



# ALLNIC AUDIO

## HPA 10000 OTL/OCL HEADPHONE AMP

By K.E. Heartsong





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Until close to three years ago, I had not yet had the opportunity to listen to a complete electrostatic-headphone system—amplifier, headphones—in the comfort of my own dedicated headphone listening room. That experience proved quite the revelation, introducing me to a musical experience that I had long sought out—incredible transparency, resolution, and detail married to superb, immersive musicality. And I would experience this unique rendering of music time and again with various electrostatic setups, though some performed to a far greater degree than others, but the core of the experience was always there.

I had always enjoyed choral music and counted it a favorite. What the various electrostatic headphone systems provided

was a completely new rendering or “freeing” of choral music, with superb depth and width and incredible layering of the choraleists across the soundstage. The combination made choral music more real, palpable, and exceptionally enjoyable. It truth, it is difficult now to listen to choral music with nearly any system, regardless of its cost, though the Vivid Audio Kaya 45s in the two-channel reference system do a superb job of bringing back that electrostatic magic.

As electrostatic headphone amplifiers and electrostatic headphones of all makes passed through Casa Heartsong’s reference HPA system, I settled on two components in the end that together summoned listening bliss above all other configurations. The headphone amplifier, the HeadAmp Blue Hawaii Special Edition, and the headphones,





ALLENBY

line1

line2

line3

line4

line5

selector

power

011/011 15K10P101 15K10P101



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the Dan Clark CORINA electrostatics, together summoned magic time and again.

This brings me to another rather wonderful revelation in regard to the audio world, a world that I have been engaged in for nearly all my life, and that revelation concerns an OTL—Output TransformerLess—amplifier design. In this case, the OTL amplifier is the ALLNIC AUDIO HPA-10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier.

REFRAIN: Unlike most reviews, this review will be non-sequential, as it will start with how the component actually sounds and not the process of physically “undressing” it and/or laying out its various parts, specifications, etc. Think of this review then, as a non-linear movie—Memento, Kill Bill, Arrival, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, etc.—that likewise starts at the end and winds its way to the beginning.

## THE SOUND

“To date” is a phrase that I often use to denote that up until now this particular component has either set the standard or “crossed over” to another level entirely of music rendering capability. And I have only ever used it, I believe, with exceptional products, because one never knows when the current King of the Hill will be edged aside.

Suffice to say, that the ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier

(HPA) is one of if not the best HPA that I have reviewed to date, and its ability to provide an exceptional rendering of one’s music is beyond reproach.

Above all, the HPA 10000 is exceptionally natural and engaging. It is also electrostatic-like in its dimensionality, its layering across and to the depths of a given soundstage and the separation that it affords musicians. It also embodies a gravitas and weight and drive in its presentation of the music that few electrostatic headphone amplifiers can match. In this respect, the HPA 10000 relative to electrostatic HPAs is less “ethereal,” though a great deal more corporeal, real, and natural in its ability to render the in-room, palpable presence of a given performer or performers. When you add how the HPA 10000 handles tone/timbre and parses their various shadings, this is not your 8 or 16 or 24 box of crayons, it is your 120 box of crayons or better, in that it distinguishes the various tonal/timbral shadings in a league far above most others.

ALLNIC says of its various OTL/OCL amplifiers that they provide, and I paraphrase, “extremely detailed expression of the music with natural harmonics, the lowest possible distortion, and subtle musical decay, while providing wide-ranging musical dynamics.” In truth, given my time spent with the ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier, I cannot argue with



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their marketing statements, as their statements proved true time and time again.

The HPA 10000 is the only HPA comparable to the vaunted Viva Audio Egoista STX electrostatic HPA (\$17,000), nonetheless, the HPA 10000 comes out ahead! And that's saying something. The power on hand with the HPA 10000 drove the ABYSS AB1266 Phi TC exceptionally well and was, in the end, an incredible pairing, if not the best that I have ever experienced. Further, the range of headphones able to pair with the HPA 10000 relative to the electrostatic Viva Egoista is far greater and much more varied, as you would expect. There are very few electrostatic headphones these days.

The ALLNIC AUDIO HPA 10000's volumetric cube—its soundstage—is truly expansive in both width and depth, another area where the HPA competition fades away in direct comparison. The height of a given soundstage, not necessarily an aspect that draws much attention to itself, is also quite unique with the HPA 10000, in that it renders to the fullest a given venue's height with openness and a dimensionality and space that stand it in rarefied air.

## BASS

Never having experienced an OTL up close and personal and certainly not in a reference headphone configuration, I did not know what

to expect. Suffice to say that I set relatively low expectations. Better to have them surpassed than high expectations not met. Well, there needn't have been any worry. The ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL HPA surged past my expectations with a wink and a smile. "Those expectations weren't meant for me, were they?" one imagines the HPA 10000 saying. To which I would answer, "No, apparently not." So, the first lesson is that the lack of an Output Transformer does not limit bass extension, not at all. Or certainly not with the HPA 10000.

The resulting bass with the ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL HPA was tight, agile, lightning quick, incredibly transparent and well resolved. This meant in practice that across the various Bass test tracks, from Charlie Haden to Dave Holland to Christian McBride to Delfeayo Marsalis, bass reproduction was being realized anew. There was, in fact, more "there there" in terms of inner-detail, tonal/timbral differentiation/separation, and gravitas. All of the various attributes of the HPA 10000 combined to bring the music alive, as well as the venue or studio in which it was recorded, in the most natural way possible, while never for a moment eschewing incredible musicality.

## MIDRANGE

Superb. The ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL HPA, in its electrostatic-like way with



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voices and massed voices, brought air and ambiance and incredible transparency and resolution not only to choral music but to all music. While its heritage is that of a dynamic headphone amplifier, it provided what they are known for—weight and gravitas and piston-like dynamics. And of course, there is its naturalness and palpability and texture that easily draws you in, and in the most engaging way. The HPA 10000 represents the synergy of the best of these headphone amplification

her voice, the tones that she invokes have never been more real, more present. The HPA 10000 does indeed compel the listener to fall in love with the human voice and much more. Andy Bey's "Angel Eyes" (*American Song*, Savoy) is again the best rendering of this track that I have heard to date. Perhaps it is the lack of Output-Transformer distortion and/or colouration and also the lack of Capacitors in the signal that provides such a daunting, real life, and



technologies in a way that moves it far beyond the abilities of either. Does removing the transformer and the capacitors make such a difference? Well, apparently it does.

Elina Duni's *Partir* album (ECM) is more fully realized—alive, natural, and engaging than it has ever been. Elina sings as if her lips are pursed but inches away from my ear and the texture and air, the timbre of

natural experience. Bloat and overhang and a muddling of the lyrics are not allowed as they are in some very expensive kit, but not with the ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL HPA.

## TREBLE+

Airy. Extended. Natural. The high frequencies of the ALLNIC HPA 10000 rise with an effortlessness, a compelling transparency, and a



clarity that perhaps speak to its exceedingly low distortion and its uncolored yet superbly musical rendering. Given this, our current top headphone amplifiers—Viva Egoista STX and Aurorasound HEADA—are not the HPA 10000's match in how it so deftly scales the treble heights, completely free of all distortion, coloration, sibilance, grain, glassiness, etc. You come to a more profound understanding of the ravages of both distortion and colouration when experiencing a top-notch OTL like the ALLNIC HPA 10000.

Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" (*Time Out*, Columbia-Legacy) rolls in with Joe Morello's treble-rich cymbals suffused with air and ambiance, more engaging than ever, as it moved things along beautifully. And whether it's Dave's piano or Paul's saxophone or Eugene's bass, all are dimensional, with a weight/gravitas and a naturalness of tone/timbre that is also quite new. Perhaps transformers and capacitors in the mix incite a bit of angst derived from the detritus of their distortion and their colouration. How does one convey the ease of this technically more insightful and more musical performance? Is it via the greater transparency and resolution, the microdynamics that make available the entirety of the stage to its depths and the vanishingly finite—discovered detail—that convey a more "organic" or more natural

rendering? My experience would say yes. Yes, natural comes up quite a bit with the ALLNIC HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier. Bravo!

## CONCLUSIONS

The ALLNIC AUDIO OTL/OCL HPA 10000 compels one to listen and to be rewarded by one of the most transparent, beautifully resolved, natural, and musically engaging headphone amplifiers that this reviewer has listened to, owned, or reviewed to date. And the surprising thing is that this also takes into account electrostatic HPAs, which had served as a revered "third rail" untouchable given their rather potent bona fides. The ALLNIC HPA 10000 has de-electrified that third rail. That it plays nice with a great many headphones and headphone types—dynamic, planar, IEMs, AMTs, etc.—than do electrostatics, in truth, seals the deal.

The missing output transformers and capacitors from the signal path apparently provide a truth and reality and an unadulterated beauty to the music that many other HPAs cannot match. This is not saying that they are not good—they are, and in many cases exceedingly good, as I have discovered in my review of the PASS LABS HPA-1. But at 1/5 the price of the HPA 10000, it should not by any means be its equal, and it isn't. Nor should the Aurorasound HEADA at 1/5 the price of



the HPA 10000. Interestingly, not even the Viva Audio Egoista STX, comparatively priced, appears to be in the same league as the HPA 10000 and in many respects—power, varied compatibility, inputs/outputs, remote control, musicality, clarity.

The ALLNIC AUDIO HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier stands as the King of the Hill with regard to headphone amplifiers as its technical and musical prowess are to date unmatched. This, coupled with its specifications—multiple inputs (2-balanced, 3-single-ended), multiple headphone outputs (2-balanced, 2-single-ended), and power to drive relatively inefficient headphones (see ABYSS AB1266 Phi TC)—finds its competition wanting in many respects. That said, we give the ALLNIC AUDIO HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amplifier our highest award—the DIAMOND AWARD, for its unparalleled excellence.

**Pros:** Breathtaking transparency, resolution, and musicality that compel one to listen for hours on end, Single-Ended palpability, electrostatic dimensionality, and the power and gravitas of dynamics move it past all comers. Handy remote control is icing on the cake. Beautifully designed.

**Cons:** None.

## THE SYSTEM

- Baetis Audio 4 Reference Mingo Streamer
- Silent Angel Rhein Z1
- Silent Angel Bonn Pro Network Switch
- Bricasti Design M1SE DAC
- ALLNIC OTL/OCL HPA-10000 Headphone Amp
- Aurorasound HEADA Headphone Amp
- Abyss AB1266 Phi TC Headphones
- Meze Empyrean Headphones
- HIFIMAN SUSVARA Headphones
- Audience Front Row Cables/Wires
- Kubala-Sosna Cables
- TORUS AUDIO RM20 Power Conditioner

## THE COMPANY

### ALLNIC AUDIO

ALLNIC AUDIO HPA 10000 OTL/OCL Headphone Amp (\$15,000)

## THE DISTRIBUTOR

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## AKRM

