

that have eliminated hum with my Boulder L-5 AE solid-state preamp have been unsuccessful with the MP-1. I hate hum—it's the most distracting, amusical electronic artifact on earth—and I won't tolerate it, or any hum-ridden component, in my system.

The MP-1 also lacks some features that I've found to be absolutely necessary to a surround-sound system. One phono, two balanced line, and two unbalanced (tape) line just aren't enough inputs for a high-end A/V system that has a balanced D/A processor, balanced tuner, single-ended phono, single-ended video audio, single-ended Sony PCM 701 processor, single-ended Dolby S cassette machine, and a single-ended surround-sound processor. Without two tape-monitor loops, the MP-1 won't do if you have any sort of outboard surround-sound processor and a tape recorder in your system. It has two tape outs, but #2 only works if you're using a balanced source, and even then it's 180° out of phase. Nor does the MP-1 have any true tape loops. Sure, I could use an outboard switching box, but that would just throw away the sonic superiority of the MP-1's line stage. It's like buying a Porsche and finding out you have to use it to pull a mobile home—better sell the Porsche and buy a Ford Explorer.

If you're a dedicated tube freak who plans on being buried with your tube tester, your cache of old Telefunken's, and your collection of RCA tube manuals, few of my objections to the MP-1 should be of any major concern to you—it can still produce Class A sound if you're up to its care and feeding. But I'll leave products that require a lot of tweaking, like the MP-1, to those better psychologically prepared for the rigors of ownership. Enjoy, folks, and watch out for those hot tubes—they can burn ya.

—Steven Stone

MAGNUM DYNALAB FT-101A FM TUNER

The Magnum Dynalab FT-101A FM tuner has been listed in *Stereophile's* "Recommended Components" since Vol.13 No.10 without receiving an up-to-date evaluation; a look at the latest version seemed appropriate.

In 1990 (p.194), I was 75% satisfied with the FT-101A. Discontent with the missing 25%, I set about some custom modifications—considerable experimentation with IF filters, audio output ICs, and capacitors—to an older FT-101 (no A). This older tuner gave me 90% satisfaction, and has remained a standard by which I've measured the performances of other tuners—some only slightly bet-

ter, most worse.

Consequently, when Magnum Dynalab's Manfred Breunig called to suggest a retest of the "new and improved" FT-101A, I didn't expect it to work as well as it did—especially since I recently spray-painted the top cover of my reference tuner gold to match its front panel.

The FT-101A sports a single circuit board (the older FT-101 had two circuit boards), a more sensitive signal meter circuit, improved voltage regulation to cut frequency drift, defeatable blend (now on/off instead of slide-blending in mono as the signal level dropped), different IF filters, gold-plated jacks, and other circuit updates. (Some of the changes were mentioned in "Recommended Components" in April '94, Vol.17 No.4.)

Rather than abandon existing circuit design, Magnum Dynalab has tweaked what they have. There's a lesson in this: Think of how many pieces of older audio gear would have been fantastic if improved just a fraction, rather than redesigned—starting over with a new circuit just because new is supposed to be better.

Is the newer version better? Yes! What you get is 40dB adjacent-channel selectivity in the Narrow mode (about as good as you can get in a production unit) with fairly low distortion (0.30%); excellent stereo separation (50dB at 1kHz); superb soundstaging; typical, but very good, usable sensitivity of 1.8 μ V/10.31dBf; and very good, if not quite award-winning, audio quality.

The current FT-101A is an excellent tuner overall, and will receive any FM signal presented to its antenna terminals. The tuner is particularly useful where high adjacent-channel selectivity is needed, which nowadays includes any place where two metropolitan areas are in close proximity. My reference tuner did equal or slightly better Magnum Dynalab's tweaks in sensitivity and selectivity; however, my version lost when it came to stereo separation, but maintained slightly cleaner, more detailed audio.

Magnum's optional audio output refinements for the FT-101A cost an additional \$225 (base price is \$875). For \$1100, you can get 90–95% perfection in FM reception, provided you use a good antenna! This is a bargain: the enshrined McIntosh MR78 listed for \$1695 when it was last produced in 1979 (and sold new from stock until 1984). You can get 19" rack-mounts for the FT-101A, and the factory will upgrade older tuners. Consult a dealer or call Magnum Dynalab for details.

—Don Scott

¹ Look for my upcoming antenna reviews.

AUDIOSTATIC ES-100/SW-100 LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM

As I pointed out in my review last March (Vol.17 No.3, p.117), the ES-100 is, in fact, a modular speaker. Put out an initial outlay of \$3200, and when your bank account grows back to a safe level, invest another \$3200 in the matching SW-100 woofer panels.¹ No external crossovers are required, and no internal networks are used as part of the upgrade. Hence, the speaker's full-range electrostatic purity is in no way compromised.

The SW-100 panels, physically and cosmetically identical to the ES-100s, connect in parallel to the power amp. You can single-wire them by using short sections of cable to connect the terminals of the SW-100 to the corresponding terminals of the ES-100, or bi-wire and connect the SW-100 directly to the matching power-amp output terminals.

The woofer panels are rolled off above 300Hz, and thus augment the ES-100's radiation output in the lower midrange and bass octaves. Because of the parallel connection of the panels, the load impedance, as seen by the power amp, is halved. However, because the impedance in the bass region was so high to begin with, the resulting impedance magnitude will still be a comfortable load for the amplifier.

The SW-100s didn't compromise the excellent imaging of the ES-100s. Instrumental outlines remained palpably suspended within a panoramic soundstage that flooded the front third of the listening room; however, I had to sit right in the sweet spot—just as before. Head movements of several inches to the side significantly shifted the central image.

After experimenting with a number of amps, I concluded that the ES-100s/SW-100s prefer tubes. Connecting the Audiostatics to a solid-state drive is, to my mind, an abomination. Don't do it. Even transistor amps known to be well-behaved with other loads sounded like a bunch of growling dogs with the Audiostatics.

Tubes, on the other hand, coaxed some of the suavest, most refined sound imaginable out of the ES-100s/SW-100s. Specifically, the Music Reference RM-9 Mk.II power amplifier catapulted the midrange to its divine limit. Harmonic textures were so enchanting that I thought I'd died and gone to sonic heaven. Where else could I have experienced such textural sweetness and delicacy?

Because my AC power-conditioning setup had grown more sophisticated

¹ A wood finish is available for another \$200/pair.