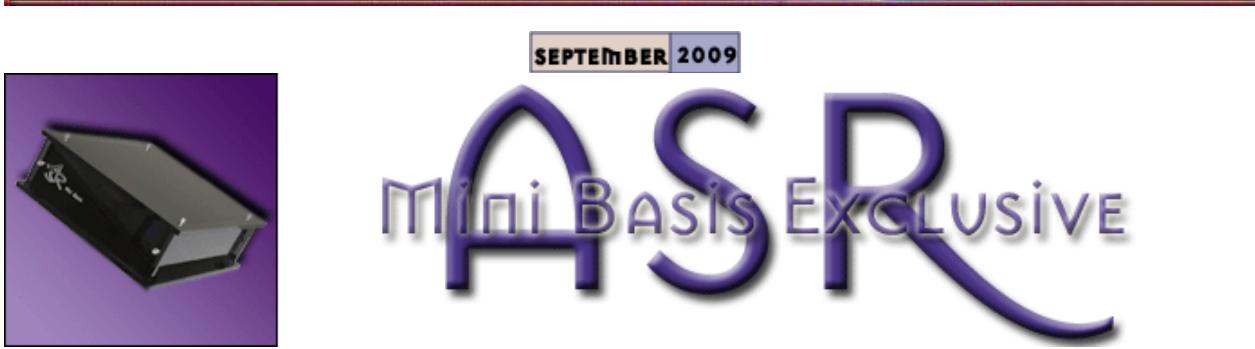
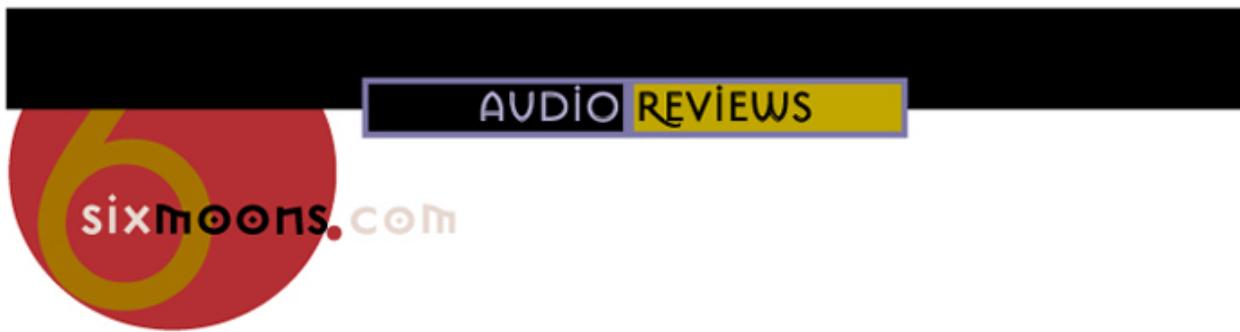


This review page is supported in part by the sponsors whose ad banners are displayed below



Reviewer: Frederic Beudot

Financial Interests: click [here](#)

Source: Esoteric X03SE, Apple i-Mac / Weiss Minerva [on loan], Acoustic Solid Classic Wood, AS WTB211, Grado Reference Sonata 1, Denon DL103, Clearaudio Nano, Audia Flight FL Phono [on loan], Esoteric E03 [in for review], SQ-PH-1t [on loan]

Preampl/Integrated: Esoteric C03 [on loan], Wyred 4 Sound STP

Amplifier: McIntosh MA2275, Genesis GR360 & MDHR, Esoteric A03 [in for review]

Speakers: FJ OM, Zu Essence

Cables: Zu Varial, Zu Libtec, Slinkylinks RCA copper, Esoteric Mexcel balanced interconnects [on loan], Zu Mother, Accustic Arts Ferrite 2 [on loan], Isotek Elite [on loan]

Powerline conditioning: Monster Power HTS5100mkII, Isotek Titan [on loan], Isotek Nova [on loan]

Sundry accessories: Isopads under electronics and good 'ol wooden chest

Room size: 12' x 13.5' x 8'

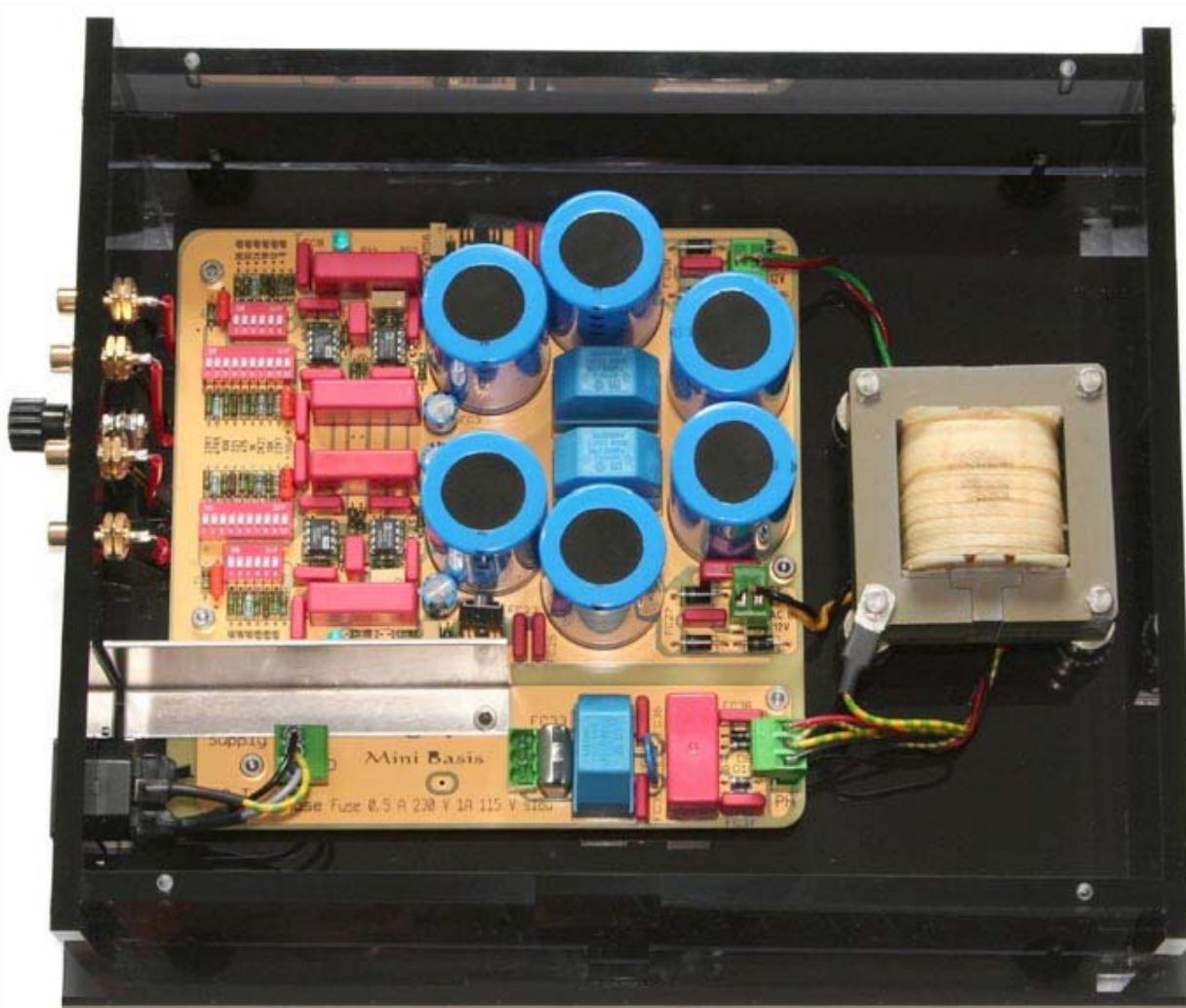
Review Component Retail: \$2900



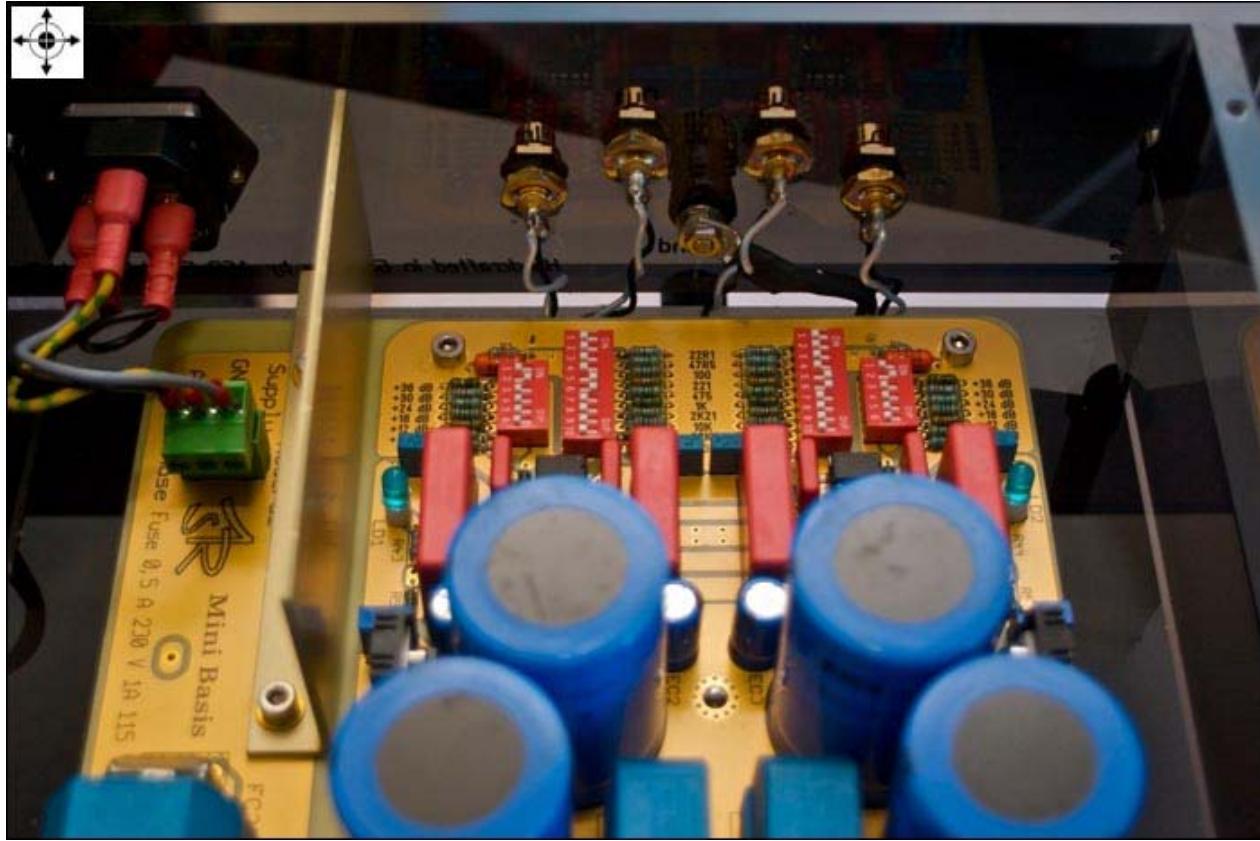
The ASR Mini-Basis Exclusive is the third installment in a series of five reviews of phono preamplifiers. The prior reviews of the phenomenal Audia Flight Phono and the delightfully tubey Sound Quest SQ-PH-1t can be found in our archives for reference and context on this series. ASR, a German company founded in 1980, is globally famous for its line of Emitter integrated amplifiers and Basis phono preamplifiers, all part of the cream of the cream in both quality and price. The Mini-Basis here in its 'Exclusive' version is ASR's attempt of bringing a large piece of Basis goodness for a fraction of the price.



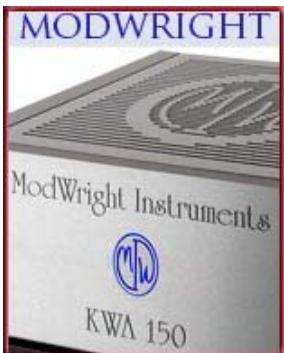
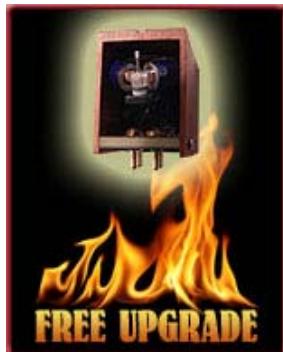
One of the concessions made is obviously the enclosure although truth be told, I find the smoked acrylic and engraved front plate extremely elegant in a simple no-frills sort of way. The acrylic offers a glimpse inside, with two blue diodes revealing that the unit is plugged in without making an exhibition of all the parts - more of a tease than audio porn. The interior of the preamplifier can easily be reached by removing the four screws holding the top panel in place. This provides access to every customizable setting offered by the Mini-Basis Exclusive. This top-side opening proved extremely convenient in my set-up and far easier in use than the back panel adjustments on the Audia-Flight Phono but won't be the case if your phono preamplifier is meant to sit on an intermediate shelf with little clearance. For most users, finding the right settings will be over in a matter of days and they will never have to reach inside again but for people enjoying frequent changes of cartridges, it is one aspect to consider.



Once peeking inside, a few features are well worth mentioning, starting with the oversized 72VA Philbert Mantelschnitt transformer and 200,000 μ F buffer which are in no small part responsible for the superb dynamic character of this preamplifier. The Mark II version of the Mini-Basis which has been commercialized since 2008 now incorporates gold particles in the circuit traces and low noise ICs from Analog Devices. The original Mini-Basis is quite easy to differentiate. Not only is the enclosure a different size but it uses a blue PCB with silver traces while the newer version has a golden board. The Exclusive Mini-Basis under review upgrades the ICs to AD843SQ and comes with ASR's Magic power cord for a \$900 surcharge over the standard Mini-Basis.



To finish the tour of this full-featured machine, gain can be adjusted between +30dB and +72dB and resistive loading provides ten different options (capacitive loading for MM cartridges is adjustable with either 50 or 150pF). ASR recommends setting the gain to the minimum acceptable level for lowest noise but I did find that the overall gestalt of the presentation became more dynamic, impactful and expressive as gain increased. So experiment to find the right trade-off between extreme silence (which the Mini-Basis can deliver) and expressivity.



Similarly, experimenting with loading is extremely recommended as higher resistive loading also translates to more dynamics and bass weight but less finesse and subtlety. In my system, a combination of relatively low input resistance (360 ohm) and higher gain (+60dB) proved the best match for the low output DL103 cartridge even though my system could have easily gotten away with just +48dB of gain instead. I simply felt the presentation lacked slightly in punch and impact on reduced gain (using the Esoteric C03 line stage, it is very easy to dial in +12dB of gain by remote to offset the 12dB decrease in the ASR phonostage and compare apples to apples on this gain question).

peachtree audio

World's 1st Tube Hybrid Integrated Amp with "Pure Digital" iPod Dock* and ESS Sabre DAC

Made for iPod

iDecco

Stereophile 2009 Product of the Year stereophile.com

ALL CONTENT AND GRAPHICS ON THIS SITE ARE PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT AND MAY NOT BE USED WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION
SITE CONCEPT & DESIGN BY MOBUKO NAGAOKA OF KUMADESIGN.COM
JAVASCRIPT CODING BY ANNEKE AUER OF CUCKOO@XS4ALL.NL