

# Getting a head

**PRO-JECT HEAD BOX II (£105)**

Pro-Ject's most affordable headphone amp turns in an ear-warming performance



Rarely is careful attention paid to the headphone output of components. Consequently many specialist companies have standalone headphone amplifiers in their portfolios, designed specifically for getting the best possible performance from an enthusiast's set of cans.

Pro-Ject Audio Systems of Vienna makes a couple of little headphone amplifiers called Head Box II (£105) and Head Box

alert or remind you that the Head Box is powered, nor is there an on/off switch. Simply plug in and go. Plugging in your 'phones is a two handed affair, mind you, as the mere 600g weight of the unit does mean that you need to rest one hand on it when inserting your cans' jack plug.

## PLUG IN AND GO

Immediately noticeable is a comfortable, easy-going nature to the sound of this Head Box II. Comparing the sound directly with

say that it's not pristine would be an understatement.

Similarly I enjoyed listening to 'Eruption', the entire second side of *Moving Waves* by Focus [Polydor/Blue Horizon 2931-002]. I've owned this LP even longer and yet found myself immersed in the music, observing details of Jan Akkerman's intricate guitar frills that were long forgotten.

Familiar high quality 'reference' recordings showed bags of detail as well, despite the Pro-Ject's subjectively smooth tonal balance. Spinning a high resolution 24-bit/96kHz recording of Haydn's Minuet & Presto for Woodwind Quintet from an AIX Records' compilation disc [AIX 81000] revealed fabulous detail of the recording space.

## VERDICT

There's little pride of ownership to be had from this tiny Head Box. But if you spend many hours listening through headphones, you might be surprised how much better Pro-Ject's headphone amp sounds compared with the socket provided on the front of your CD player or amplifier. ☺

## 'Familiar high quality reference recordings showed bags of detail'

IISE (£200). We've the cheaper model here and, like all of Pro-Ject's 'Box Series' units, it's available in a choice of silver or black finish. The rear panel has two pairs of RCA sockets – stereo line In and Out – so you can either feed it directly from the output of a source component or put it in the tape loop of an amplifier without losing the ability to record.

## FORGET THE FRILLS

There's nothing fancy about the presentation, Box Series products taking the form of utilitarian folded metal cases with stuck-on rubber feet. Yet they're perfectly presentable, the Head Box II being no exception with its solid metal fascia and gold-plated phono sockets at the rear.

The power supply is an external 'wall wart' delivering 16V AC to power the unit. There's no LED on the fascia to

the headphone socket on the front of Harman Kardon's highly explicit sounding HK990 amplifier [see page 50] there was a pleasing 'gentleness' to the presentation – more valve-like than transistorised, if you like.

Playing a couple of less-than-perfect LPs that I've owned since a teenager showed clearly that while the HK's headphone output is extremely explicit and detailed, the sound from the Head Box II is distinctly warmer with less brittle high frequencies. Consequently it's kinder to surface noise from vinyl. Ticks 'n' pops from damaged records were significantly less exposed.

Yet the Pro-Ject can't be accused of sounding rolled-off or dull. Treble detail is delightfully open and airy, Robert Wyatt's plaintive vocals and crazily warped psychedelic soundscapes on his first solo album, 1974's *Rock Bottom* [Virgin V 2017] sounding clear and comprehensively detailed. I got this LP more than 30 years ago on my 18th birthday; to

## AUDIO FILE

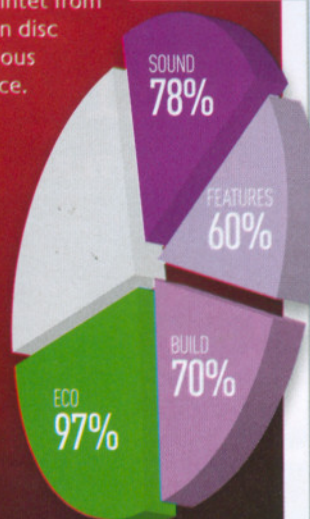
Headphone amp with variable output

Price: £105

Made by: Pro-Ject Audio

Telephone: 01235 511166

Web: [www.project-audio.com](http://www.project-audio.com)



## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level (<1% THD)	4.8V
Maximum input level (overload margin, <1% THD)	7.0V
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	8.6–14ohm
Frequency response (20Hz–100kHz)	+0.0dB to –0.3dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBV)	275mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBV)	97.4dB
Distortion (0dBV, 20Hz–20kHz)	0.0002–0.0026%