



Keepitin the family

The latest Pro-Ject addition boasts the advantage of fully balanced operation. **Ed Selley** checks out how it sounds

number of models in the Pro-Ject range, you might be forgiven for thinking that pretty much every evolutionary niche of turntable design has long since been covered. In reality, it still has a few more gaps to fill. The X8 is outwardly conventional, but has been developed to employ a specific feature rarely seen at this price point.

uch is the depth and

It is fully balanced in operation. This is rarer to encounter in analogue than it is in digital front ends, which is all the more puzzling considering all turntables are inherently balanced. The four-pin arrangement on the back of a phono cartridge, where each channel has its own ground, is a balanced audio out and it is only when this is recombined in an RCA connection that this ceases to be the case. The X8 avoids doing this and comes supplied with a five-pin DIN-to-XLR lead-out cable.

The turntable is unsuspended and combines a heavy aluminium platter deadened with a TPE inner lining. This sits on an equally substantial 50mmthick MDF plinth. Between them they contribute to the bulk of the X8's 15kg unboxed weight.

running but continuously evolving 9CC; here in its Evo form with large bearing housing and tapered carbon fibre tonearm tube and one-piece headshell. It's capable of supporting a range of cartridges. The package comes fitted with an Ortofon Quintet Blue (HFC 389) moving-coil design, which greatly simplifies initial setup.

While the turntable is unsuspended, the three feet provide excellent isolation and their threaded mounts help with levelling. The motor takes an AC feed created from a DC input being converted internally. The power supply is small, plastic and feels a little cheap, but Pro-Ject will happily sell you a Power Box RS2 Phono that provides a linear feed for both the turntable power input and a matching phono

To make use of the turntable's XLR feed, Pro-Ject has developed a pair of

The tonearm is Pro-Ject's long-

stage, albeit at an additional £700.

Pro-Ject X8 drive turntable WEIGHT 15kg (WxHxD) 465 x 150 x 350mm **FEATURES** • 33 and 45 rpm • 9in carbon fibre tonearm with Ortofon Quintet Blue

Balanced or

tonearm output

TELEPHONE 01235 511166

WEBSITE

Henley Audio Ltd.

project-audio.com

DETAILS

PRODUCT

a fully balanced

particularly talented rivals).

the neat trick of looking and feeling more expensive than they are. Some aspects of the turntable still strike me as a little basic; the thread-andweight antiskate is fiddly and the separate switch and speed control well assembled and a pleasure to setup and use. The DS3 B is, if loading and setup would be outstanding for the price, even without the balanced connections.

Sound quality

providing the required balanced input, the principle advantage of a balanced turntable is demonstrated before a record is even played. The duo is uncannily quiet at idle. Even

balanced phono stages of which the DS3 B is the more sophisticated of the two. Fitted for both moving magnet and coil operation - the latter with a useful spread of impedance and capacitance settings that will suit most cartridges – it is a fairly impressively specified device even without the XLR in and outputs (RCA in and outs are also supported and the X8 can have a standard RCA cable attached to the arm output too, although this brings it into contact with some

This duo is a superb demonstration of analogue front-end

Both the X8 and the DS3 B pull off arrangement feels fussy, but it is very anything, even more impressive. The all-metal construction and the flexible

With a Cambridge Audio Edge A



Box DS3 B Austria/Czech Republic 1.5kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD) 206 x 72 x 194mm

Moving-magnet/ moving-coil inputBalanced and unbalanced DISTRIBUTOR Henley Audio Ltd.

TELEPHONE 01235 511166

nenleyaudio.co.uk

are pretty quiet, but the X8 starts

The effect this has on how it

tangible affair; the hushed but

ever-present audience becoming a

more defined part of what you hear.

As Frahm begins, his location in the

on occasions when I've played this

expensive devices. It would be wrong

to describe the effect as purely down

to detail retrieval – in part because I

detailed cartridge - but where the

noise floor vacates, additional

This feeds into the X8 being a

naturally spacious performer. It

large-scale recordings because it

possesses an effortless heft and

airiness that combine to give it

doesn't appear to struggle with any

impressive authority. There is also the

perception that the presentation has

a wholly compelling flow. Talking

Timbuktu by Ali Farke Toure and

Rv Cooder sees the X8 and DS3 B

combine in a way that plays to the

strengths of the recording. Faster,

feel less urgent than on some

similarly priced designs, but this

Pro-Ject pair never tips over into

more impactful music can sometimes

information is perceived.

don't feel the Quintet Blue is a hugely

venue and the scale of the room

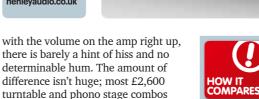
record on considerably more

being a little bit quieter.

everything it does from a position of

performs is significant. The opening

of Nils Frahm's Spaces is a much more



come in at similar price to Rega's Planar 8 with Ania cart and Fono MC phono stage (HFC 443, 452 and 426) Used over RCA (there is no XLR on the Rega), the Pro-Ject has more bass extension and a warmer and fuller around him is easier to pin down than midrange while the Regais more lynamic, exciting and manages to find more detail. If you have a balanced stem, though, the X8 and DS3 Beke out advantages that the Rega can't. The low noise floor and superb three mensionality tips the balance for many steners. If you have an XLR input going

spare, the Pro-Ject is

a fine source for it.

The X8 and DS3 B

sense of bloat and overhang. Some tests around the balanced functionality do suggest that this is really how you will want to use the X8 and DS3 B and that they are greater than the sum of their parts when you do. The X8 is supplied with a conventional RCA output cable as well and running this into a Cyrus Phono Signature (HFC 408) is still very listenable (and actually a little more energetic), but that imperious space and airiness suffer. Likewise, the DS3 B is a good RCA phono stage at the price, but a great XLR one. The good news is that the Pro-Ject

sounding slow. This is helped by

a bass response that is deep; at

times positively subterranean, but

controlled and defined enough to

recordings while being free of any

ensure that your attention isn't drawn

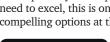
to it but instead it effortlessly fills out

duo has attributes beyond its XLR connections. The tonal realism, across an extended midrange in particular. is glorious. The manner in which it ensures that Emily King's heartfelt and passionate vocals in Forgiveness are the focus of your attention while giving the whole track the space it needs to breathe is highly impressive. It is decently forgiving too. The X8 takes in its stride my standard torture test of a first pressing of Placebo's Meds while going on to sound excellent with high-quality material.

Conclusion

The Pro-Ject duo is a superb real-world demonstration of what running a fully balanced analogue front end can do - the exceptionally

low levels of noise are superb and help this duo deliver one of the most airy and three-dimensional performances at the price. If you're looking to change your turntable and phono stage in one go and have the XLR input on your amp that they need to excel, this is one of the most compelling options at the price •



OUR VERDICT: X8 LIKE: Effortlessly quiet

Choice

SOUND QUALITY sound; build; ease of use ALUE FOR MONEY **DISLIKE:** Not always the

most energetic; needs XLR to show its best WESAY: Use the X8 over XLR and very little its effortless and

OVERALL



Cholce

OUR VERDICT: DS3 B SOUND QUALITY LIKE: Sensational ****

VALUE FOR MONEY DISLIKE: Not as good *** d ver RCA BUILD QUALITY partner to the X8, the DS3 B is a FEATURES

WESAY: The natural

OVERALL

