Subject: Electro-Harmonix 2A3 replacement for Valve Art 2A3
Posted by Wayne Parham on Mon, 29 Mar 2004 08:41:15 GMT
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In two words:

Do it.

The gold grid Electro-Harmonix 2A3 build quality is much better, and the cost isn't that much more in dollars. As a percentage, the Electro-Harmonix tube is about double the cost of the Valve Art 2A3, but that's only about fifty bucks difference for a matched pair. The improvement in quality is well worth the small additional cost.

A matched pair of Valve Art 2A3's is about forty bucks street price, where a matched pair of Electro-Harmonix is about ninety. That's nothing like a pair of Tung-Sol's or new-old-stock RCA's at $300.00. While we're quoting prices, a matched pair of TJ Meshplate 2A3's is $240.00 and a matched pair of Sovtec 2A3's is about $60.00. So those represent price points in between.

I can't really comment about the sound much because I haven't spent much time with them. I've listened to all of one album side; This morning I listened to the first side of "Alan Parson's Project Pyramid".

My first impression was that the Electro-Harmonix tubes sounded immediately better than the Valve Art's, but that is probably largerly because their obvious build quality makes me expect them to sound better. That combined with the fact that it the Electro-Harmonix are less noisy makes them seem to sound better, right off the bat. But the noise difference isn't any sort of psychological thing - The Electro-Harmonix tube is definitely less noisy.

I'm comparing these tubes in an otherwise stock pair of Paramour monoblocks, each containing the C4S regulator. The stock Paramours hum a little bit even in their best trim, but it isn't particularly bad. But when a Valve Art tube pops like a Geiger counter, that really gets on your nerves.

One of my Valve Art tubes pops this way constantly, and I am told it's a common symptom of about half of the Valve Art 2A3 tubes produced. I guess I'm batting average, 'cause one of my Valve Art's is clean and the other sounds like a Geiger counter until you've played it for about an hour. So half of my Valve Art tubes have this symptom, true to the rumor.

Anyway, the noise issue alone makes the Electro-Harmonix 2A3 worth the extra $25.00 to me. No question. I think it's a better sounding part too, without respect to the issue of noise. But whether or not the tubes are equal in all other respects, the noise issue alone is worth the additional cost.

There's only one thing I liked better about the Valve Art 2A3, and it is probably pretty sophomoric. The Blue Glow. The Electro-Harmonic tube doesn't have it. Its filaments are orange as you would expect, and there may be the faintest hint of blue tint surrounding them. But the Valve Arts are brilliant blue, almost like a deep blue neon bulb. So when I pulled out my orange vinyl copy of

"Alan Parson's Project Pyramid", it was the only unusual color in the audio chain.