



Three in one

Phono pre, preamplifier and headphone amp: Clearaudio's new Balance V2 combines three devices in one. How does it perform? We've tested all the features and operating modes.

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KEYWORD

Balance

The signal is phase-correct without ground reference and phase-turned by 180 degrees. The sum of the signals causes interferences to cross out and the signal-to-noise ratio increases.

Integration of HiFi components is constantly evolving and progressing. Sometimes we don't even know which category to assign some devices to, as they cover so many areas and requirements at once. The Franconian analog specialist Clearaudio doesn't make it that difficult with its new Phono-Pre „Balance V2“. However, on closer inspection, you can use the two-part preamplifier, in which the power supply has been outsourced into one of the compact cabinets, in three different ways:

1. As a thoroughbred phono preamplifier for MM and MC pickups, offering **balanced** and unbalanced inputs and outputs for connection

to a pre- or integrated amplifier. The volume control is then bridged so that the full output level is available.

2. As phono preamplifier with headphone output. When the level control is activated, a headphone can be operated and controlled. Clearaudio thus responds to the trend of people increasingly using headphones at home and not just as an emergency solution. If you plug a 6.3 mm jack into the socket provided, the Balance V2 switches off its XLR/cinch outputs.

3. As a phono preamplifier for direct connection to a power amplifier or a pair of active loudspeakers. If no headphones

are plugged in, the activated potentiometer acts on the normal output sockets. In puristic phono chains, where the turntable is the only source, the Clearaudio can therefore take over the function of the preamplifier, although it does not offer any comfort apart from volume control.

So every type of record listener should find a dream of a device in the Balance V2. Or three, especially since you can switch between the operating modes in no time at all. To do this, you only have to operate a push switch which, like the other few control buttons, sits directly on the circuit board in the interest of shortest distances and is accessible from underneath the device. That is indeed a bit cumbersome, but most of us won't jump back and forth between modes all too often anyway.

Especially great with MCs

What else needs to be set? For example the input and the amplification factor. The latter is switchable as usual for MM- and MC-pickups, whereby the increasing steps vary depending on the selected operating mode (cf. measured values). As MM pickups are usually in contact with the tonearm mass they are therefore best connected to the unbalanced cinch input. MCs on the other hand are the only truly balanced sources of high fidelity besides microphones, which is why XLR sockets are available as an alternative – high-output MCs in MM mode. As a third option, a subsonic filter can be switched against low-frequency noise. Clearaudio has dispensed with selectable

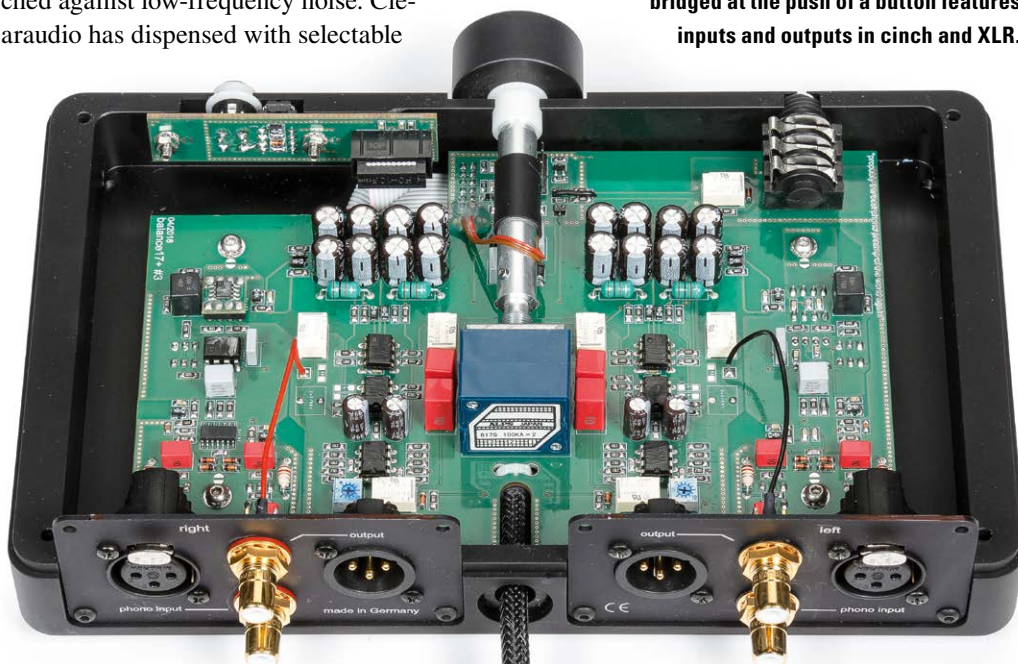


Switches for the different options are located directly on the circuit board and are individually accessible for each channel from underneath the V2.

impedances for MCs. The 500 Ohm applied in MC mode are okay. Motto: One fits all.

Thanks to the one meter long supply cable, the power supply can be moved away from the actual amplifier. The duo should not be placed on top of each other as shown in the photo anyway – but it should be broken in for some time. After one or two days, the initial crisp touch had dissolved into pleasurable homogeneity. At least with MC. Via the MM input the playback remained somewhat overly present, with too little support

The strictly channel-separated design with a central level potentiometer that can be bridged at the push of a button features inputs and outputs in cinch and XLR.



WHAT WE'VE HEARD



Sara K./Chris Jones: Live In Concert

A brilliant and intimate live portrait of the successful duo, captured with a powerful sound.

Doug MacLeod: Break The Chain



Emotional blues that gets under your skin. First-class realisation by the noble label Reference Recordings.

TEST-DEVICES

Turntable:

Clearaudio Innovation Basic mit Tonarm Tracer, Transrotor Rondino nero mit Tonarmen 5009 und 800S

Cartridge:

Audio-Technica AT-VM760SLC, Clearaudio Charisma V2 (MM)/Clearaudio Talismann V2, Hana ML/MH, Transrotor Figaro (MC)

Phono-Preamp:

Brinkmann Edison, Transrotor Phono-8 MC

Phono-Cable:

HMS Suprema, JIB Silver Galaxy BP-006SC

Pre-/power-amp:

Accoustic Arts Tube PreampII-MK2/ AmpII-MK3

Speakers:

B&W 800D3, DALI Epicon 6, Fischer & Fischer SN470M



SWITCHING-POWER

The external power supply does not contain a potent transformer, but several switching power supplies for the different areas.

from the fundamental low tone range. The sound also appeared a little tough and kind of cramped.

Not a big concern if everything else is right, as, after all, a Phono-Pre of the 2500-Euro-League usually meets moving coils. And with these the Balance V2 acts as if transformed: spacious and relaxed, rich in detail and lively, colorful and assertive, whereby it was basically irrelevant whether we fed the MC currents via Cinch or XLR cable. Nevertheless, when using the same phono cable in balanced and unbalanced versions, the differences in character typical for these connection variants became apparent: using Cinch, the sound was particularly grippy, „earthy“ and full-bodied, while with balanced XLR, a more floating, light-footed and relaxed reproduction was achieved.

Best enjoyed „pure“

With the volume control activated, you have enough level to control standard power amplifiers, active speakers or even high-impedance headphones. Thereby the Clearaudio pushes heavily from the bottom, so that even smaller chains get red cheeks. The Balance V2 can thus be a fully-fledged replacement for a „real“ preamplifier, although, only up to a certain level of quality. While it couldn't quite match the level of our high-end configuration with Accoustic Arts' ambitious preamplifier/amplifier combination in the function of the preamplifier substitute, the V2 distinguished itself all the more as a pure phono pre.

Regardless of whether we connected it via Cinch or XLR on the output side, the Franconian made the fantastic concert Deacon Blues 2017 recorded in the Glasgow Barrowlands feel big and engaging. On top of that he represented the movement of the backward separated audience as spatially realistic and therefore provided a thrilling live feeling. Lyn Stanley's delicate „A Summer Place“ from the STEREO Best-of-Hörtest-LP, on the other hand, was presented with grace, elegance and just the right amount of charm.

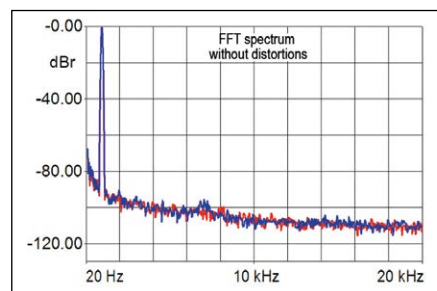
This qualified Clearaudio's all-rounder as a first-class Phono-MC preamp with a complete headphone output, in addition to its many other advantages. The showpiece of the Balance V2, however, remains that of the phono purist. ■

Clearaudio Balance V2

Price: around 2500€ (in black or silver)
Dimensions: 24 x 6 x 15 cm (WxHxD, without power supply)
Warranty: 2 Years
Contact: Clearaudio
 Tel.: +49 9131 40300100
 www.clearaudio.de

First-class sound, especially with an MC cartridge. Due to its technical specification, this Phono-Pre is predestined for balanced connection. The possibility to connect headphones, power amplifiers or active speakers makes the Balance V2 extremely flexible.

Measurement results



Signal-to-noise Phono MM (5 mV)	79/84 dB(A)
Signal-to-noise Phono MC (0,5 mV)	70/75 dB(A)
Phono MM: Sensitivity für 1 V out	9,7/5,2 mV
Phono MM: Gain	40/46 dB
Overdrive resistance MM/MC	105/103 mV/10,2/10,6 mV
Phono MM: Input resistance	25/49 kOhm
Phono MC: Sensitivity für 1 V out	1/0,48 mV
Phono MC: Gain	60/66 dB
Phono MC: Input resistance	500/528 Ohm
Output resistance	62/65 Ohm
Maximum output voltage	10,5/20,3 V
Stereo crosstalk (5mV/1kHz/1kOhm)	76/84 dB
Distortions at 5 mV	0,008/0,005 %
Intermod. at 0,8 mV/8 kHz/60 Hz	0,005/0,003 %
Power consumption Stry/Idle	<2 W/8,8 W

Lab-Commentary

First-class values, which improve with balanced operation especially with regard to distortion, signal-to-noise ratio and channel separation (details in Cinch/XLR). Sensibly high maximum output voltage even in the headphone branch.

Features

In- and output in Cinch and XLR; headphone jack with level control; external power supply; subsonic filter;

STEREO - TEST

SOUND-QUALITY	96%
VALUE FOR MONEY	
EXCELLENT	