

'Now You Can Afford Hi-Fidelity Audio'

RITA-880 Reference Integrated Tube Amplifier

**USD MSRP:
\$ 5,299.00**



- The first thing you notice when listening to **Rita** is the **exceptional soundstage and detail**. Even large and complex speakers 'disappear' into the music.
- Rita is truly an object of beauty even when she's switched off, but when she's powered up she turns into a veritable wonderland, thanks to her **blue LEDs, red tube heaters, translucent meters, and polished faceplate**.
- At **90 pounds** you know you have entered in to the world of high class audio. Rita's **anti-shock aluminum casing** completes the stunning appearance that will be welcome in any room.



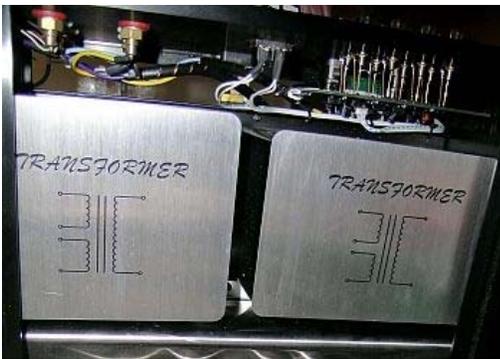
Rita is based on over 15 years of hi-end manufacturing experience, which is then all folded into a solid contender with the sound, looks and pricing that make it one of the best buys in hi-fidelity for accurate music reproduction.

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Rita can easily drive complex speaker loads and matches well with both affordable speakers and exotic \$100k+ speaker systems. Rita is the amp to build your system around or to improve your current system.

450 watts of peak to peak power allows you to experience the true dynamics of your music and the balanced design adds up to 5db of signal gain to the amplification. Rita outperforms most 100w Class A solid state amps that we have compared her against.

Truly a stunning design that even runs relatively cold, allowing your tubes to last much longer. The case is actually cold to the touch. Finally, a high power tube amp you can enjoy in the summer. A wide selection of after-market tubes is available to allow you to easily customize the sound of your Rita.

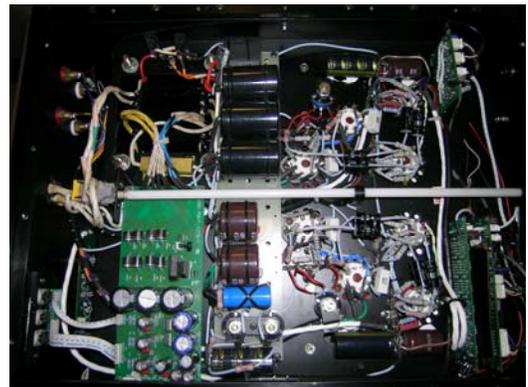


Custom hand-wound, highest quality, high tolerance chokes; power and output transformers ensure that Rita has the right amount of power on instantaneous call for low noise and high dynamics.

A custom 30 point digital stepped volume ensures that all your music is not getting lost in your volume control. Rita even remembers what volume you left her at. The hand carved remote is a pleasure.

Point to Point hand wired circuitry with excellent quality capacitors and resistors allow for the high bandwidth, low distortion character of Rita. She performs like solid state, with high and proper dampening control and speed for low frequencies, but with that special sound we love about tubes.

Rita excels at any type of music from soft classical to modern heavy rock.



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'I was, simply, really impressed with Rita, no matter what music I played and no matter the source. She has a great mix of much of what many consider the best of "tube sound" and solid state'
(customer)

Specifications

- **Power:** 45W/ch Class A UL (450w/ch pp max)
- **THD:** $\leq 1\%$ (1 kHz/1W)
- **S/N ratio:** $\geq 95\text{dB}$
- **Frequency response:** 18 Hz - 38 kHz
- **Input impedance:** 100k Ω
- **Output impedance:** 4-8 Ω
- **Voltage:** 120v $\pm 10\%$
- **Size (LxWxH):** 22x18x13.5"
- **Weight:** 90 lb.
- Unique Class A, balanced and non-negative feedback tube circuits
- Valves: EH KT-88 x 4 and EH 6SN7 X 2, Sovtek 6SL7 X 2.



Well protected crated packaging



Fresh out of the box



Audiophile grade power cord



Natural wood remote control



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Getting My Date Home

- a review of RITA-880 by a true audiophile

I haven't been on a "date" for a long time, let alone a blind date, being happily "en-spoused" for more than 20 years. However, having recently come across the opportunity to do a review of Grant Fidelity's new KT88 integrated, the RITA 880 Reference, I decided to throw my hat in the circle, pick up "Rita", and take her home for awhile.

I have to confess, though, that this date wasn't entirely "blind"; I am the owner of a Grant Fidelity 300B integrated amp, the A-330B, that I absolutely love (I've had more fun rolling tubes in that unit than I recall having with any other piece of tube gear I own – sometimes tube rolling gets like work, not just because of the time involved but the investment, too, if you really want to know all the NOS flavours). However, the A-330B (now superseded by the A-534) is, as I said, a 300B SET output tube integrated amp, and Rita is class A using KT88's, so I didn't really know what to expect.

In fact, it wasn't all that easy to take Rita home! What I found out right away is that Rita is a big girl, weighing in at 38 kg and taking up about 6 cubic litres on what you'll have to be sure is a quite substantial stand. You should, if you can arrange it, have two people to carry her. I didn't have that advantage and, despite using all my youthfully acquired furniture mover and packing plant labourer expertise (lift with the legs, not the back, etc.), did not get her into the house and onto the stand without two very nice 5cm across bruises on the front of each of my thighs (pictures at eleven...). Though currently not de rigueur among big amp manufacturers – or else the big amp purchasing public (I'm not sure who follows whom) – handles on front and back would be useful, though to be genuinely helpful, they would probably add another kilo to her weight!

Rita is sure good looking

Once Rita was settled and I had wiped the sweat off the lenses of my glasses, I was able to give her the serious once over. What strikes you first, even while carrying her, is the build quality. She's made like an armoured vehicle, except pretty. Her anti-shock casework is what looks to be about 7.5mm, black anodized aluminum, provided with screened ventilation "windows" on top and sides. An equally thick chrome anodized face plate extends about a centimeter out from the front of the amp on four stout chromed pegs.

A recessed and slanted portion of the front panel provides space for minimal controls: power, volume, mute, input selection - all replicated (except the power switch) on the handsome aluminum and naturally finished wood remote control. The face plate also houses an LED display for functions and two blue lit meters, the latter which can be switched off via a switch on the back panel. The meters are "see-through" and make a window through which to view the complement of four KT88's, two 6SN7's, and two 6SL7's. The tubes are bedded in a chromed plate which curves up gracefully from the inside front of the amp towards the rear. Unlike many Chinese produced amps, Rita's tubes are Electro Harmonix and Sovtek Russian production.

In addition to the switch for the meters, her back panel is equipped with WBT type speaker binding posts for 4 and 8 ohm speakers. There are four pairs of gold plated RCA inputs and a single pair of



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XLR balanced inputs. She does not have a preamp bypass switch so cannot run as a power amp only. A 15 amp IEC is provided for AC connection.

And, as I said, she weighs in at least 41 kg.

But what's inside is what really matters:

The really interesting thing about Rita, though, is her behaviour, not her appearance; she needs to be loved for the amplifier she is, not for her looks. Those two KT88's in each channel at 45 watts in class A is astounding. Without getting to the conclusion of this review too swiftly, I have to say that I believe it.

I ran Rita via thirty-five foot cables into her balanced inputs from the balanced record out on my Great Northern Sound Company modified Audio Research Reference One pre-amp. This was the only way my room configuration would allow me to use my current interconnects and have access to my three sources, FM, CD and vinyl. In the record out, the Ref One is a straight loop, so I was not using it as a pre-amp and the sound of Rita's pre-amp section was not being affected by the Ref One's circuitry. Unfortunately, though, I can't speak to the sonic differences there may be between Rita's balanced and single ended inputs.

Rita drove my 92 db efficient 4 ohm VMPS RM30 speakers (topped by ELAC super-tweeters) effortlessly – and I mean effortlessly. I ran her up to 40 (29 more than 11!) on the volume control and had lots more to go, but I was afraid of structural damage to the house (not to mention my ears) from the sound pressure at that point. My room has nine and a half foot ceilings and is roughly nine metres by four metres, with my listening seat at one end only about two and half metres from the speakers. Admittedly, that's almost near field, so one should take that into account in this discussion. However, I have no doubt whatsoever that Rita would have filled the room with life sized music even with the speakers located all the way down at one end. I drive those speakers with modified VTL deluxe 140 mono-blocks (at 140/ch @ 8 ohms) and a hybrid Moscode 401HR (200/ch @ 8ohms), depending on my mood and the weather. Rita appears to be able to compete head to head with either of those amps in terms of sheer force – at 45/ch @ 8 or 4 ohms.

So she's big AND loud, but can you love her?

I listen to an eclectic mix of music, so I played a mix of vinyl and CD, from small combo jazz, including ECM recordings of various vintages and others; electronica, e.g. Yello and Air and jazz electronica like Eric Truffaz; "classical" and rock (I have limited supplies of these latter, and relied on some older Telarc and for the orchestral works and Rush and Led Zeppelin for the last category).

Rita performed equally well with all. She is wonderfully resolving and transparent; she came close to the Moscode in these areas and is more so, in fact, than the VTL's (though I love the VTL's for the warmth and the wonderful body and air their 807 tubes give to and produce around instruments and voices. This is not to say everyone would like that, I know). Rita was certainly the equal of both for stage width, depth and height. I have a lot of space behind my speakers, and one of the first things guests notice is the variable size of the soundstage my system provides – the walls of the room pretty



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much transform into the walls of the venue, real or entirely engineered, on recordings (I'm a sucker for that sort of holographic imaging, and it's amazing the role the room plays in achieving it). Rita didn't let me down in that department at all.

Tight, articulate and extended bass and a clear, transparent mid-range translate into great "PRAT" – you will want to dance with this girl. Rita has remarkable transparency, and this provides for great extended highs and resolution of low level detail. The 6SN7's function as Rita's pre-amp tubes and the description above is what you get with those. For fun, I pulled the EH's and plugged in a pair of NOS grey glass RCA's. This replacement effected more dynamic contrast and a slightly warmer mid-range. However, this was at the expense of some of some of the resolving capability of the pre-amp section and some of the "live" shimmer on the high end. What it did indicate is that a person could have a lot of fun rolling these two tubes (The RCA's aren't my favourite 6SN7's – I wish I had tried a pair of Sylvania W's or GT/VT-231's, or Tung Sol round plate GT's – I can just imagine!). All this is just gravy, though; the fact is that with the stock tubes Rita is simply a very, very impressive integrated amplifier, regardless of music type – all the stable power (at least with my low impedance, relatively efficient speakers) and all the resolution and delicacy I would ask for regardless of the type of music playing.

I also used Rita for some time with the Grant Fidelity PC 1.5 power cord, which I think is simply the best power cord at the price and among the best at ten times the price. It transformed the character of the amp, giving it much more bloom in the midrange – a very nice change from the much more expensive pc I was using. I have since changed all the pc's on my power amplification and filtering equipment in the house to the PC-1.5.

I was, simply, really impressed with Rita, no matter what music I played and no matter the source. She has a great mix of much of what many consider the best of "tube sound" and solid state, and in some ways was directly comparable to my setup with the ARC Ref One and the hybrid Moscode (which still blows me away given the power differential and the (apparent) simplicity of Rita's pre-amp stage relative to the big ARC (so who says complex is better?). The Moscode and ARC give me more resolution (but do you always want to hear the pianist's underwear rubbing against the inside of his trousers when he moves on the bench?) and more "body" or solidity to images (but again consider that the Moscode is cranking 400/ch at 4 ohms and is stable into a dead short). The VTL's are just a different kind of magic. All this comparison is probably meaningless to most, since you haven't ever heard my system, but I hope I've given you an idea as to what I have been striving to create, and that such an idea can help you place Rita (and my evaluation of her) into a context. Part of that context, of course, is to consider the relative costs of the equipment discussed. At her rumoured introductory price, Rita is a bargain compared to the gear I have compared her to here, even where they are purchased used.

One other comparison is possible for me. I have also heard the JAS Array 2.1, which is in the same, expected, general price range and is a dual mono, 805 SET integrated amp at 45/ch into 4 or 8 ohms. That is a beautiful amp as well and really has the classic SET qualities – especially since the 805 output tubes are driven by 300B's. However, one might want to keep in mind that the Array uses a passive pre-amp that, while acceptable, has some reviewers saying to use the Array with an external pre-amp (achieved by flicking a switch to bypass the pre-amp section). I agree with that assessment, having heard the JAS Array operated as both an integrated and a power amp only in my system.

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So Rita has class, eh?

Do I think Rita is a great integrated amp? From the perspective of listening over a week or so (which doesn't get me into issues of tube life and other reliability considerations) I can answer without equivocation, "You betcha! She's "class A" in every way you can imagine and more than competitive at the price. If you are planning to use her as a portable, though, I advise you to forget it. However, if you're in the market for a spectacular tube integrated that you will move pretty infrequently, pull on your toque and go take her for a ride.

(Gerald Simon, Calgary, Alberta)

RITA – 'My next date to take home'

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