

Pre/power amplifier with ouboard PSUs. Rated at 300W/8ohm  
Made by: Musical Fidelity (Audio Tuning Vertriebs GmbH), Austria  
Supplied by: Henley Audio Ltd, UK  
Telephone: 01235 511166  
Web: www.musicalfidelity.com; www.henleyaudio.co.uk  
Prices (PRE/PAS inc. PSUs): £20,499/£21,999

AUDIO  
FILE

PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

# Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista PRE/PAS & PSUs

Look familiar? This new four-box pre/power stack from Musical Fidelity shares the styling of 2014's Nu-Vista 800 integrated, but is it a high-end contender? You bet it is!

Review: **Andrew Everard & Paul Miller** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Ever get the feeling we've been here before? Well, the arrival of the latest amplifier system from Musical Fidelity brings a new twist to the whole *déjà vu* thing as the Nu-Vista naming and macho aesthetics are familiar from the historically hefty Nu-Vista 800 integrated amplifier [HFN Nov '14]. In practice that classic nuvistor [see PM's boxout, p42] tube-equipped integrated amplifier, also rated at 300W/8ohm, has provided the inspiration for both the industrial and technical design of the PRE and PAS we see here, the hybrid nuvistor/transistor concept now evolved into a pre/power set-up, complete with separate PSUs for each. So one box is now four...

Thus we have an all-analogue fully-balanced preamplifier, the Nu-Vista PRE, selling for £20,499 complete with its partnering PRE PSU power supply to which it connects using a trio of umbilical cables. The matching 300W stereo power amp, the £21,999 Nu-Vista PAS, is serviced by the PAS PSU via no fewer than five umbilicals. All four units share the same massive alloy casework, with different fascia and top sections machined away to accommodate grilles and displays, etc, as required. The PAS has fluted sidecheeks too [see main picture, p41] to improve the heatsinking of its transistor power amp.

## TURN BACK THE CLOCK

The PRE and PRE PSU together weigh in at 47kg while the PAS and PAS PSU add up to no less than 67kg, thanks in no small part to the latter's much heftier toroidal transformers [see inside pic, p46]. Want even more power? Of course you do, so this new Nu-Vista series will soon be joined

**RIGHT:** Inside the PRE, choke PSU regulation [left] feeds pairs of nuvistors configured in an 'op-amp' circuit (note LED illumination) and main transistor output [top/bottom]. WIMA polypropylene caps [red] are used throughout

by a monoblock power amp, the PAM, a fully balanced, bridged design rated at 600W/8ohm and pitched at £20,499 apiece. It weighs the same as the PAS and comes in the same high-quality metalwork as the units here, all of which are offered in a choice of silver or black.

While these new Nu-Vista components aren't outrageous in terms of size and price in the context of the wider high-end market, they certainly see the brand, now under the wing of Austrian-based Audio Tuning [see PM's boxout, p46], setting itself more ambitious targets. Musical Fidelity has aimed high before, of course, with the outrageous Michaelson Audio-branded four-box Chronos preamp/PSU/monoblock

system [HFN Feb '91]. With their art deco-inspired casework and 'Call them stunning or bizarre, they'll probably leave you speechless' advertising line, those amps were certainly conversation pieces, and sounded stunning. Anyway, hefty though the Chronos combo was, the new Nu-Vista range outguns it on weight as well as power – those big, dark, menacing all-black power amps were rated at just 112W.

## NAVIGATING THE NU-VISTAS

A sense of scale is required to appreciate the size of the Nu-Vista PRE's two giant rotaries, one for volume – the preamp has both fixed and variable outputs on RCAs and XLRs – the other to select between ↪



'MF's nuvistor/transistor hybrid amp has evolved into a pre/power'





**LEFT:** Inside the PAS, the frame transformers [right] are common-mode DC chokes – a feature of MF's PSU regulation. Pairs of 6S51N nuvistors [left] drive five complementary pairs of Sanken output transistors per channel [top and bottom]

input/driver stage, this time ahead of a Sanken transistor-based power amp. Musical Fidelity already has great experience with this high power, high current output stage configuration [see PM's Lab Report, p47].

**TO STACK OR SPIKE?**

So, how to position your Nu-Vistas? Out of the box, the amps are provided with 1m PSU umbilicals but 3m sets, for a wider component spacing, are available at £289 for the PRE/PSU and £499 for the PAS/PSU. Spikes, with cups provided to protect the supporting surface, are included for use in place of the felt pads that are otherwise affixed under each chassis' four alloy feet.

Firing up both PRE and PAS is a two-stage process, using first the power switch on each PSU and then the Power/Standby button on the PRE and PAS's facias [or via remote, see p45]. Do that and the display will light up, as will the LEDs illuminating the nuvistors, glowing red for about 12 seconds while the output is muted, then orange (still warming up but unmuted) and, after about 20 minutes, blue indicating optimum performance.

A button on the fascia and remote allows the PRE/PAS displays to be switched between black or white, and between an information readout or level meters.

The display brightness can be adjusted by a sequence of button presses on both the PRE and PAS.

Around the back, both PRE and PAS 'communicate' with their respective PSUs via a four-pin XLR control cable while two five-pin XLRs carry power for the nuvistors input stages.

The PAS has additional Neutrik-terminated umbilicals for its power amp stage. Given that you'll also have audio cabling between the PRE and PAS themselves, and to the inputs and speaker terminals, and perhaps also to those optional 12V trigger links, then you're going to have a nest of wiring back there [see p47]! ☞

**RIGHT:** From the top... two huge rotaries govern source selection and volume for the PRE, with buttons for display mode and a +6dB gain boost; the PAS includes the same display options (black or white background/meter or text) and pushbutton input selection; the PRE PSU and PAS PSUs share the same casework

its 12 sets of line inputs, again on six pairs of RCAs and six XLRs. There's no phono stage or module bay for an aftermarket DAC option because these facilities are all coming down the line as matching Nu-Vista separates [see PM's interview sidebar, p46].

Under the milled alloy top plate are two pairs of 6S51N nuvistors per channel, forming a fully balanced input circuit that drives a solid-state Class A output (with

+6dB gain option). The latter comprises two pairs of power transistors per channel that would not look out of place in a circa-50W integrated amplifier. Here they are configured for a low impedance, high headroom source [see PM's Lab Report, p45] to drive the partnering PAS with ease. The power amp is also a hybrid design, employing a similar, fully balanced nuvistors 'op-amp'

**THE NOBLE NUVISTOR**

Introduced by RCA in 1959, the nuvistors' brief was simple – tackle all that was deficient in glass-bodied vacuum tubes. By improving on reliability, size, microphony, operating performance (noise, gain, linearity and PSU requirements) and consistency between manufacturing batches, the miniature, metal-bodied nuvistors was rolled out to great fanfare in RCA's TV and radio sets. As innovations go, the nuvistors represented a step change in the evolution of vacuum 'tubes', but its timing was... unfortunate. Germanium transistors were in the ascendent and once their own reliability/performance issues were addressed by the development of silicon devices, the nuvistors, aside from a few very niche applications, was doomed.

Readers may remember the tale of the Russian MiG-25 – flown to Japan in 1976 by a defecting pilot – that hosted EMP-proof nuvistors in its critical flight systems. Conrad-Johnson had a brief flirtation with the miniature technology in its Premier Seven preamp in 1988 but, otherwise, the next time these tiny metal cylinders shook the consciousness of our audiophile world was in the late 1990s when then-owner of Musical Fidelity, Antony Michaelson, acquired a NOS batch. These were deployed in its Nu-Vista Preamp [HFN Aug '98] before a similar nuvistors line stage found its way into the company's Nu-Vista 300 amplifier [HFN Jun '99], CD Player [HFN Dec '15] and Nu-Vista 800 [HFN Nov '14], the latter also the inspiration for the four-box PRE/PAS we have here [see Lab Report, p47]. PM



## LAB REPORT

### MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA PRE



**ABOVE:** Inside the PRE PSU there is comprehensive AC mains filtering [centre], full rectification and regulation plus additional filtering of the  $\pm 55V$  DC feed (via XLR terminated umbilicals) to the PRE's nuvistor and transistor output stages

Incidentally, twin speaker cable binding posts are provided for each channel, facilitating bi-wiring, but though chunky they are better suited to 4mm than spade terminations.

#### FULLY STACKED

With all those connections made and checked, and the nuvistor lighting turned blue and then extinguished, the amps were placed between an Aurender W20SE server [see p52] and dCS Vivaldi One APEX SACD player/DAC, here running in balanced 'line out' mode, and B&W 801 D4 floorstanders [HFN Nov '21]. And what a combination this made: from the very opening of Vangelis's remastered 'Pulsar' [*Albedo 0.39*;

RCA SICP 3 1558], it was clear that these heavyweight Nu-Vista amps deliver an impression of unburstable power and resolution, the sound imbued

**LEFT:** Substantial metal remote caters for input, volume, +6dB gain boost, mute and display mode



with great clarity, detail and confidence, even at very high basic playback levels.

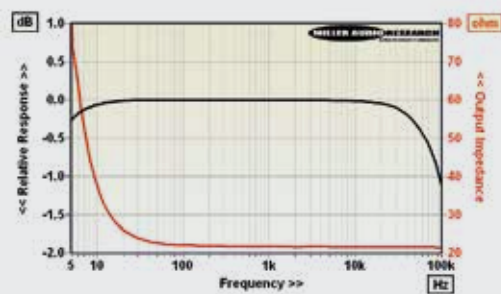
But even more impressive is the sympathetic handling of instrumental tone, as in the beautifully focused view of the guitar on Peter Frampton's take on Roxy Music's 'Avalon' from his *...Forgets The Words* 'covers' album [Ume download; 96kHz/24-bit], alongside the laidback rhythm section. It's a balance also well-suited to 'Make Me Rainbows' from the Bill Charlap Trio's *Notes From New York* set [Impulse! download; 96kHz/24-bit], which is delivered with both crisp detail and plenty of dynamic punch, the instruments naturally balanced, and Peter Washington's double bass being especially finely resolved.

#### HIGH TENSION

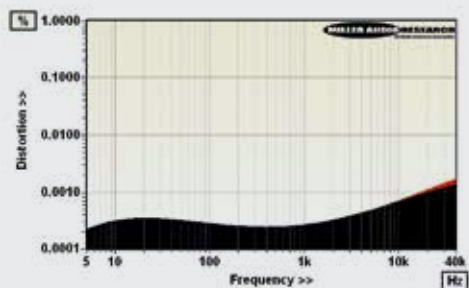
Switch to Patricia Kopatchinskaja's reading of the Janacek Violin Sonata on her recent *Bartok Janacek Brahms* recital [Alpha Classics ALPHA885; 96kHz/24-bit], and there's a spine-tingling sense of the rapport between violinist and pianist Fazil Say, which is even more intense in the Adagio of the Bartok sonata. In practice, this recording is less about the accompanied violin and more about the duet performance as a whole, and that's exceptionally clear

The graphical metering that lights up the Nu-Vista PRE's fascia serves two functions, indicating both the overall gain of the preamp (the 'dB' figure adjacent to the indicated input) and the 'dBV' calibration of the *input*, not the preamp output. The former (gain) value is accurately represented with its maximum +7dB volume setting equivalent to +7.2dB (balanced in/out) or +13.2dB with the extra +6dB selected. The calibration of the volume setting is remarkable – accurate to within  $\pm 0.1$ dB over the top 97dB of its range (+7dB down to -90dB) and within  $\pm 0.2$ dB over the final 9dB down to the minimum -99dB setting. The graphical dBV metering is also accurate – the 0dBV setting equivalent to 1V input (RCA) and 2V (balanced XLR).

In practice the additional +6dB gain option has no impact on either distortion, response, separation (>100dB, 20Hz-20kHz) or output impedance but it does influence the A-wtd S/N ratio. Here the lower gain setting achieves a thunderous 99.6dB and the +6dB option a slightly lower 97.3dB (all re. 500mV in/0dBV out). Margins are extremely generous in the PRE with balanced inputs tolerating over 12V *en route* to delivering a maximum 39.0V output (re. <1% THD). This, in combination with the low  $\sim 22$ ohm source impedance, and response that's flat to within  $\pm 0.2$ dB from 6Hz-40kHz [see Graph 1, below], suggests the Nu-Vista PRE will drive any cable/power amp combination. Furthermore, as Musical Fidelity has demonstrated in previous NuVistor products [HFN Nov '14, Dec '15 & Mar '18], the use of triode tubes in line/preamp stages need not presage high or even moderate distortion [see Graph 2]. Again, in practice, the Nu-Vista PRE incurs a mere 0.00015-0.001% (re. 0dBV, 20Hz-20kHz). PM



**ABOVE:** Balanced line frequency response (black) and output impedance (red) at 0dBV



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus extended frequency at 0dBV (Balanced in/out; left, black; right channel, red)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output (<1% THD, 47kohm)	39.0Vrms (Balanced)
Maximum input level (<1% THD)	>12Vrms (Balanced)
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	21.5-24.8ohm (Balanced)
Freq. response (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	+0.0dB to -0.05dB / -1.1dB
Input sensitivity (re. 0dBV)	435mV (Balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	99.6dB / 97.3dB (+6dB gain)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz re. 0dBV)	0.00015-0.001%
Power consumption	109W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight (total)	483x188x491mm / 47kg





**ABOVE:** Inside the PAS PSU there is 'soft' rectification only. Two huge transformers [right] supply filtered 58V AC as a high-current feed (via Neutrik-terminated umbilicals) to the PAS transistor power amp stage and 12V discrete-regulated DC (via the XLR umbilicals) to feed the nuvistors' heaters

via these Nu-Vista PRE/PAS amps. The sound is all about character and performance, as is clear with Peter Gabriel's near-impersonation on the title track of the superb *Here It Is* Leonard Cohen tribute album [Blue Note 00602445659951] – the recording is closely detailed, and these amplifiers let every detail of that intimacy flood out, delivering a chilling sense of presence in the room.

The same goes for Gabrielle Aplin's at times dreamy *Phosphorescent* set [Never Fade Records download; 44.1kHz/24-bit], her breathy, close-miked vocals on 'Good Enough' again having that impression of just hanging between the speakers. That feeling of voices and instruments in space before the listener is something this heavyweight quartet of boxes does exceptionally well, its combination of sheer clout and lightness of touch being well-suited to Angela Hewitt's first release in her complete cycle of Mozart piano sonatas [Hyperion CDA68411-2; 96kHz/24-bit]. All the finesse and ease of her playing is conveyed here, plus it creates a palpable three-dimensional image of the piano in the recorded acoustic, as there was in the Kopatchinskaja set.

**'The "Storm" has explosive, menacing power'**

But for all that finely-etched detailing and solidity of imaging, this latest Nu-Vista outing is in no way limited to playing audiophile-approved recordings, as is clear with the DSD64 version of Yes's 'Roundabout', from *Fragile* [Atlantic WPCR-17604]. Steve Howe's opening acoustic

guitar is hyper-realistic, and then the bass, drums and of course Rick Wakeman's whirling keyboards kick in with a real slam, the Nu-Vista PAS delivering all the grunt and snarl one could want, almost audibly grabbing the Bowers &

Wilkins 801 D4 speakers by their scruffs and getting them moving hard. It's hugely impressive, not to mention massive fun, that a recording well past its golden anniversary can be punched into a 2023 listening room to so dramatic an effect.

#### LYRICAL LIFEBOAT

And of course the Nu-Vista PRE and PAS combination are more than up to the task of handling full-bore orchestral recordings, including Benjamin Britten's demanding 'Four Sea Interludes' from *Peter Grimes* [Edward Gardner/BBC Philharmonic; Chandos CHAN 10658]. Here the subtle evocations of rolling waves in the first

### HEINZ LICHTENEGGER

The founder of Austria's Audio Tuning Vertriebs GmbH (incorporating Pro-Ject and Musical Fidelity among other brands), Heinz Lichtenegger, sees this four-box pre/power amplifier as the mainstay of a new series. 'It will be "Nu-Vista by Musical Fidelity"', he says, 'as we launch an array of partnering products'.

There's already a 'matching' phono stage – the Nu-Vista Vinyl [HFN Mar '18] – but this will be updated with balanced inputs, in keeping with Pro-Ject's drive to get the best from its latest MC-equipped turntables [see p56]. 'There will also be a fully balanced DAC', says Heinz, 'and a CD transport featuring a new motor-loading drawer'. It's very likely that the transport will be modular, with a slot to accommodate a nuvistor-equipped DAC module, allowing audiophiles to choose between an integrated or two-box CD playing solution.

Alongside the monoblock PAM amplifiers – essentially bridged mono versions of the PAS with one less nuvistor in the driver stage – Musical Fidelity will be launching a pair of Nu-Vista integrated amplifiers. 'These will be the 800.2 and lower-powered 600.2', confirms Heinz. 'A key concept for the Nu-Vista range is our use of big, outboard choke-regulated power supplies so we are planning another separate PSU chassis to feed all our upcoming source components.'

MF's early nuvistor products were always moderated by the limited supply of tube bases as much as the devices themselves. So where is MF now sourcing its tiny tubes? 'Captain America', smiles Heinz. PM



**ABOVE:** The PRE [top] has 12 line ins (6x RCA and 6x XLR), fixed and variable outs (on RCAs and XLRs), and control plus PSU ins for the L/R channels fed from the PRE PSU [third box]. The PAS PSU [bottom] has control plus high/low-level PSU connections for the PAS's nuvistor and power amp stages. The PAS [below PRE] has 2x RCA and XLR inputs, buffered line outs on RCA/XLR and pairs of heavy-duty speaker cable terminals

three movements are just as thrilling, in their implication, as the explosive, menacing power of the 'Storm' interlude as it surges, rumbles and threatens towards its thundering climax. Again, the ability of Musical Fidelity's PRE/PAS pairing to render fine detail and the subtleties of orchestral scoring is blended seamlessly with its capacity to release seemingly limitless dynamic power when required while still retaining full control.

#### SWEPT ALONG

These sonic qualities are never more in evidence than with the Paavo Järvi/Orchestre de Paris cycle of Sibelius symphonies [RCA Red Seal 19075924512], as is clear from the opening movement of the very first work where the clarinet solo

gives way to a great soaring tide of orchestral playing. Just let the music wash over you... ☺

#### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

This is a big, heavy and ambitious addition to the current MF range, but by high-end standards it represents remarkable value for money, given its ability to reveal the subtleties of a recording, then deliver massive slam when required, all with total control and assured music-making. Provided you have the space – and strength – for all those boxes, the new PRE/PAS Nu-Vistas are definitely a must-listen.

Sound Quality: 88%

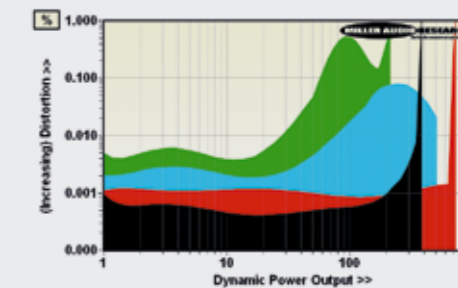


## LAB REPORT

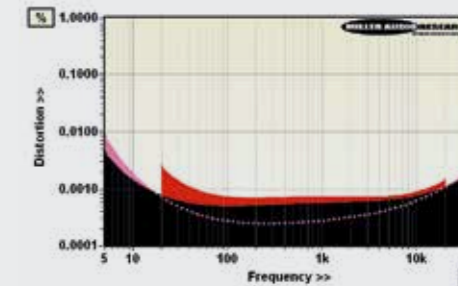
### MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA PAS

Historically, the biggest amplifiers from Musical Fidelity have also posted 'big' power figures and, into 8 and 4ohm at least, the Nu-Vista PAS follows suit. However, while this latest nuvistor/bipolar hybrid amplifier marks a return to Musical Fidelity's familiar stomping ground, the low impedance/high current 'grunt' demonstrated by the Nu-Vista 800 [HFN Nov '14] is restrained here by what looks like over-cautious electronic protection. Let's compare the figures... Both the new Nu-Vista PAS and 'old' 800 are rated at 300W/8ohm and both (coincidentally?) deliver a full 2x330W/8ohm and 2x580W/4ohm. Under dynamic conditions too, the 800 and PAS offer a similar 370W/700W and 385W/730W, respectively, into 8 and 4ohm. Into lower loads, however, while the Nu-Vista 800 powered on to 1.30kW and 2.17kW (46.5A) into 2 and 1ohm loads at <1% THD, the Nu-Vista PAS is limited to just 575W/2ohm (17A) and 198W/1ohm [see Graph 1, below]. In practice it's unlikely the PAS will mute unless driving a really tough and insensitive loudspeaker really hard, but the design clearly has more under the bonnet...

Otherwise, the PAS's performance builds on the 800's with a lower distortion of just 0.00025-0.0011% versus 0.001-0.004% (re. 10W/20Hz-20kHz) and a wider A-wtd S/N ratio (94.1dB vs. 86.0dB re. 0dBW), although the PAS necessarily has lower overall gain (+23.5dB vs. +42.3dB). Interestingly both the 800 and PAS show a slight increase in THD at low frequencies from 0.0003%/1kHz to 0.0007%/20Hz and 0.01%/5Hz [see Graph 2]. Finally, the PAS's output impedance is lower (~0.02ohm vs. ~0.03ohm), the response slightly flatter with -1dB points at 2Hz-55kHz (vs. 6Hz-48kHz) and crosstalk reduced (-113dB vs. -99dB). PM



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 17.0A



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus frequency versus power output (1W/8ohm, black; 10W, pink; 100W, red)

#### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	330W / 580W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	385W / 732W / 575W / 198W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	0.019-0.07ohm / 0.58ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	+0.0dB to -0.18dB/-2.4dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/300W)	186mV / 3220mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/300W)	94.1dB / 118.9dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.00025-0.0011%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	140W / 975W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight (total)	483x188x475mm / 67kg