sprawling and magnificent beast that it's probably intended for only the most serious of vinyl lovers. But is that me, right now? Do I need to stray from the RIAA equalization curve in order to explore the darkest and dustiest corners of my LP collection? Do I need four separate inputs? Do I have a turntable, arm and cartridge that will thoroughly show off the H-10000's massive potential for offering the finest analog playback available in 2025?

Perhaps I do. But I'll tell you what I do need from a phono preamplifier, and most of that revolves around the sound quality. I know I'm generally biased toward tube phono preamplifiers, since I've always felt there's a unique symbiosis between vinyl and valves. That's how I'm evaluating the Allnic Audio H-10000, which brings up another wrinkle. Since this is the most expensive (and ambitious) phono stage I've reviewed, there is a little voice in the back of my head that keeps mentioning those multiple inputs and EQ options. After considerable thought I've chosen to ignore the question of the H-10000's amended cost if it only had one or two outputs and stuck with RIAA equalization curves. That approach simply ignores the grace and composure of this piece of gear.

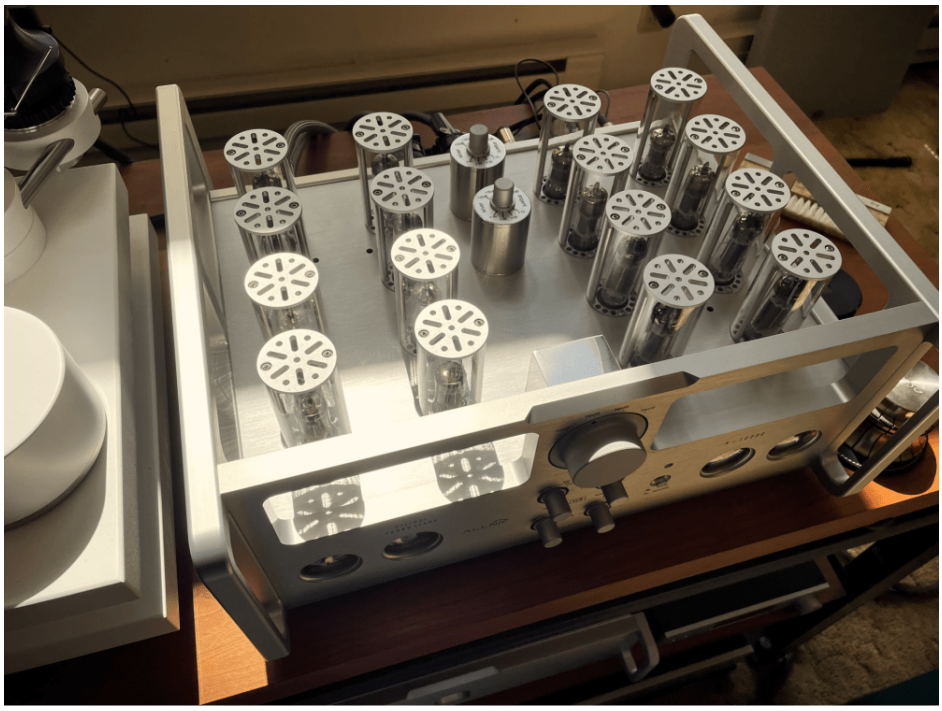
The main phono pre chassis of the H-10000 is an undeniable thing of beauty, elegant and sleek despite all the protruding valves, and the outboard power supply is bigger, heavier and generally more robust than the average high-end audio power amplifier. There's no doubt about it–the Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL phono preamplifier is a very serious phono preamplifier aside from the inputs and EQ options. It's not the most expensive phono stage I've seen or heard, but it's still the cost of a very nice German sedan. To me, there's something decadent and wild about that considering that a large majority of the populace has no idea what a phono stage is, or what it does.

How did I manage to review the Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL phono pre? If you haven't noticed, I've been quite smitten with Allnic Audio's products for the last few years. John Ketcham of Kevalin Audio, the US distributor for Allnic, has been generous in lending me a steady stream of integrated amplifiers and phono stages and cartridges. More often than not, I've fallen in love with each product, culminating in the 2024 Best Value Award we just gave to the T-1500 Mk. II integrated amplifier. But my real story with Allnic concerns their phono preamplifiers, which might be my favorites of all time. I started off a few years ago with the H-5500, and I thought it was spectacular for the money. (At $4,500 during the time of the review, it was already in my usual wheelhouse as a phono pre reference, i.e. I would have been happy to write a check.) I held onto it for a few months, and then John asked me if I wanted to make a swap up to the Allnic H-6500 phono stage,

which retails for around $10K. The H-6500 has an external power supply and far more tubes than the H-5500, and I was worried that it might be too much for the analog rigs I was reviewing at the time. I found, over time, that my analog rigs started to rise and align with the performance level of the H-6500, and before I knew it, close to two years passed by and I truly appreciated having such a solid and musical reference at my beck and call.

John called me up earlier in the year, right around the time the YG Acoustics Sonja 3.2 loudspeakers and Burmesteramplification and J. Sikora Initial Max turntable arrived, to tempt me one more time with the brand new phono preamplifier flagship of the Allnic line. We're talking, of course, about the Allnic Audio H-10000 OTC/OCL, a phono stage so big and wonderful that it has five digits in its model designation. Since the H-10000 is part of the same flagship line as the OTL/OCL preamplifier Grover Neville reviewed, I figured that it'd be around $20K or so. While it seemed a bit too ambitious for my system at the time, I was hoping history would repeat itself and I would again build a compatible analog rig around it. Once the fabulous J. Sikora Initial Max turntable arrived, I felt comfortable and prepared enough to move one more space forward on the game board. Imagine my surprise, however, when the Allnic Audio H-10000 phono preamplifier landed at my house in two big and heavy boxes, and when I headed over to the Allnic website to glean a little more info before I unpacked I saw that price for the first time.

Once again, do I deserve all this? Am I the right person for the job? After many months with the Allnic Audio H-10000, I still don't have a clear-cut answer to that question. Let me just say that during a busy and chaotic 2024, my biggest highlight of the year was coming home to an analog rig that consisted of the J. Sikora Initial Max turntable with two KV12 tonearms, cartridges from ZYX, Koetsu and Aidas, all hooked up to the H-10000. If it gets better than *this*, so be it. I'm content to stay right here and enjoy *this* while I can.



Inside the Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL

In my review of the Manley Labs Oasis phono preamplifier, I mentioned that its relatively low cost–$3,999 USD–was due to its lone input as opposed to any compromises or shortcuts in the design. By that rationale, the Allnic Audio H-10000 must be so costly because it contains four inputs–two MMs and two MCs. (If you're wondering why a $45K phono preamplifier has two MM inputs, it's primarily for SUTs–Allnic Audio sells one of those as well.) I've seen phono preamplifiers with four inputs that cost far less than the price of the H-10000, but none of them had a variety of phono equalization curves for each of those inputs.

If we stick with this reasoning, it's easy to say that the H-10000 shouldn't be the first choice of someone who uses a single analog source. But the Allnic Audio H-10000 is more than just a wealth of features in a single (or in this case double) box. The OTL/OCL designation in the model name should clue you in on the first novel design concept. I'll let Allnic explain:
"An OTL/OCL (Output Transformer-Less/Output Capacitor-Less) design omits the usual coupling transformer or capacitor at the output stage of the vacuum tube amplifier, thus reducing distortion, coloration, and energy loss. It is unprecedented for an OTL/OCL circuit to be used in a

phono-stage, which requires a level of amplification much higher than that of a line-stage preamplifier."

I've mentioned the brawny outboard power supply already, but it's still impressive in its own right: "The voltages used for the 16 tubes and the nature of their arrangement and function in the H-10000 OTL/OCL Signature amplification unit require an exceptionally robust, extremely quiet, high-speed power supply. Thus, it was determined that the H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature's* optimal power supply would be an automatic solid-state rectification and voltage regulation device specifically designed to maximize the performance of the tube gain stages. The power supply has two separate circuits and two DC outputs which couple to the preamplifier via provided umbilical cables. The separate circuits and connections are not for each channel: there is one for each of the H–10000 OTL/OCL *Signature's* two gain stages. This configuration provides exceptional stability, reliability, and very low noise."

Yes, there are 16 tubes popping out of the chassis of the Allnic Audio H-10000–you should have expected as much once you saw the letters OTL. I don't know if I've used a phono preamplifier with more than four valves per side, but I do know that you'd be wise to maintain a steady supply of replacement tubes. As John Ketcham reminded me, it's a true balanced internal circuit–which is why there are so many tubes. I'll refer back to Allnic for this eloquent description:
"The H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature's* amplification unit employs 16 vacuum tubes, 8 on each side with each in its own polycarbonate chimney. The vacuum tube arrangements on each side of the step-up transformer controls differ. Because this phono amplifier uses two-stage amplification to attain a high gain of 40-72dB, the left and right channel input signals are each first-stage amplified through an ECF802 triode-pentode tube, then a double triode E180CC, followed by two 7233 triodes. After phono curve correction, the left and right channel signals are each amplified in a second gain stage, again through an ECF802, an E180CC, and two 7233s. However, the tubes of this second stage appear on the chassis top in reverse order to the tubes of the first gain-stage." gain-stage." (Note: Allnic advises that 2025 forward production replaces the 7233s with 12B4s.)

It's notable that Allnic, a company that has built its reputation on the use of Permalloy transformers, produced a flagship product that completely eschews them. I find that impressive, since it shows that Allnic is constantly looking for new ways to build products, ways that focus on sound quality.
"As with Allnic's other OTL/OCL designs, the permalloy core output transformers that are the pride of Allnic's transformer coupled devices disappear from the H-10000 OTL/OCL Signature. Instead, two 7233 output tubes per channel form a single-ended push-pull (SEPP) circuit that uses both positive and negative power to prevent DC from passing to the next stage. The reason the 7233 was chosen as the output tube is that it has very low internal resistance; at only 230Ω, it can powerfully drive the following preamplifier or integrated amplifier without coloration or distortion."

I've already mentioned external SUTs while using the Allnic's MM inputs. What I didn't expect is that the H-10000 has taken its *internal* SUTs very seriously:

“Silver-wired, built-in MC step-up transformers (SUTs) are a primary feature of the H-10000 OTL/OCL Signature. Allnic’s phono-stage preamplifiers and step-up transformers initially became famous because they used permalloy, with its high permeability, as the transformer core. Then, the performance of the SUTs was further improved by making the coils with silver wire, which has a higher conductivity than copper. Step-up transformer losses occur due to coil resistance and core saturation during the energy conversion and transfer process, but using a silver wire coil reduces those losses by allowing the coil resistance to be lowered as much as possible. The SUTs are easily accessible on the top of the chassis and adjusted with a turn of one’s fingers.”

The Allnic Audio H-10000, as you might have gathered already, re-defines “feature-laden.” But here are some of the basic specs:
“The H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature* allows you to select the amplification factor and input impedance from four options. Looking at the step-up transformers, one per channel at the rear of the top panel, each has four amplification factors and winding ratios indicated: 22dB (×13), 26dB (×20), 28dB (×26), and 32dB (×40). The MM gain of the H-10000 is 40dB, and the MC gain is 62dB, 66dB, 68dB, and 72dB. Once the turns ratio is determined in this way, the MC input impedance is automatically determined by the formula ‘MM input impedance / turns ratio squared’. If the MM input impedance is 47KΩ, then: 22dB is 278Ω, 26dB is 117Ω, 28dB is 69Ω, and 32dB is 29Ω.”

Finally, let’s talk about those EQ curves. This opened up a can of worms for me, as I started to comb through my record collection (now approximately 10,000 strong) looking for LPs that haven’t stuck with RIAA. I’ve only owned one piece of gear that offered a choice between curves, and that was the circa 1960 H. H. Scott 299C integrated amplifier I had around 20 years ago. In other words, I’m not the kind of record collector who scours the bins for all sorts of old recordings–but I might be if I had the H-10000 on hand for the rest of my days. But here’s the Allnic description of the EQ features:
“On the upper center of the H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature* amplification unit’s front panel, there is an input selector dial for four inputs, two for moving coil and two for moving magnet cartridges. Below that dial are two pairs of LCR multicurve EQ knobs, one for each channel. One knob of each pair is for turnover, and one knob of each pair is for roll-off. Four balance meters, two for the right and left channels of each of the two gain stages, monitor whether DC is involved during the amplification process. There is also a mute/operate button. On the rear panel there are four pairs of RCA inputs and one pair each of XLR and RCA output connectors.

“As just noted, a final highlight of the H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature* is that it supports not only the standard RIAA curve, but also other phono curves, such as the Decca and the Columbia, through its ‘LCR Multi-Curve EQ Units’. For example, the RIAA curve can be selected with 500Hz as the low-pass turnover frequency for a 6dB boost in the equalizing stage, and -13.7dB as the attenuation level when playing 10kHz high-pass. In addition to these standard values, the H-10000 OTL/OCL *Signature* has turnover frequencies of 250Hz, 400Hz, 500Hz, and 700Hz, and high-pass attenuation levels of -5dB, -11dB, -13.7dB, and -16dB. As above noted, the two EQ units per channel are conveniently controlled from the amplification unit’s front panel.”

I realize that I've relied heavily on Allnic to supply a detailed description of the H-10000's features and design, but I'm trying to make one final point about the price by supplying you with the cold, hard facts. Once again, I haven't tested every phono preamplifier on the market, but the actual number is, let's just say, more than average. I've never seen a phono preamplifier that has this many features, this many design ideas, and this level of fit-and-finish. Before I listened to the Allnic Audio H-10000 for the first time, I was already convinced that it offered an incredible amount of, well, *everything* I could possibly want. Secretly, all I cared about was whether the Allnic Audio H-10000 sounded better than the H-6500–because that latter phono stage is, to me, the cat's pajamas.

This is the scene of the movie where I ask the audience, "Shall we take a listen?"

Set-Up

For all its sophistication, the Allnic Audio H-10000 was fairly simple to set up–this is my third Allnic phono preamplifier and it all felt familiar. I'm always going to love the look of those "turrets" among the tubes, which house the controls for gain and the SUTs, but you do have to remember that the number values aren't total values but *added* values to a 40 dB baseline.

For most of the review, the Allnic Audio H-10000 was paired with the J. Sikora Initial Max turntable with two KV12 tonearms, and three different MC cartridges–the aforementioned Aidas Tru-Stone Gold Web MC, the ZYX Ultimate Airy X and the Koetsu Urushi Black. I also used the Allnic to evaluate two other analog rigs–the new Technics SL-1300G and my reference Pear Audio Blue Kid Howard turntable with a new addition–the IntegrityHifi Tru-Glidertonearm.

The rest of the system varied greatly during the Allnic Audio H-10000 review period. I will point out that the H-10000 was used with a combination of grounding devices (Telos Audio and CAD) and power conditioners (Telos and AudioQuest) and other noise reduction devices (Furutech NCF) to ensure the noise floor on the H-10000 was as low as possible. While Gary Koh of Genesis Advanced Technologies visited to install his new G7 Minuetloudspeakers, we both noticed a noisy tube. At first I felt it was a little daunting when I looked at those 16 tubes and asked, "Which one of you is to blame?" Fortunately the sound was gone during the next listening session and never reappeared, but I may have to hone my troubleshooting skills in such circumstances.

Allnic Audio H-10000 OTC/OCL Sound

After spending so much time with the Allnic Audio H-6500, I thought I would be moderately prepared to evaluate the sound of the H-10000. That didn't happen, and for good reason–this is

a very different design than the H-6500. OTL/OCL might be the main reason, and I could no longer use the Permalloy output transformers on every other Allnic Audio product I've used (with the exception, of course, of the Amber MC phono cartridge) as a sonic touchstone. First, I should mention that I enjoy the Permalloy transformers because they don't sound like transformers, which is why they're so good. I'm never distracted by the artifacts from inductance and eddy currents with Allnic.

Going with an OTL/OCL design, however, actually increases the feeling of absolute neutrality. For a device with so many valves, I was astonished that the sound of the H-10000 was so clear and clean and transparent. In my past experiences with the H-5500 and H-6500, I characterized the sound as very linear, with just a dollop of warmth that reminded you that these are indeed tube phono preamplifiers. The Allnic Audio H-10000 is linear as all get-out, so it doesn't have the impression of "added" warmth. The music just feels right–performers appear in correct proportions, the detail extracted from the grooves is plentiful, the bass is potent and tight and the soundstage is so big it knocks down all the walls–even with a big listening room such as mine.

If I could point to a single identifiable characteristic, it would be a richness throughout the melodic structures. That almost sounds as if I'm coming up with a new word for warmth, but I think *warmth*–even though I find it a highly desirable trait–can obscure detail. By richness, I feel like the tonality contained an unexpected layer of musical information that made each listening session more informative. The second trait I picked up on was an uncommon focus on the music. It was easy to pick out musical threads and hang on for the duration of the track, which is the best way to hear new details in familiar music.

Best of all, the H-10000 was so unbelievably quiet in the groove–a weird thing to consider when you're staring at 16 glowing vacuum tubes. I had the same impression when I reviewed the Allnic Audio T-2000 integrated amplifier, that it didn't sound like a classic tube amplifier. But that amplifier supplied a small helping of the same warm and fuzzy feeling that you might get from a great 300B tube amplifier–like the Allnic Audio T-1500 Mk. II. I'm reminded of the Radiohead song "There There": *Just cuz you feel it, doesn't mean its there.* In this case, it's a matter of feeling that it's there without being constantly reminded of a departure from neutrality. It's all clear as a bell, and you'll still have happy feelings.

Listening Sessions

This might be the last time I talk about the Analogue Productions one-step remastering of Steely Dan's *Aja* or Lyn Stanley's *Black Dress Ballads*, but those two LPs are so meaningful to the tests of YG Acoustics and Burmester and J. Sikora and the Allnic Audio H-10000 because I saved the opening of those two sonic spectaculars for the first listening session with that awesome system. You can read about those two albums in the reviews of that other gear, and this column from the original Vinyl Anachronist column on *Perfect Sound Forever.*

The Lyn Stanley album prompted me to pull out her direct-to-disc LP from a few years ago, *Live at Bernie's.* Over the years I've owned a number of direct-to-disc LPs, but *Live at Bernie's* is the one that captures that excitement among the musicians who have to record an entire side of music live without a mistake, and as they near the end and realize that "this is gonna be the one." The Allnic Audio H-10000, however, was so adept at capturing the linear escalation of that excitement that it's palpable and downright obvious to anyone who knows this going in and what it sounds like. What does it sound like? Maybe it's like bowling a 300 game–everyone gets tense

and anxious and there's more talking low in the background and suddenly the energy in the room increases, the performances start to crystallize and gain confidence and the ending is both an epiphany and a relief. Once again, great music reproduction forces you to think about the original performances and the precise conditions in which they were recorded.

I've been pretty critical over the last year or so concerning the plethora of live jazz reissues I've been receiving–the sound quality is all over the place as is the pressing quality. One that stands out for its excellent sound is Elemental Music's reissue of *Bill Evans in Norway*, which documents Evans' 1970 appearance at the Kongsberg Jazz Festival with bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Marty Morell. This is a classic Bill Evans trio performance, lush and lyrical and precise and all the reasons why Evans matters so much to jazz fans, but I have to admit my expectations were not high until I had a listen with the Allnic Audio H-10000 at the helm. There's a crispness and clarity to the sound that's evocative of some of his earlier live recordings, famous ones such as *Waltz for Debby* and *Sunday at the Village Vanguard*. Even the sound of the audience here is realistic–it sounds like you're near the stage but surrounded by people and not like a sterile laugh-track added in later back at the studio, like many other recordings of that in-between era.

The Allnic Audio H-10000 consistently offered a more intimate view of my favorite performances by supplying at least one additional layer of meaning I hadn't considered before. I've heard no better rendition of the Yulunga Test than with this analog rig, with that first soft yet formidable drum strike emerging with a new set of spatial cues. The H-10000 first defined the small mushroom-shaped sound of the synthesizer in "Aja," which I now use as a very revealing test for imaging. I might as well come out and say it…the Allnic Audio H-10000 gave me more music than I've experienced before from a simple phono stage, and it's an important part of the Great Analog Rig of 2024 and I'm grateful I agreed to host it.

Allnic Audio H-10000 OTL/OCL Conclusions

I'll be honest. There were times when I told myself that the H-6500 was probably better suited to me personally than the Allnic Audio H-10000, especially when considering the multiple inputs

and EQ features.

Then again, I thought the same thing when I made the leap from the H-5500 to the H-6500. At the same time, I always knew this phono preamplifier had to be about the sound and that, I believe, is the influence of the OTL/OCL design. The H-5500 and H-6500 sounded very similar to each other, with the latter phono stage delivering a much lower noise floor and more air and space around the instruments. The H-10000, however, is a completely different animal. It sounds more layered and detailed and revealing than any other phono stage I've reviewed, but at the same time that focused and rich tonality is intoxicating. I can't imagine a solid-state phono stage making me swoon like this.

Look at it this way. The Allnic Audio H-10000 is aimed at a very specific type of vinyl-loving audiophile, one who needs it all in order to enjoy a very large and varied record collection. If you're a more casual listener to analog, you'll probably find a phono preamplifier with less features and inputs to be a shrewder purchasing decision. But if you have the means, the ears and the LP collection for it, you will find eternal bliss and happiness with the amazing H-10000. Highly recommended.

part-time audiophile REVIEWERS CHOICE