Subject: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by woodfree on Fri, 24 Dec 2010 04:54:32 GMT
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As audio specialists and enthusiasts, which do you prefer: tube amps or solid-state amps? I remember something I read, how this one musician conducted a test to see which is preferred by experienced musicians, the tube amps or the solid-state amp?

What they found out was that the tube amp was slightly preferred by purists. However, due to the quick advancement of technology nowadays, the solid-state amps were at par with tube amps these days.

So for you guys, what do you prefer? What qualities make one better than the other?

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Adveser on Fri, 24 Dec 2010 10:54:52 GMT
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Solid State all the way. Accurate, but still has Saturation points and Q values too. You can make an op-amp sound tube-like if you want. That just hasn't been the traditional role of of solid state. The guitar tech is starting to get really specialized and they are learning how to use SS to do the same things as tubes.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Aki on Thu, 30 Dec 2010 00:25:55 GMT
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I don't know if it's necessarily better, but what I prefer seems to be the gear that gets overly hot, takes up too much room, and proves unreasonably heavy. If it's old and dusty, I seem to like it even more.

I tend to apply similar criteria for cars and cameras, so maybe it's just me.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Wayne Parham on Thu, 30 Dec 2010 00:53:02 GMT
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Did you ever see this little booklet?
A taste of tubes

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?

Posted by Adveser on Thu, 30 Dec 2010 01:08:17 GMT
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Awesome book Wayne. Thanks for sharing something else awesome as always.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Shane on Fri, 07 Jan 2011 16:24:59 GMT
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This debate will go on till the end of time. I prefer tubes for high efficiency speakers. I think they bring a warmth to these types of speakers that SS doesn't. On the other hand, I prefer SS on the bottom end due to it's ability to provide the power needed on the low end. Many SS amps sound quite nice, but the ones I've heard that compare with good tube amps were all class A and expensive. The good SS amps won't sound glaring on the high end providing the speakers are up to par, but tubes definitely have the edge in midrange/vocal area IMO.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Adveser on Fri, 07 Jan 2011 18:04:27 GMT
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How hard would it be to run a system, with a crossover, where the mids and highs are amplified by Tubes and the lows are being amped by solid state?

Wouldn't this essentially eliminate Harmonic distortion?

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Shane on Fri, 07 Jan 2011 18:08:40 GMT
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Adveser wrote on Fri, 07 January 2011 12:04How hard would it be to run a system, with a crossover, where the mids and highs are amplified by Tubes and the lows are being amped by solid state?

Wouldn't this essentially eliminate Harmonic distortion?

IMO, that is the ideal setup if you want the best of both worlds.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by AudioFred on Wed, 09 Mar 2011 22:24:38 GMT
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I'm fully converted to solid state. The overwhelming disadvantage of tubes in in the cost. You can buy a new 50 watt/ch solid state integrated (NAD, Cambridge Audio, etc.) for about $500 msrp. The equivalent 50 watt/ch tube amp, with high quality transformers, etc, sells for about $1,500-$2,000. You can get a no-name Chinese amp on Ebay for less, but there will be quality control issues.

The second disadvantage is in a tube amp's reliability. Power tubes blow, and they usually take a cathode bias resistor with them, so you're looking at a repair job. I have four high quality tube amps, and right now two are out of service.

There was a time when budget priced solid state equipment sounded harsh and grainy compared to tube equipment. Solid state has improved quite a bit in the last ten years, and that $500 fifty watt amps sounds pretty good. In an effort to gain some "tube warmth" I added a tube buffer to the system that includes a $170 Oppo player and a $500 Cambridge Audio Azur integrated. I gained a very slight warmth but lost a very slight amount of resolution, and decided I prefer the system without the extra component in the signal path.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Bill Epstein on Wed, 23 Mar 2011 03:00:34 GMT
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AudioFred wrote on Wed, 09 March 2011 17:24There was a time when budget priced solid state equipment sounded harsh and grainy compared to tube equipment. Solid state has improved quite a bit in the last ten years, and that $500 fifty watt amps sounds pretty good.

Funny, my experience is just the opposite. Back in the Seventies, along with platform shoes I had a Bedini 25/25 pure Class A, mosfet power amp that was wonderfully musical. I think it was about $350. In the Eighties my Muse 100 (I'm still on the lookout for a well-priced Muse amp) and Counterpoint SA-100 were excellent. All 3 of these played Acoustat 1+1s, not at all forgiving on top!

Over the past several years I've had An Accuphase E-450 integrated $4500, A Conrad-Johnson Sonographe 250 $1250, A Classe CR-70 $900 and a B&K 202ST, none of which had acceptable upper mids and treble. All were grainy, or etched, or both. The only really fine SS amps I've heard in the past 5 years were the big John Curl monoblocks $8000 and the McCormack DNA 1 $1995.

My Tubelab Simple SE has less than $400 in parts and is sublime with $50/pair EH 6CA7s. OK, maybe not sublime, but it kills any of the above-mentioned solid state.

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by steve f on Mon, 28 Mar 2011 18:38:30 GMT

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I generally prefer good solid state to tubes. Being a typical audiophile, I keep examples of both. Most tube amps sound too warm to me. Solid state no longer resembles the bronze age designs of the 60-70's.

That said, I believe the best amps period are the tube kits of Transcendent Sound. They are OTL designs that are head and shoulders above the better known brands.

My two favorite line stages sound almost alike, and one is tube, the other solid state. The differences are more bass for the ss and more gain from the tube unit. They are both remarkably silent. My top phono choice is a tube unit, but I haven't tried any ss units priced over $200.

When you really think about it, good equipment should sound very similar. Tonal differences are coloration, and therefore mistakes.

Steve

Subject: Difference Between Solid State Amp and Vacuum Tube Amp
Posted by Hannah on Tue, 23 Aug 2011 07:11:00 GMT
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What is the difference between these two? I have heard about vacuum tubes used in early computers. Which is better in terms of sound quality?

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by WorkingWoman2017 on Sat, 30 Sep 2017 00:15:50 GMT
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I would think that solid state would have it all over tubes. Now that they are creating chips that are tubes made of carbon, I think that it can only get better.

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by gofar99 on Sun, 01 Oct 2017 21:39:07 GMT
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Hi, This is an endless topic. I admit to being a tube person, after all I design and my company sells them. I do however own SS amps as well (three vintage ones by Marantz and a few new things from other companies). Both kinds do the job...feed speakers with sound. They do sound different. Saying which is better is a matter of criteria. Is one type more accurate than the other, does one render music in a more enjoyable manner than the other and so on. Fortunately there is room for both types. Which one you choose depends on your budget, needs and sound preferences.

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Rusty on Fri, 22 Jun 2018 14:47:14 GMT
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I agree with Steve F. The Transcendent Sound amps are one of the most unique sounding amps available. And very reliable. I've used the original T-16 mono's and grounded grid preamp for close to 20 years now with no problems. Also my old Hafler 220 amp I soldered up in the mid 80's is still going strong, and fine sounding too.

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Wayne Parham on Fri, 22 Jun 2018 16:23:51 GMT
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I agree that Transcendent Sound makes good amps. So does Raven Audio, OddWatt Audio and Audio Note. Those are my personal favorites.

I like Solid State amps too, as long as they are powerful enough they are not driven into clipping. I think one has to be choosier when purchasing tube amps, because there is more variation in quality. You can get great tube amps, average-quality tube amps and really terrible tube amps. Seems like with solid state, there's either good or there's bad.

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by positron on Mon, 27 Jun 2022 00:29:50 GMT
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I think one has to consider the difference between what is possible
vs the viability. This involves what education the general public
has vs what is possible under lab conditions.

Comparing typical SS/Tube systems, it is probably a toss up between
SS and vacuum tubes. There are so many varieties in both types
that one could claim either.

(I discuss some inherent differences between SS and tubes in another
string in Audio Round Table Forums.)

In the lab is a different case. Hands down the vacuum tube amplifier
can be made to be accurate in absolute terms, from treble to bass.
By that I mean the output sounds so close to perfect accuracy that
one cannot tell if the amplifier is in the system or not.
(Preamps as well.)

It is not one simple listening test, but sophisticated, multiple

types, correlating the results, and taking considerable time, to be absolutely sure the results are correct.

It involves multiple speaker types, many many musical selections, developing accurate interconnect cables (ics) and speaker wires, sources etc etc.

The question then becomes if a lab type system could be incorporated into a conventional household setting by the average consumer. I say this as most have expertise in different fields.

But I think to some extent yes, in that one could just as easily incorporate the best in electronic components, and then work with the source, ics, speakers, and speaker wires. Room acoustics, of course, should be addressed no matter the system and venue.

Cheers

pos

Subject: Re: Which Is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Helen on Sun, 09 Nov 2025 07:56:26 GMT
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That’s an interesting question! I’ve heard a lot of people say tube amps have that warm, classic sound that feels more natural while solid-state amps are cleaner and easier to take care of. I’ve never owned either, but I think both have their charm depending on what you like to hear. It’s nice that solid-state amps have improved so much, sounds like you can’t really go wrong with either these days.

Subject: Re: Which is Better, Tube Amps or Solid-State Amps?
Posted by Hank on Sat, 06 Jun 2026 06:41:19 GMT
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I like solid-state amps more and have made use of a lot of them for most of my music and movie experiences.

I've got the Boss Katana 100 and Quilter Mach 3, and these amps offer clarity when in use irrespective of the type of music that you are playing. If you add the fact that you don't spend much in maintaining solid-state amps like what we see with tube amps where you replace tubes every 7 to 8 months, then I think one would agree with me that my decision to go with solid-state

amps was the right one.