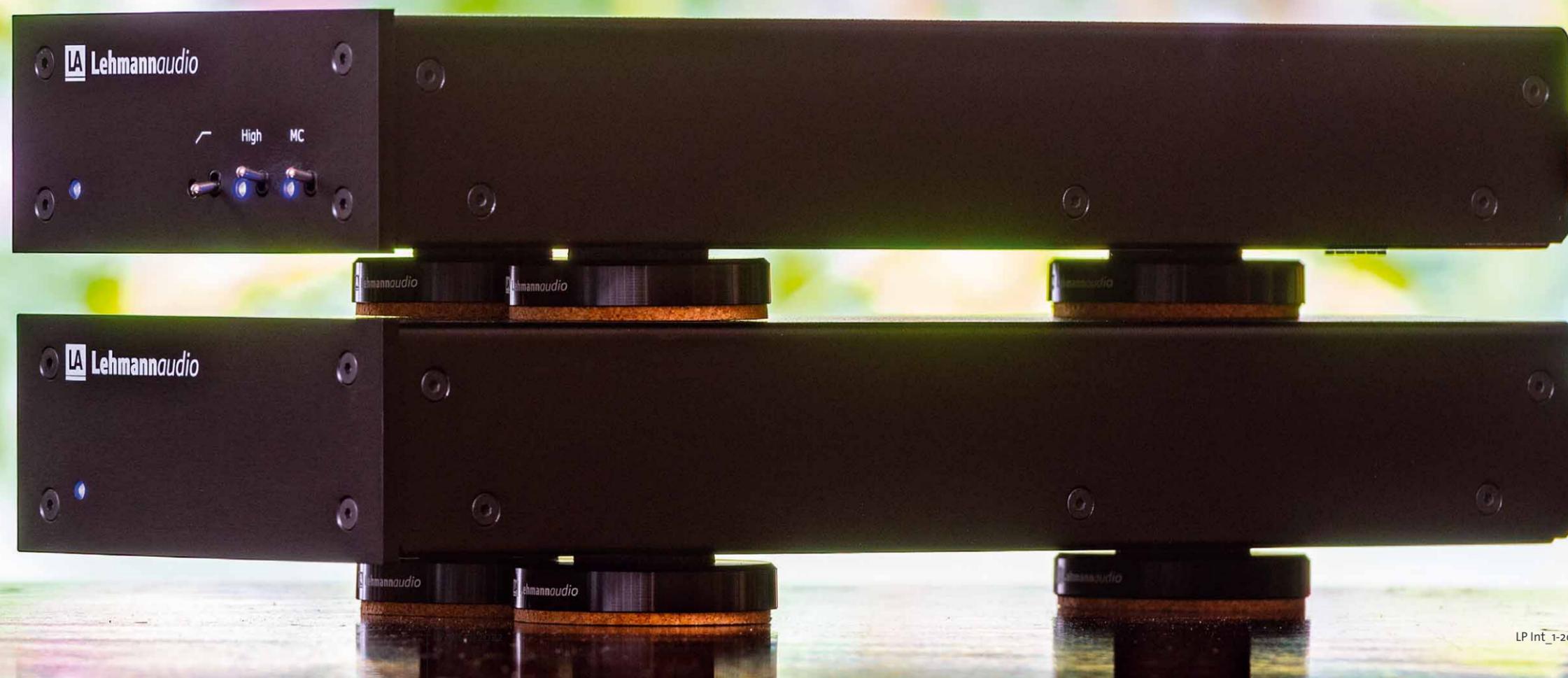
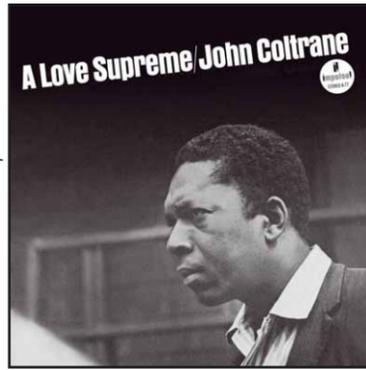


# THE BIRTHDAY PHONO

Hard to believe, but Cologne-based sound engineer Norbert Lehmann has been doing this for over 30 years now. With some delay – the company has existed since 1988 – there's now the anniversary edition of a Lehmann phono preamp classic





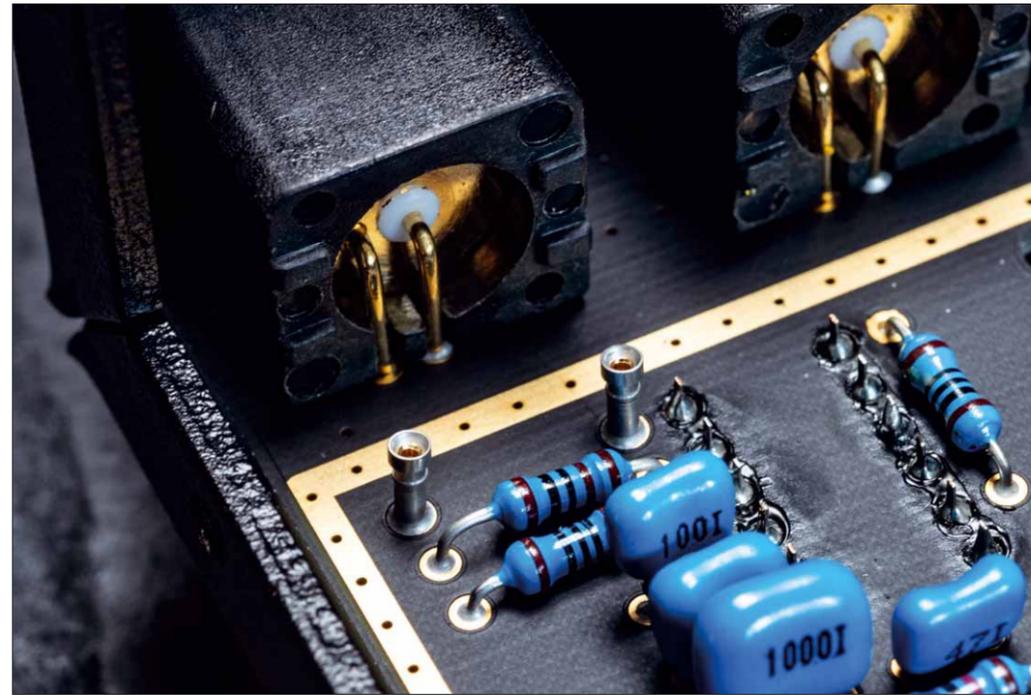
## Music

**John Coltrane**  
A Love Supreme

**Ricki Lee Jones**  
S/T

**Ricki Lee Jones**  
Pirates

**Kungensmän**  
Stockholm Marathon



The two contacts on the board accept the desired terminating resistor for the MC input

Of course, if we want, we can start from the other side. The „Decade“ phono preamplifier has been around since 2005, so the „Jubilee“ model could also be seen as a reference to last year’s fifteenth anniversary. In addition, the 3400 EUR gem offers the opportunity to look at Norbert

Lehmann’s basic approach to equalizer preamplifiers, which, despite all the fashionable trends in the realization of such devices, has been based on the same circuit principle since the early days of the company. The first device was called „Entec Black Cube,“ back in the days when Lehmann was still working full-time for Westdeutscher Rundfunk. „Black Cubes“ still exist today, and the circuit design has served as a blueprint for countless devices since then.

The smaller Black Cubes still contain the technology in an unspectacular square metal cube that can be hidden behind the system and is powered by a power supply unit. The larger models, such as our review sample, consist of two „proper“ devices, which are too beautiful to be hidden away. In the case of the Decade and its current Jubilee

Efficient decoupling: The Lehmann stands on the new “net feet” supplied as standard

edition, these are two compact (eleven by five centimeters front panel dimensions) and deep components connected with a cable that can be plugged in on both sides. You rightly assume that one of the two devices handles the signal processing; the other is responsible for the power supply.

One of the innovations of the Jubilee and a reason for the late release of the device can be found in triplicate under both components: Yep, the cabinet feet. They are an offshoot of the well-known absorbers by Audio Physic developer Manfred Diestertich. The predecessors of these device feet worked with taut threads as elastic elements; in the new generation, it’s a fabric disk that takes over a large part of the decoupling. It is supported by two layers of heavy plastic foil and a cork ring. These are precisely the things that make up the long-term evolution of Lehmann’s phono preamplifiers,

and that help them achieve a remarkable degree of sonic perfection.

In terms of features, the Decade Jubilee is rather pragmatic. Of course, it can amplify MM and MC signals. Both system types are connected via the same pair of RCA input jacks solidly screwed to the housing. Which signals it should amplify is determined by the position of two toggle switches on the front. One selects MM or MC operation, and one allows the gain to be increased by an additional 10 decibels. Thus, 35 and 45 decibels are available for MMs, and 56 and 66 for MCs. This fits in virtually all cases. Toggle switch number three activates the high-pass filter, which takes effect relatively early: six decibels of reduction are already available at 50 hertz. That’s why the manufacturer calls this option a bass filter and not a rumble filter, as the effect is clearly audible.

## Teammates

## Turntables:

- TechDAS Air Force III / Reed 1X
- Clearaudio Master Innovation / TT2
- Sony P-2250

## Cartridges:

- Ortofon Windfeld Ti
- Lyra Etna
- Audio Technica AT5V

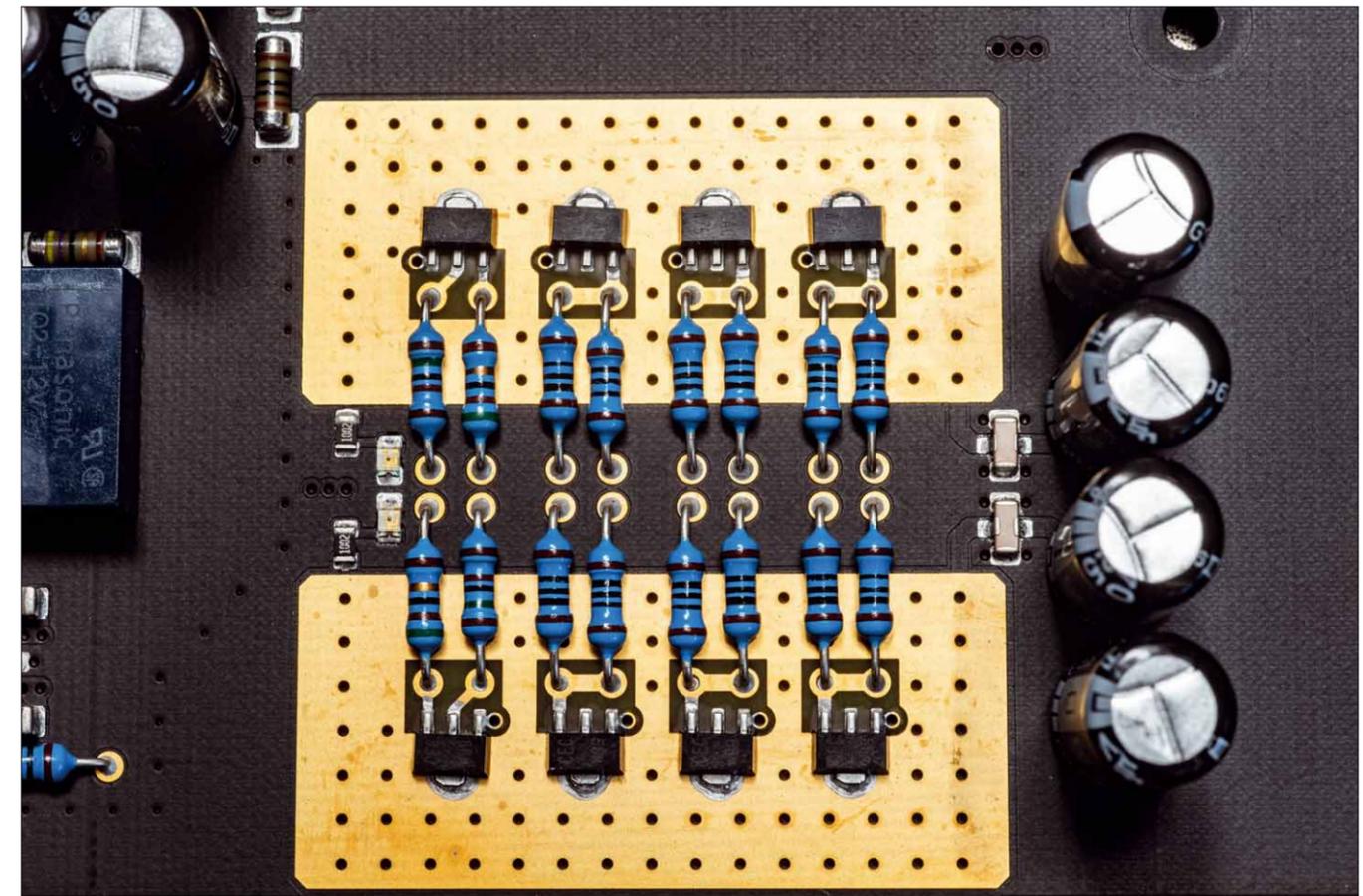
## Loudspeakers:

- DIY Mini Onken / Focal / JBL
- Cube Audio Nenuphar Mini

## Competitors

- Malvalve preamp three phono
- Fidelice 7566

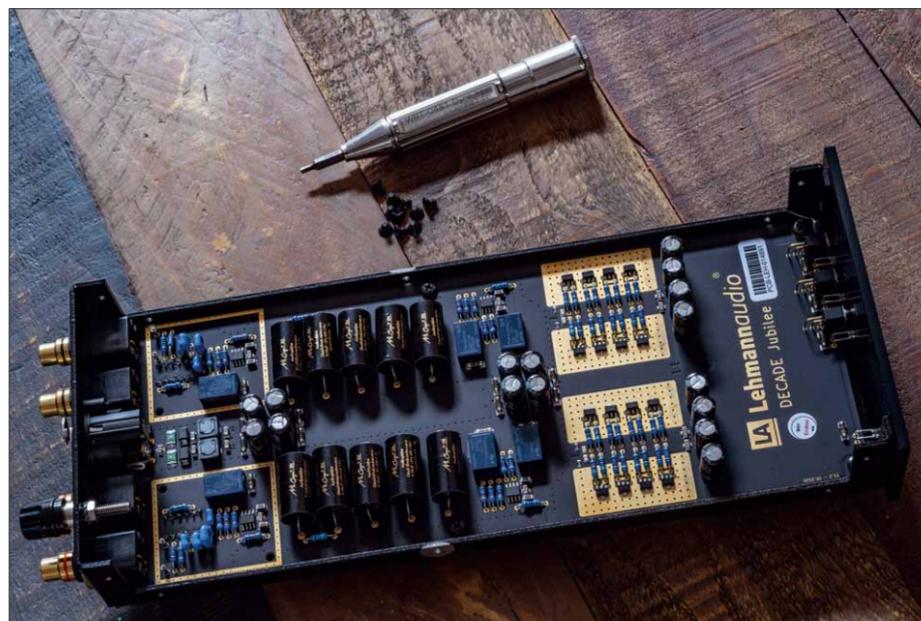
*Lehmann specialty: The Diamond Buffer at the output of the equalizer, now in SMD design*





Four-pin XLR cable: This special connection couples the power supply to the equalizer

There are only a few options for pickup termination, which has a long tradition at Lehmann. Via the „mouse keyboard“ on the bottom of the device, 47,000 ohms can be set for MMs and 100 ohms or 1,000 ohms for MCs. If you have an MC with a little more special taste, you can plug desired resistors on sockets inside the device. This is not super comfortable but has the undeniable advantage of very short signal paths.



The body of the Decade Jubilee is almost too good to be hidden under a lid



#### Measurement comment

The frequency response measurement of the Decade Jubilee reveals the effective bass filter, which indeed has an apparent effect already at 50 Hertz. This is a fine thing for corrugated records and with small speakers. The device behaves exemplarily in terms of measurement. In MM mode, the distortion at 5 millivolts at the input is just 0.008 percent, the impedance ratio a whopping 79 decibels(A), and the channel separation is in the same range. At full gain and with 0.5 millivolts, the result is 0.08 percent distortion, 64 decibels(A) of external voltage spacing, and channel separation that is also at least as high. The power consumption is just under eight VA from the mains.

On the back of the amplifier compartment, there's the obligatory pair of output jacks and a solid binding post for the ground connection. Under the lid of the device,

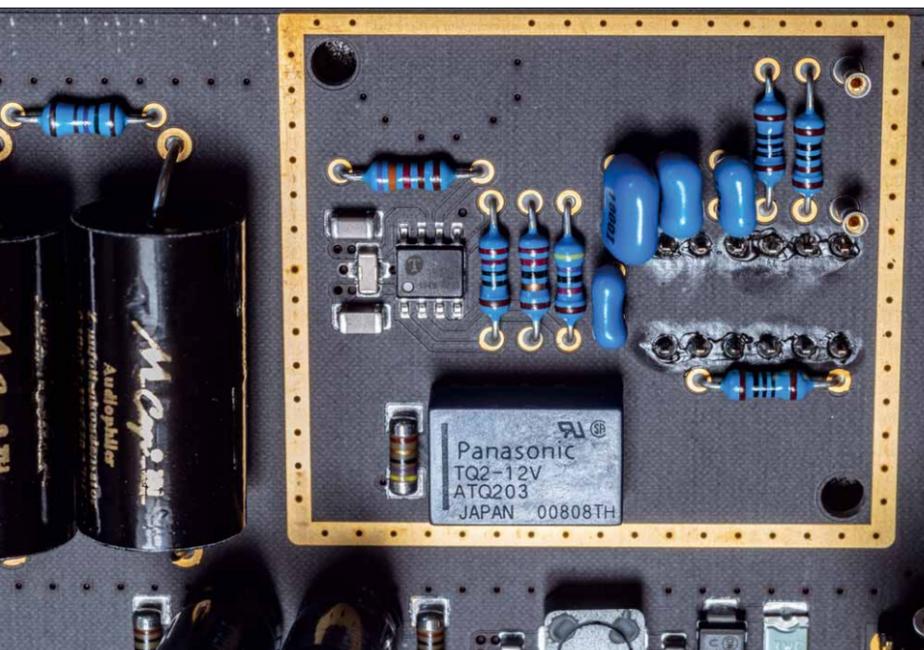


The small back panels of the device are entirely occupied with connectors

which is exclusively available in black, an aesthetically very appealing and, compared to our first encounter with the Decade in LP 6/2008, changed construction comes to light. The matte black PCB with gold-plated tracks has a much stricter channel separation than before, and the layout is entirely new. However, the basic circuit topology is the same as before: The input amplification is handled by a special chip from ThatCorp, which still has a say in the race for the world record for noise amplification. This is followed by the passive equalizer network, behind it a second, somewhat more „normal“ operational amplifier, and last but not least, a so-called „Diamond Buffer.“ This is built with eight SMD transistors (somewhat more potent than the original model) and delivers an excellent low impedance signal to the output jacks. For the top model Silver Cube, Lehmann borrowed the exceptional Mundorf tin-foil capacitors, which are exceptionally good sound-wise in the equalization. Operating mode, gain, and bass filter switch relays directly on the spot. That's how the pros do it – no objections.

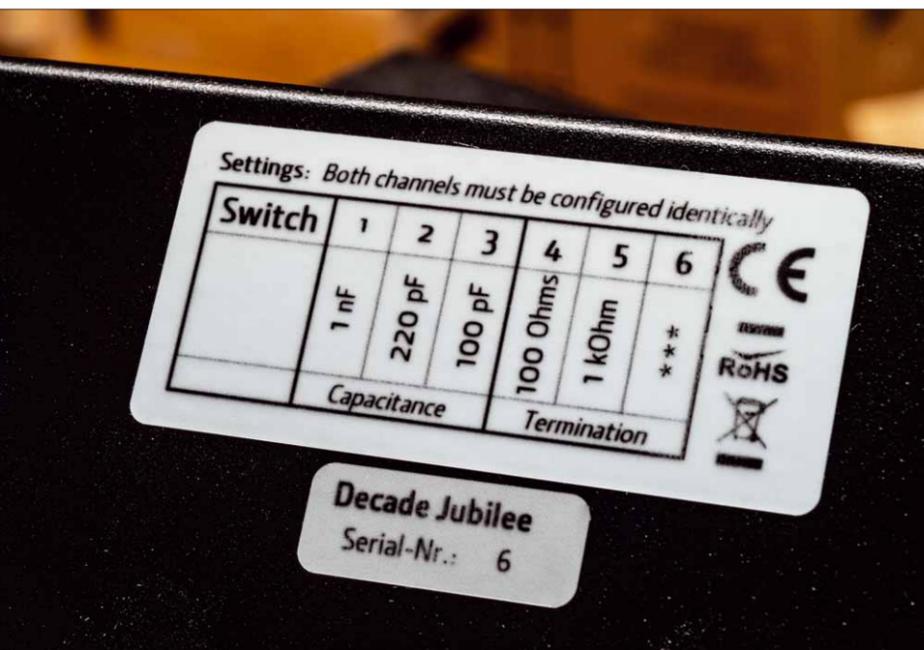
The power supply with toroidal transformer, ample filtering, and voltage regulation





The input amplification with the legendary ThatCorp chip

There are fewer changes to report for the power supply, except for the double MU metal shielding of the toroidal transformer; essentially, everything remained the same. The voltage regulators reside in the power supply, and filtering is done with plenty of



Setting instructions? There's a sticker on the bottom of the device

filter capacitances and chokes on both the input and output sides. The power switch is still not very conveniently located at the back, but the device doesn't mind being permanently switched on. Interestingly, the power consumption of around eight VA is noticeably lower than what we measured at the time. Norbert Lehmann is an avowed opponent of sonic coloration in playback devices - no wonder, given his studio engineering background. And you can hear that in his devices, including the Decade Jubilee.

This machine well serves anyone who wants to distill a cartridge's tonal essence. The Cologne team forms a fortunate combination with the Ortofon Windfeld Ti. With this combination, even after weeks of continuous operation, I cannot for the life of me discern any preferences for certain areas of the spectrum. However, very much those for a lively and powerful way of playing. This is especially noticeable with extreme recordings like John Coltrane's „A Love Supreme.“ Lehmann and Ortofon always keep the balance on this difficult-to-reproduce early stereo recording. Coltrane's sax sounds feverishly hot, has power and expression, but it is not annoying. On the other hand, the illustrious accompaniment team sounds wonderfully nuanced and discreet - amazing how well the combination can place both extremes simultaneously in the room. Even its imaging succeeds very convincingly, which is quite a feat with the extreme ping-pong recording.

The indestructible Rickie Lee Jones also proves to be perfectly „compatible“ with the qualities of the components. On „Coolsville,“ the early Miss Jones balances vocally exemplary fine on the knife-edge, her piano work on „Pirates“ has pressure and attack. This is an analog pleasure at the highest level, but if you ask me how the Jubiläums-Lehmann sounds, I must leave you with the answer: It doesn't sound; it passes music. What more could you possibly ask for?

Holger Barske

## Lehmann Decade Jubilee



- Distributor: Lehmann Audio, Köln
- Phone: 0221 29493320
- Internet: lehmannaudio.com
- Warranty: 2 years
- Dimensions (B x H x T): 110 x 50 x 280 mm each
- Weight: ca. 0.87 / 1.56 kg



Lehmann  
Decade  
Jubilee

International 1/22

» Lehmann's Decade Jubilee is a near-perfect phono preamp. Tonally without a signature, with impressive dynamic capabilities and maximum transparency.