

The VTL 7.5 II linestage is an outstanding preamp. In my system, it replaced a Lyra Connoisseur 4.2SE.

Having recently had my 7.5II upgraded to "III" status — thanks to Bea Lam for a smooth process — I am writing to avow that the 7.5III is a *superb* preamp!

The first thing I noticed was a substantial increase in dynamics across the audio spectrum, and at both low and high gain levels; e.g., Liszt piano pieces. I'm getting ahead of myself here, but, given its combination of characteristics, the III might make you think that you hadn't heard a real piano before, except live, of course, and in row C (where you can *feel* the soundboard).

Transients are faster, much faster, and more musically natural, without splatter, buzz, or compression that otherwise masks the note/s of transients are comprised. (I would *not* have said that the II was slow, nor that the II did any of the sonic nasties above, but.....)

Bass: The II had always provided deep bass on my Wilson Audio Alexandrias (driven by VTL Siegfrieds), with natural bloom, particularly on acoustic bass. The III provides more bass impact and sustain. This, along with the characteristics described above and below, allow the listener to follow bass lines more easily. Indeed, "follow" is the wrong verb: you don't "follow" bass lines, the bass lines "move" the music (and you).

Treble is more extended. This, in combination with the characteristics described above and below, provides improved articulation: melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic lines that had been blurred are revealed. And, again, in combination, etc., the overall presentation is more life like.

Although I would not have described the II to be colored — remember that it replaced a Connoisseur 4.2SE — the III provides more natural musical color, particularly on voice, piano, violin, oboe, and clarinet. And, speaking of voice, male vocals are more solid and robust while female vocals are more extended and nuanced.

Soundstage: The II provided an excellent soundstage; the III's is a bit wider and deeper.

My listening notes include a couple of "blackier background?" question marks, but I haven't yet been able to discipline myself to listen for blackness. I *think* the III has

blacker backgrounds, but, at least for the time being, I am (gladly) getting distracted by all the great sonics described here.

Any negatives? Not that I am aware.

Finally, a guilty pleasure: I like to listen loud when the music calls for it; e.g., "Crown Imperial" and "Let It Bleed" in high resolution digital. The way the III unravels musical lines (served up by a Mac G5 through a Weiss 202) and rocks the room is *awesome*.

So, is the VTL 7.5 III the best linestage in the world? I have no idea. Besides, I had thought that the Connoisseur *was* the best linestage in the world, and it got replaced with a 7.5 II.

What I can say is this: If you are lucky enough to own a 7.5 II, then contact your dealer immediately and get in line for the III upgrade. It isn't cheap, but it is worth it. And, if you own a linestage that you believe is the "best", then you owe it to yourself to audition a III.

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