

A Purist Masterpiece

Simaudio Moon 810LP Phonostage

By Jeff Dorgay



A cursory listen of Simaudio's flagship components is all that's needed to reveal that they boast cost-no-object performance at a fairly reasonable price. Producing everything in-house (even the elaborate casework, thanks to having a five-axis CNC machine in the shop) keeps costs down and quality control high. Granted, \$12k isn't exactly reasonable in everyone's budget. But in comparing the 810LP to similarly priced offerings from ARC, Burmester, Boulder, and the like—as well as our reference \$60k Vitus Audio MPP-201—it's clear Simaudio engineers produced a top-shelf phonostage.

During the initial 24 hours of play, the 810LP sounds slightly flat in terms of dynamics and a bit forward in the upper register. Don't panic. Half of it goes away after the first few days of the unit being continuously powered up. While you might take pause with your purchase right out of the box, you'll be on your way to vinyl nirvana within a week, and it only gets better moving forward. These aspects are not unique to Simaudio. Practically every solid-state component we've auditioned exhibits the same effects.

Kapow!

Listening to the 810LP for the first time, one characteristic immediately springs to mind: it's super-quiet. To wit: In the world of four-color lithography, the maximum percentage of ink that can be addressed by any color is 100%. Which means you can't get more black without going to what is called four-color black, built by using all four of the available process colors and, effectively, going beyond 100% black. The 810LP is the aural equivalent of four-color black. Forget about "CD quiet." New LPs cleaned on the Audio Desk Systeme and played through this Simaudio sound 24/192 quiet.

Should you begin your listening with a record possessing wide dynamic swings, like the new Analogue Productions copy of Shelby Lynne's *Just a Little Lovin'*, the 810LP confirms another major strength: dynamic contrast and impact.

No Moon Rock Left Unturned

Removing the cover shows fanatic attention paid to every detail in construction—and why this phonostage commands big money. The M-Octave damping system fully floats the circuit board from the chassis, eliminating any ground or airborne vibrations, critical when amplifying a signal that starts out in the millionth of a volt range. A massive power supply is contained within a shielded environment and covered, utilizing large filter capacitors along with common mode chokes in a pi-type filter.

The 810LP is one of the few components we've tested that does not benefit in the least from any external power conditioning, a trait that testifies on behalf of its power-supply design. Go ahead: Plug this baby right into the wall without worry. (Nerd alert: the noise floor in the DC power supply is -150dB down from 1V.)



Moreover, this is a fully balanced, differential design featuring balanced XLR inputs and outputs in addition to single-ended RCA inputs and outputs. Much like a pair of headphones, a phono cartridge is a truly balanced device. Those in search of absolute maximum performance are advised to get their tonearm cable re-terminated to accommodate the Simaudio's balanced input.

Yes, the 810LP sounds stellar. However, analogaholics need to know a couple of things. The phonostage sports just one input and you must flip the unit over to set gain, loading, capacitance, and EQ, which probably means pulling it out of the rack every time you want to change settings. Listeners that own just one turntable, and that don't swap cartridges on a regular basis, won't notice this slight inconvenience. Audiophiles with multiple turntables should think about it—or just buy multiple 810LPs! Simaudio's VP of Marketing, Lionel Goodfield makes it clear that these choices were made in pursuit of a purist signal path. "We could have added multiple inputs, switching, and a remote control, but that would ultimately compromise sonics, and we didn't want that."

For Now...

The 810LP needs a few more hours on the clock for full evaluation, but it's highly impressive, and we've heard enough to highly recommend it. If you are shopping for a phonostage in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range, put it on the short list. Watch for the full review on the new Analogaholic section of our Web site, totally devoted to all things analog. ●

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