

AUDIOTECHNIQUE
www.audiotechnique.com

音響技術

ISSN 2226-0560
4 895048 326689

2012年10月號

373

每本：HK\$45



iPad App
US \$4.99



83W-130
Preamplifier

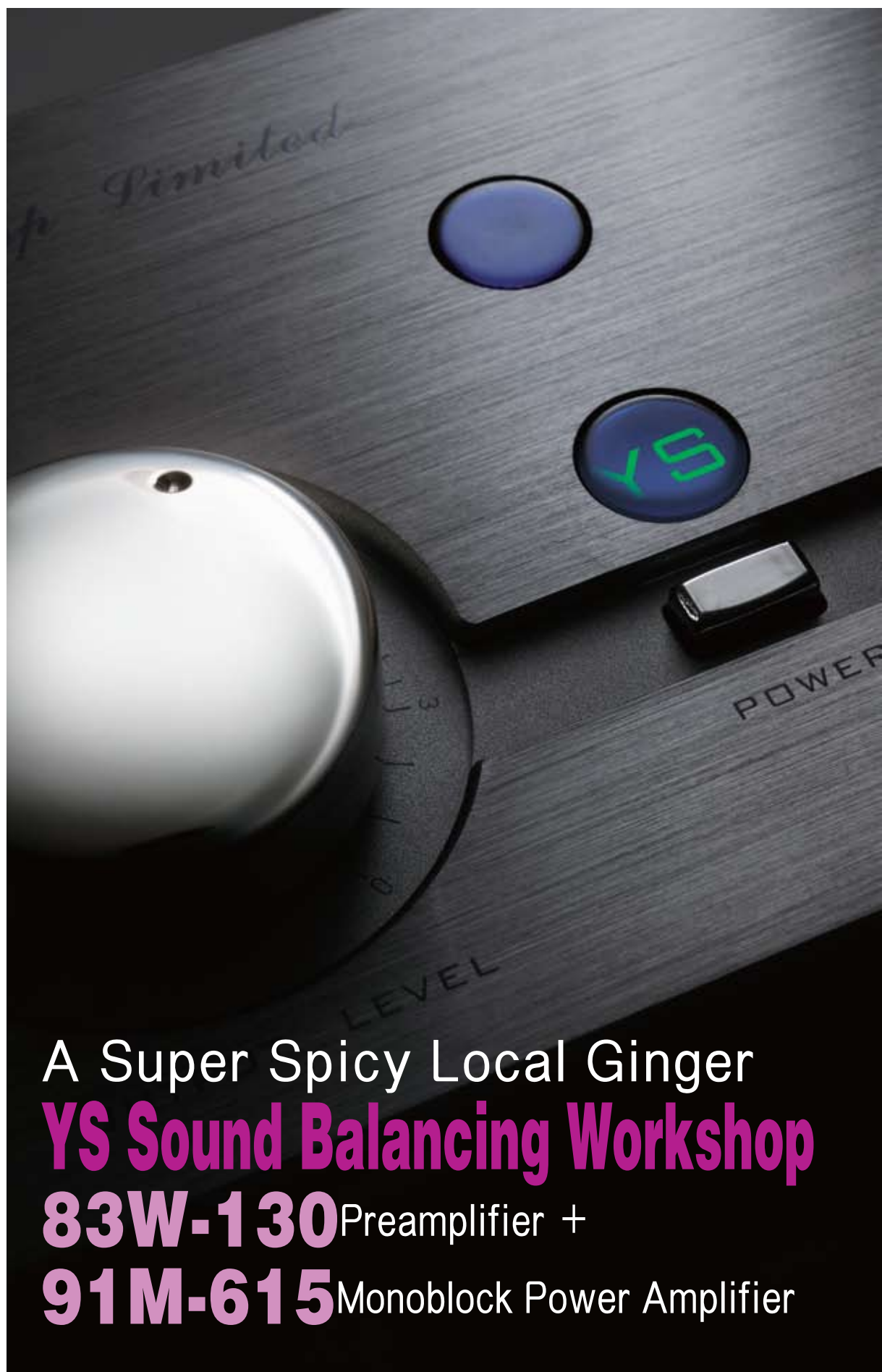


91M-615
Power Amplifier



YS

YS SOUND
HANDCRAFTED IN HONG KONG



A Super Spicy Local Ginger
YS Sound Balancing Workshop
83W-130 Preamplifier +
91M-615 Monoblock Power Amplifier

<< There is a Chinese saying, “Local ginger is not hot.”
Here, we have a piece of super spicy and hot local ginger! >>

Rumour had it, there was a new audio brand name that manufactured super pre and power amplifiers here in Hong Kong. Their products were not only heavily built, but were also using the best materials available, with high standard craftsmanship at the same time. The most amazing thing was, this “made in Hong Kong” product, which included a one-piece preamplifier + a 2-piece monoblock power amplifier, was priced at nearly HK\$1,500,000 (around US\$190,000)! What was more, less than half a year since its launch, a couple of tycoons had traded in their expensive Europe-made amplifiers for the YS Audio, to everybody’s surprise. All these made people curious about this new brand name, “YS Sound Balancing Workshop Ltd.”

INVESTMENT BEGAN WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

We met YS of YS Sound by chance. We visited the place where they made their gears, and we also visited two audiophiles’ homes who were using the YS Sound amplifiers (please refer to our #371, August issue), so we had a better understanding about this rumoured brand name.

The best way to know more about YS Sound was from YS himself. According to YS, he was a crazy audiophile. He started DIYing tube preamplifiers, power amplifiers, and building wooden boxes for full range loudspeakers since his early college days. Later, when he was capable of spending more, he started buying gears with a name. In his journey to perfect audio system for more than 30 years, starting from entry-level Japanese brands to top class European gears, YS found none of these gears met his strict requirements for a perfect system. An unpleasant experience with a Swiss high end

brand name made him very disappointed on those so called state-of-the-art equipment. Because of his knowledge in electronics and audio technologies, YS decided to manufacture his own amplifiers in pursue of his ideal sound.

He bought three separate small factory units in Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong and combined them into a 12,000 sq. ft. factory. He then ordered from Germany, Switzerland, England and Japan a large number of Hi-End audio components such as transformers, capacitors, resistors, rectifiers, voltage stabilizers, power transistors and potentiometers etc., some critical components were specially made to order. He also bought some extremely expensive measuring instruments from Germany and Switzerland, so that he could select the best or the best matched components, one from a hundred, or even one from a thousand. As to the circuit design, YS had his own plan. He referred to many top class European designs, adding his own knowledge in audio technology, and finally succeeded in building a set of





pre and power amplifiers, to his own satisfaction, and to the recognition of other audiophiles.

In addition to circuit design and choice of components, the construction and craftsmanship of the amplifier chassis also affected the final performance, and the desires of buying them. The chassis of the YS Sound amplifiers were made from solid aluminium alloy, by a Hong Kong manufacturer which was expertise in aluminium products. All YS Sound products were assembled and aged in the Tsuen Wan factory and they had undergone a series of testing before reaching the hands of the customers.

PRACTICAL SUPPORTS FROM BUYERS

YS established YS Audio on a major premise of making a set of amplifiers to satisfy his own harsh requirements, or at least one that he considered to have the optimum performance. Although he already had dozens of supporters showing their recognitions by paying full cash for his amplifiers, YS insisted to have one set transported to our place for audition. I was not exaggerating by saying "transported", because just one single power amplifier weighted 70kg! The set we got was the flagship model — 83W-130 preamplifier and the 91M-615 mono power amplifiers. (YS Audio had another medium-sized set with an 'M' at the end of the model name, which was a bit 'cheaper'. YS said the 'M' model had omitted the EQ and REC functions, and the power output

was reduced from 3000W to 1280W; the chassis was made to the same scale and craftsmanship, the choice of components was also the same high quality as the flagship model.)

To a preamplifier with a 5-band equalizer, the front panel of 83W-130 was not complicated. On the upper left were two buttons for the EQ, one of which is for REC. Next to these buttons were 5 turning knobs for frequency adjustments at 60Hz, 220Hz, 820Hz, 3.5kHz and 13.2kHz. By their side was a small button for record monitor. The lower half from left were 6 input buttons, and another 4 for Rec, Mono, Phase and Mute (-20dB). Then there were two big turning knobs for balancing and volume. To the right were 2 small circular windows for infra-red receiver and the YS logo which would light up in blue when the power button was pushed on.

The back panel was simple, besides the IEC power socket was a series of XLR terminals, which included 6 inputs (the first 3 were 3+, 2-; the following 3 were 3-, 2+), 1 rec in, 1 rec out, and finally, 2 outputs (3+, 2-). One input and one output used Cardas XLR terminals, all the rest were Swiss-made Neutrik top class terminals with silver contacts.

STATE-OF-THE-ART EQUALIZING CIRCUIT

Removing the 8mm aluminium top plate revealed the heavy weighted aluminium alloy chassis —

the front and side plates were 10mm, even the back plate was 6mm thick! The potentiometers of the 5 EQ and the volume control were the Japanese Alps top models; the balance was from Tokyo Ko-On Denpa. At the bottom was a large circuit board, with the true balanced amplifier and record circuit components and sealed modules soldered on it. Above this was another circuit board, as big as half the size of the case, densely packed with the 5 EQ components and modules. YS emphasized that the 5 band equalizing circuits were composed of high quality discrete components, and they had very high linearity. Non-linear and phase distortion was kept to a minimum. Once the owner had got used to its operation, he could easily adjust an ideal frequency response curve to suit different acoustic environments without deteriorating the original pure and accurate sound of the preamplifier. The owner could also use this part as a professional studio equalizer to create a sound effect to his own personal taste. YS also told us that the preamplifier section was originally sealed with a special black resin material, this time it was exclusively exposed for our readers.

On the right was a heavy German-made toroid transformer in a mumetal shell. There were 2 German ROE 5600 μ F filtering capacitors on its side. The layout and craftsmanship of the 83W-130 was of very high standard. Its dimensions are 17.5"(W) $\times$ 12"(D) $\times$ 4.5"(H), weighing 11kg.

EXCLUSIVE TURBO FUNCTION

91M-615 had the same high standard of craftsmanship, and was a heavy weight product, with a dimension of 20.5"(W) $\times$ 28"(D) $\times$ 11"(H), weighing 70kg. Its faceplate was machined from solid 25mm thick aluminium alloy, the side and back plates were





10mm, and the top was 8mm thick, both left and right sides had a second inner chassis made of stainless steel. The construction of the whole case was very sturdy and rigid; the guys who helped bringing them to us should be most impressed. The large faceplate was very simple and concise. On the top left was the logo of YS Sound, on the lower right was the full brand name, and the second line was clearly printed, "Handcrafted in Hong Kong". In the middle was a round power button; above it were 3 small LEDs representing DC, short circuit or leakage. Should any of the abnormal conditions occurred, the corresponding LEDs would light up.

The back was also simple. There were two very quiet exhaust fans on the right and left sides. In the middle was a pair of Furutech Torque Guard FT-818 binding posts; under it was the 20A power receptacle. The XLR input was on the top left, with a Tokyo Ko-On Denpa potentiometer for adjusting level to its right. On the top right was a small push button, YS called it "Turbo". This was a special circuit developed by YS. After turning on the amplifier for about 1 minute,

the user could press this button for 30 seconds, and the exhaust fans would turn in a high speed; at the same time, all the driving circuits of the power transistors would increase their bias voltage, so that the temperature of the transistors would quickly rise to the ideal working temperature, and the amplifier could reach its warm-up state in half a minute which would normally take half an hour. YS emphasized that this Turbo function is unique, not found in any other amplifiers.

SUPER QUIET COOLING OPERATION

Taking away the heavy lid, one could see the heavy power transformer which was wound in a special way with British-made enameled copper wire. The silicon steel E-I core was from Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal, the rating was a stunning 5,000VA! YS said this was the most stable transformer at the moment. The filtering capacitors were 4 British-made BHC, 15,000 μ F each, connected together with gold-plated copper bars. Each channel of the 91M-615 used 16 Motorola metal case bipolar transistors, the maximum power dissipation of each was as high as 3,000W! The design of the amplifier was not common push-pull circuits with NPN + PNP transistor pairs; it employed only NPN transistors for both positive and negative half cycles of the signal. The advantages were high power, analytical, wide soundstage and high velocity. But it required very strict transistors matching, and the cost was unavoidably much higher.

These 8 pairs of transistors were mounted on aluminium rectangular heat sinks at the rear. At the end of the heat sinks were two very quiet exhaust fans to help draw out the heat produced. During the

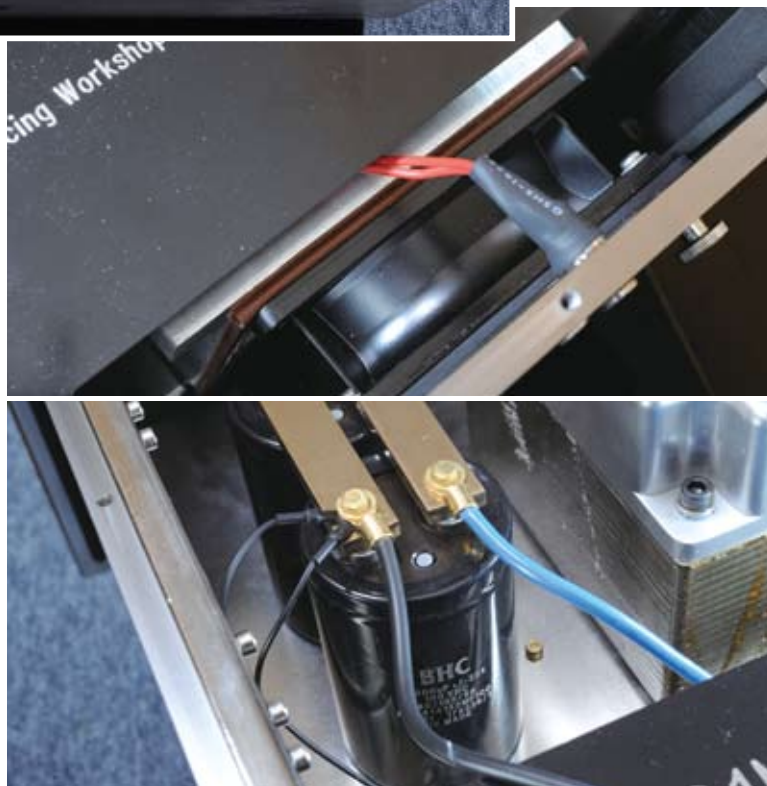




one month or so auditioning period, we could only hear the sound of the fans in the first half minute when the turbo was functioning; after that, we could see the fans were turning slowly, but couldn't hear any sound of air flow or noise from the motors. The case was only slightly warm, that proved the heat dissipation was highly efficient. We left the power on all the time, and their operations showed perfect stability.

DEEPER CHARM

We paired the YS Sound amplifiers with the new 4-piece dCS Vivaldi SACD/CD playback system and our reference speakers, the Dynaudio C4 Signature. The power cord for preamplifier 83W-130 was Siltech Ruby Hill II, and Ruby Double Crown for power amplifier 91M-615. Interconnect and speaker cables were respectively Empress Double Crown and Emperor Double Crown. Interconnect from Vivaldi DAC to preamplifier was Crystal Cable's Absolute Dream. After burning-in for 20 days, around 500 hours, the system was ready for serious audition.





In our previous issue when I reviewed the dCS Vivaldi digital playback system, I was deeply impressed: what a big step forward by simply changing the digital source! I could never imagine, just one month after, another great surprise awaited me, and that was the YS Sound amplifiers; they raised the performance of our system to yet another higher level! Not only the SACD/CD replay from Vivaldi had a deeper charm with more details, higher clarity and analogue feels, even the Dynaudio C4 Signature seemed to be much better in every respect like never before. The speaker boxes and woofers were more powerful as if they were enlarged considerably, emitting very large dynamic and a majestic spectacle in the grandest sections. On the other hand, the details and delicacy of the instruments were not a bit coarse, but even clearer and more meticulous, more attractive to the ears. That confirmed the fact that any link could have a decisive effect in the whole system.

Recently I liked using the "The Perfect Sound" 2012 and 2010 for testing. When Tsai Tsin sang "Wishing me Happy" (Track 1, 2010), the voice was very lively, more penetrating. Her interpretation of the lyrics expressed the helplessness and struggle from the heart, and that was very moving. It also showed the sound density, micro-dynamics and musicality of the YS Sound Amplifier were superb.

CHEERING EXPERIENCE

In Oscar Peterson Trio's "You Look Good to Me" (Track 2, 2010), when Ray Brown was playing the double bass, one could hear not only how deep the bass was, but could also feel the size of the instrument, and how the bass sound spread out like ripples. When he turned from bowing to plucking, the low notes came out clearly, bouncing and vibrant. Together with Oscar Peterson's sonorous, free and unfettered piano playing, and also Ed Thigpen's fabulous drums, they brought the piece to the highest realm of jazz music! YS Sound had the best frequency extensions to both ends, astounding analytical power, revealing every detail of the three instruments, giving me the most cheering listening experience to this familiar piece.

When listening to "Dance Macabre" (Track 11, 2012), from the 12 strokes of the harp, to the summon of the violin, the timbre of the instruments, rhythm and melody were very dramatic and attractive. When it came to the part of the xylophone, which signified the rattling bones, the dancing of the souls came to a climax. The whole audition room was filled with a surge of emotion, with both delicacy and dynamics. It was a perfect demonstration of big orchestral music replay. With inexhaustible power reserve, YS Sound handled this demanding piece with ease, showing at the same time all the details, the acoustic characteristics and spaciousness of the recording venue.

POSTSCRIPT

The YS Sound 83W-130 preamplifier and the 91M-615 power amplifiers had the quality of the highest grade; I had no doubt about that. Up to this day more than 40 sets had been sold, and I was so astonished on how audiophiles were willing to pay a high price for real good sound. This "made in HK" YS Sound brand name, should now be added to the Hall of Hi-End Audio.



A State-of-the-Art pre and power Amplifier set bringing a pleasant surprise to the Audiotechnique Audition Room

封面專題
COVER FEATURE

Paul Leung
(梁錦暉)



YS Sound

83W-130&91M-615

Recently, a set of dCS Vivaldi digital replay system had stationed in our audition room as the reference source. And as a frequent visitor, I felt the sound performance had reached an unprecedented state; the musicality and analogue feel were comparable to vinyl disc, very close to our reference vinyl turntable. Sounded like Arabian Nights? Frankly, before the introduction of the 83W-130 and 91M-615, I thought there was not much room for improvement with our reference gears, but the YS Sound amplifiers proved I was wrong.

I fully understood "the eyes can't replace the ears", but since I had seen so many fine and delicate European and Japanese products, my expectations to the relatively plain and simple appearance of the YS Sound amplifiers were not high. So, when music came out from the system, its outstanding musicality and analogue feel nearly blew me away from the couch to the floor! At first I thought it was because of the Vivaldi, but when I listened to the tracks which I previously listened to with the Vivaldi and the original amplifiers, I found the familiar voice of Pang Ling (from "The Perfect Sound 2012") suddenly sounded like LP. Yes! It was emitting the analogue feel of the original LP. It was this unforgettable feeling from this LP that haunted me all the time, and it was this LP that tempted me to join the LP family. I had already started collecting old vinyl discs! Now the voice of Pang Ling reproduced by these gears in front of me not only had fine and life-like images, it was also full of passion, very analytical, and with abundant micro-dynamics.

Still with disbelief, I tried some orchestral pieces: Brahms's Violin Concerto from "The Perfect Sound

2010" and Dvorak's Symphony No.9 from the Esoteric SACD. YS Sound and dCS seemed to have a kind of synergistic effect. I used to think the Dynaudio C4 signature lacked some flavor of the strings, but with YS Sound, it was another story, the strings sounded warm and "woody", the sense of stage and 3D were excellent. But, when I came to Tsai Tsin (Track 1, 2010), might be my preconceived impression, it sounded not quite the same as before; the air around the singer was not as good as before, the tone was a bit darker. But it was not obvious when listening to Pang Ling.

On the following day, when I came to listen again, Lincoln told me that he had changed the digital cable and clock cable to Nordost Oden and Valhalla. I listened to Tsai Tsin again. The tone colour restored its brightness, Tsai Tsin was as mellow as ever, and the "air" came back to my expected level. This time, I was 100% contented with the result. Once again, the sensitivity to cables in Hi End gears could not be overlooked.

CONCLUSION

In the past month, I experienced two times extraordinary sound upgrade in the Audiotechnique Audition Room (1st time was dCS Vivaldi, 2nd time YS Sound), the margin of upgrade was so big, previously tested gears could hardly be compared. To my memory, amplifiers could rarely come close to YS Sound. It was the only made-in-HK amplifier that had brought such a big pleasant surprise, and that answered my previous question: how come some well-off audiophiles had become owners of YS Sound when it was still unknown to most audiophiles?





A Thunderbolt ! Amplifiers of the Highest Standard

YS Sound, a local brand name that astounds all audiophiles

When I looked at the review heading, even I would ask, would it be too exaggerated? But compared to the sound I had heard, I concluded that it was not a bit exaggerated. I was referring to a set of local-made amplifiers, the YS Sound 83W-130 preamplifier and the 91M-615 mono power amplifiers.

There were many DIY'ers in Hong Kong, some of them had turned from a hobby to a career, and they made and traded Hi Fi gears. These gears were not expensive and had guaranteed qualities, very high c/p ratio. But, on the other hand, they were rarely considered as real Hi-End. It had been commonly agreed among Hong Kong audiophiles, foreign gears were always better. Not only local products, even for Japanese products, if they were more expensive, people would say, why not buy European or US products?

A BREAKTHROUGH IN LOCAL PRODUCTS

Frankly, even I myself was somewhat biased in the same way; but after listening to this YS Sound amplifiers, I believed any audiophiles who despised local products would have nothing to say, and would definitely be convinced.

Just last month, I have listened to the best sounding digital replay system, the dCS Vivaldi (If you don't believe it, find a chance to listen to it!). Its beautiful sound still lingered in my mind. I said to myself, it would be very long before I could listen to another gear with such a breakthrough.

But this set of YS Sound amplifiers caught me by surprise! Its performance in the audition room unexpectedly beat our reference amplifiers which were already very good. I could only say, there was

always a higher mountain — the progress of audio equipment was endless.

A 3000W CONQUEROR

The output power of 91M-615 could reach a stunning 3000W; it could handle the most demanding orchestral music with ease. When I played the Esoteric SACD, Mahler 5th symphony, the big climaxes demonstrated what real ease was. The strong sound pressure came as quick as you could imagine, the transient was immediate. It was breathtaking, but without any strain; you could feel it still had a lot (of power) in hand! Also, it turned our Dynaudio C4 Signature into a bigger pair of speakers, the lower frequencies and the big sound stage seemed to exceed the speaker size. But on the other hand, they came absolutely effortless, showing the real potential of the speakers and strength of the amplifiers.

In Mahler 5th, the strings sounded beautifully, but were overshadowed by the splendid sound of the full

orchestra. Listening to Szeryng's Mendelssohn Violin concerto, I could enjoy the string section more, and could feel the high density of the YS Sound. There were some moments when the lower string sections were playing tutti, the bass sound surrounded me, deep, rich, moist, backing up the orchestra, creating a grand and magnificent sound stage. Szeryng's violin was tender and charming, shining highs, smooth and delicate. It was not too difficult to make high power, but what audiophiles concerned most with high power was if the sound was coarse. Szeryng's violin could address the concern. It was by no means coarse. The size of the violin was well reproduced; the stage was large, but the violin remained small, with the right proportion. After listening to this concerto, I was almost certain this amplifier could handle any type of music.

LIFE-LIKE 3D IMAGES

Some tracks from Accuphase's test CD gave me new listening experience. In the beginning of the first track, Richard Strauss's "Sunrise", the trumpet had a slight shaking, and that was shown quite clearly. The momentum of the timpani, the surging bass of the organ, the reverb and echo from the venue, all were very impressive with the YS Sound. The jazz piano trio of Track 11, "Side by Side", also had a very unforgettable sense of presence.

Of course, I couldn't miss out the vocals. There were two tracks I liked very much in our "The Perfect Sound 2004", one was Jheena's "A Groovy Kind of Love". The African drumming at the beginning was difficult to replay well. In some systems, they were either too strong, or sounded like deflated. Well, I actually did try that drum before! And I dared say YS Sound gave the most accurate reproduction, not too big, not too small, the bass was just right, superb! Needless to say, Jheena's voice was very good. But even common gears could play Jheena well; the 3D image of YS Sound was just more persuasive, the reproduction of a virtual human in a virtual space was more 'real'.

The other track that I also liked very much was Carol Kidd's "When I dream". I always found it interesting when comparing local audiophile CDs with foreign ones. The locals were more Hi Fi, while the foreign ones were more natural. These two tracks were no exception. In the beginning of "When I dream", the sound of the acoustic guitars was very attractive. Some people couldn't tell whether there were 2 guitars or just 1. YS Sound showed very clearly there were 2. The voice of Kidd was intoxicating. Like Jheena, both had proper proportioned mouth size, diction and breath were very clear. But as I mentioned before, Jheena was even clearer, more Hi Fi, and Kidd was more natural. YS Sound had demonstrated faithfully the two different recording properties.

100% NO COMPROMISE

I couldn't say the appearances of 83W-130 and 91M-615 very attractive, but with a close look, the material was fine and nice, and craftsmanship was very delicate. They were all made in Hong Kong by a local factory which was specialized in aluminium products. The price of this amplifier was high, and so was the cost. Besides the chassis, the components inside were all specially ordered, such as transformers and filtering capacitors from Britain and Germany. The circuits were different from common high power circuits which employed NPN and PNP transistor in push-pull configurations. 91M-615 used only NPN transistors, matching was very strict. The preamplifier also adopted very complicated real balanced circuits.

Last and not least, was the performance. Best materials didn't mean best performance. YS Sound might not be the best, but must be one of the best. They gave you all you could ask for a set of amplifiers: power, delicacy, analytical ability, velocity, you named it. You wouldn't feel it's a specially powerful amplifier, because even in the most demanding passages, it still sounded easy, and that didn't made you think about power. When replaying small pieces and vocals, it wouldn't magnify the sizes of the instruments or the mouth, giving you the most subtle sound. What more could you ask for?

A FINAL WORD

These YS Sound amplifiers were far from cheap, but if they were not good enough, they would disappear very soon, and they wouldn't even have a chance to sit in our audition room. To attain fame in the Hi End market, Hong Kong made products not only had to be good, but 'super good'! And 83W-130 and 91M-615 were. When compared with the best amplifiers, they could only be better. With such good products, I could say proudly to my foreign audiophile friends, "They're made in Hong Kong!" 音

