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American Pass Labs (hereinafter referred to as Pass) is a long-established classic brand, and its product update cycle is also relatively long. After all, top-notch audio equipment should be made through hard work, so how can it be easily changed? After listening to the XP-12 preamplifier this time, I deeply felt that the Pass is more mature. The XP-12's soulful musicality and its warm and smooth music texture fully demonstrate the true nature of the music and the hidden meaning in it. The musicality is worth savoring.

### **The new generation of entry-level Pass preamps.**

The engineer who made Pass famous is the founder Nelson Pass. His patented super symmetric amplification circuit (Super Symmetric Amplification, nicknamed Su-sy) made the Pass X series power amplifiers dominate the 1990s. In the power amplifier market, in comparison, there seems to be less discussion about Pass's preamplifiers. In fact, Pass has its super flagship preamplifier XS, and there are also three preamplifiers,

namely XP-32, XP-22 and XP-12. , representing the choice of high, medium and low. This time I tried the XP-12, which seems to be an entry-level product, but is actually the representative work of the new generation Pass preamp.

How can you say that the entry-level model is a masterpiece? The key point is here: XP-12 inherits the volume control of the flagship Xs preamplifier, leading to a new generation of Pass preamplifiers, evolving from generation 0 to generation 2. The past three levels of XP-30, XP-20 and XP- 10, all pushed to XP-32, XP-22 and XP-12. Therefore, the volume control of the XP-12 has a total of 100 levels, each level is 1 dB, exactly the same as the XS.



### **New design starting from power supply**

only volume control evolves? Then you are underestimating Pass! The new generation Pass preamp is completely replaced with a new custom-made toroidal transformer. The coil windings are shielded with Mu molybdenum metal as magnetic isolation and anti-static. They are then evacuated and filled with Epoxy resin to provide good damping to the transformer. The XP-12 has a quiet power supply and adds additional filtering to enhance power supply quietness.

I guess XP-12, the higher-end XP-22 and XP-32 may both use the same toroidal transformer. The difference lies in the independent power supply. Therefore, it can be seen that XP-12 looks entry-level, but is actually a great value. .



### **A relatively value-for-money option**

, the XP-12 has a single-box design and is replaced with a new custom-made toroidal transformer. The main difference from high-end products is whether the power supply is an "independent box", that is, the traditional clean box and dirty box are separated. However, if the XP-12 wants to maintain a competitive price, there is no way to separate the power supply.

What's the difference? Signal-to-noise ratio, a preamp with independent power supply, theoretically the music background will be quieter. If you are pursuing the highest performance of the sound system, XP-12 may not be your choice, XS is, but if you want to pay attention to cost performance, of course choose XP- 12.

### **Many XS flagship technologies are decentralized**

. According to Pass's information, XP-12 still uses their favorite Toshiba transistors,

while raising the operating voltage and using a self-supplied bias voltage that is “close to” XS. From here, it can be seen that the new generation of Pass In the evolution of the preamplifier, many technologies have been devolved from the flagship XS.

Compared with the previous generation XP-10, the design of the amplification circuit of the XP-12 has also been changed. The previous XP-10 used two-stage amplification, while the XP-12 was changed to a simpler one-stage amplification.

### **First-level amplification pays more attention**

to the difference in parts selection and materials? I often explain to editors that if we want to achieve the same gain, two-stage amplification can use the amplification difference between the first stage and the second stage to adjust the tone. The gain can be one to one, or it can be small at the front, large at the back, or large at the front, and the back is small. Although the gain multiple remains unchanged, the thickness of the tone will change subtly. It is easy for designers to control the direction of the tone. However, if you only do one level of amplification, it will be a head-on battle, and it will completely rely on selected parts to shape the tone.

Also because of the one-stage amplification, to obtain sufficient gain, the XP-12 must be in line with the XS flagship and raise the bias voltage of the output stage. This is also conducive to long-distance transmission and maintains the "single-ended output" that Pass has always insisted on. design concept.



## Adding a power switch

Finally, as far as the appearance of the XP-12 is concerned, the industrial design vocabulary has not changed much. The simple aluminum alloy chassis is very attractive. On the right is a large volume knob with a black decorative ring on the bottom. On the right are the volume control and mode Select, and next to it is the mute function, which allows vinyl players to change records without having to worry about the popping sound caused by the stylus touching the record. The input terminals have 2 sets of XLR and 3 sets of RCA, and the outputs are one XLR and one RCA, which should be enough for most people.

Another difference between XP-12 and XP-10 is that it has a power switch. Pass believes that it is best not to shut down the preamplifier, maintain a constant operating temperature, and be in the best sound state at all times, so XP-10 does not have a power switch. Most people will not unplug the power cord every time, but this is not environmentally friendly enough. Even though the power consumption of the XP-12 is only 30 watts, Pass has added a power switch this time to save power, but Pass still emphasized that the XP-12 is designed to "never shut down."

Among the five input groups of XP-12, the fifth group can be set as pass thru to connect to the home theater system. This part needs to enter the menu settings and reduce the gain of the fifth input group to the minimum, which is equal to pass thru. Preamplifier. When displaying subtitles on the panel, the XP-12 can set two levels of brightness or switch it to off to minimize interference from the panel display screen.



### **Better sound evolution than expected.**

This time I listened to the XP-12. Actually, it was because of the German Lansche 3.2 MK II ion tweeter. The agent Jinyinfang wanted me to use Pass to match it, so I sent the XP-12 and X250.8 together. , I originally didn't plan to write a review of the front and rear amplifiers, but the sound performance of the XP-12 and X250.8 was so great, so I decided to write a separate review.

I first used Lansche 3.2 MK II with a complete set of XP-12 and X250.8, then replaced it with Wilson Audio Alexia 2 speakers for comparison, and then paired the XP-12 with an EAR 509 MK II mono power amplifier. In terms of the scale of the music scene, Alexia 2 performs better, but in terms of the delicate and smooth mid- and high-frequency, the ion treble of Lansche .32 MK II is a little more fresh and sweet, but whether it is Lansche 3.2 MK II or Alexia 2, XP -12 all present a smooth and smooth sound bottom, especially the thickness of the mid-range, which is really beautiful.

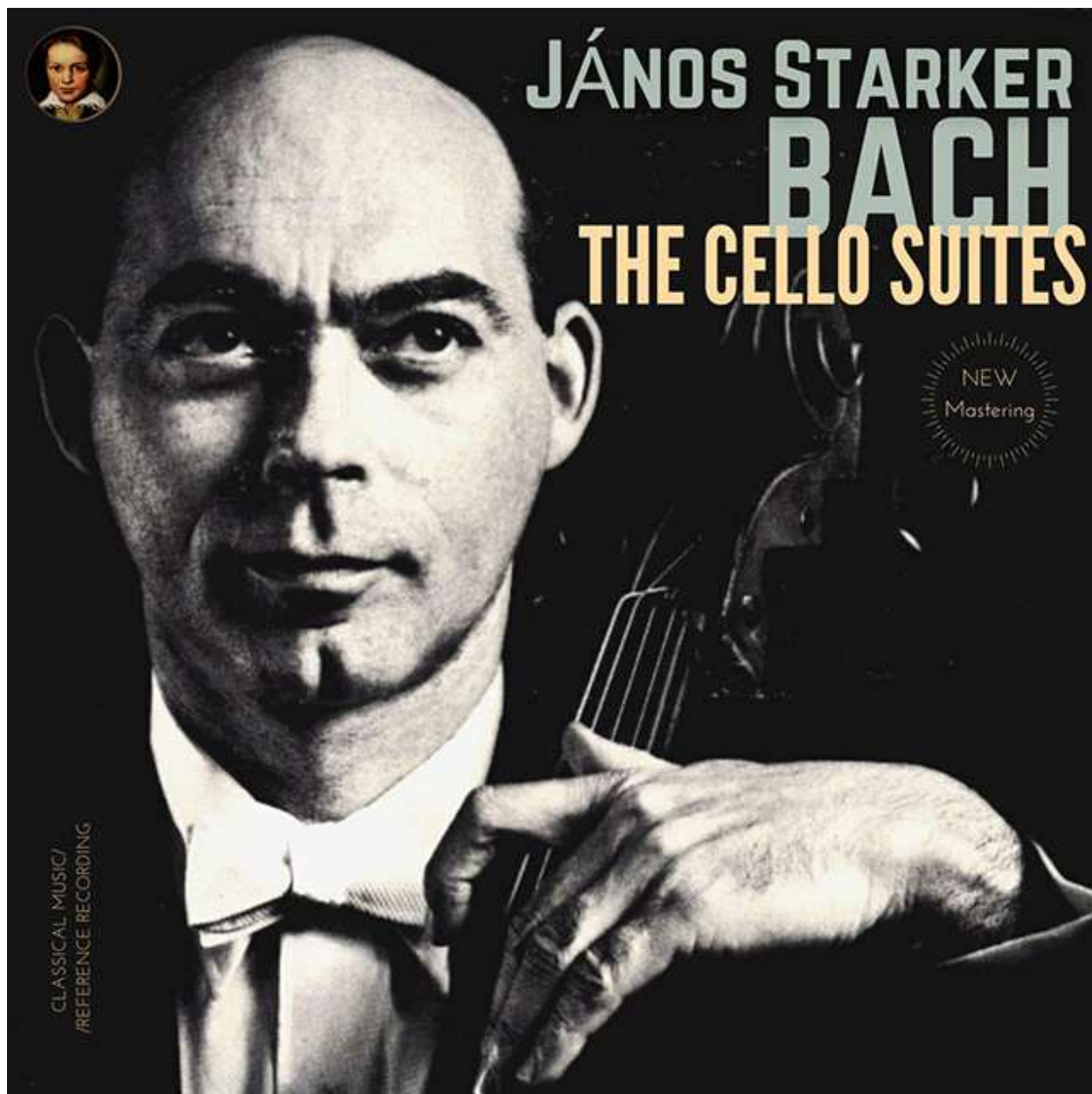


## **It adds a touch of mellowness and comfort to the music**

. This is different from the Pass preamplifier in my impression. In the past, I always felt that the Pass preamplifier was more masculine and sharper, but the XP-12 has a lot more. It is smooth and comfortable, and the sound adds a comfortable warmth, and the same is true for the matching X250.8. The thickness of the overall music supports the loose and huge music scene, and it flows freely.

For a small test, start with Stark's "Bach Unaccompanied Cello Suite". For the cello solo, the test is not dynamic contrast, but timbre. The XP-12 plays the cello and beautifully condenses the cello's voice in the sound field. In the center, there is a quiet musical background, opening up the natural spatial reverberation, Stark's smooth right hand moving the bow, his left hand pressing on the neck of the piano, the sound of the fingertips on the wood of the neck, and Stark's breathing while playing. The breath brings people closer to the recording scene. The change of the angle of the bow makes the sound either tight or loose. Between the tightness and tightness, it brings out a sense of beautiful melodic lines.





### **It feels more realistic than the tube machine**

. I switched to the EAR 868P preamplifier. Compared with the XP-12, the warm tone of the vacuum tube preamplifier is still richer than the XP-12. However, the XP-12 is a crystal machine, so although it is not as rich as the 868P. So good, but the quietness of the music background is better than that of 868P, so when listening to Stark, the sound field of XP-12 feels wider and the contrast is stronger, or it can be said that 868P makes

Stark Tate's cello is more beautiful, and the XP-12 adds realism beyond beauty.

If you are using XP-12 for the first time, you may be surprised by the volume control numbers of XP-12. The volume display ranges from 0 to 99, with a total of 100 bars. However, when you turn the volume value to 40 or 50, the volume feels very Small, compared to the traditional volume knob, this is already turned to the 12 o'clock position, isn't it? The first time I used it, I was shocked. The normal listening volume had to be pushed to above 60. I wanted to play on a larger scale. More than 70 is normal, but don't worry. The original instructions for Pass have written it. Please feel free to turn up the volume. It's no problem up to 80 and above. The XP-12's new microcomputer controls the volume. It's designed that way, no fuss needed.



**Familiar recordings can also hear new ideas.**

I switched to the Miles Davis classic "Kind of Blue" and listened to the familiar "So What". To create a swinging jazz scene, the XP-12 bounces the sinews of the double

bass, presenting a full and swollen sound image, but it can also hold its shape, giving you the power of a bouncing double bass. When the brass is playing, the force is separated from the sound. On both sides of the field, the distance feels very close.

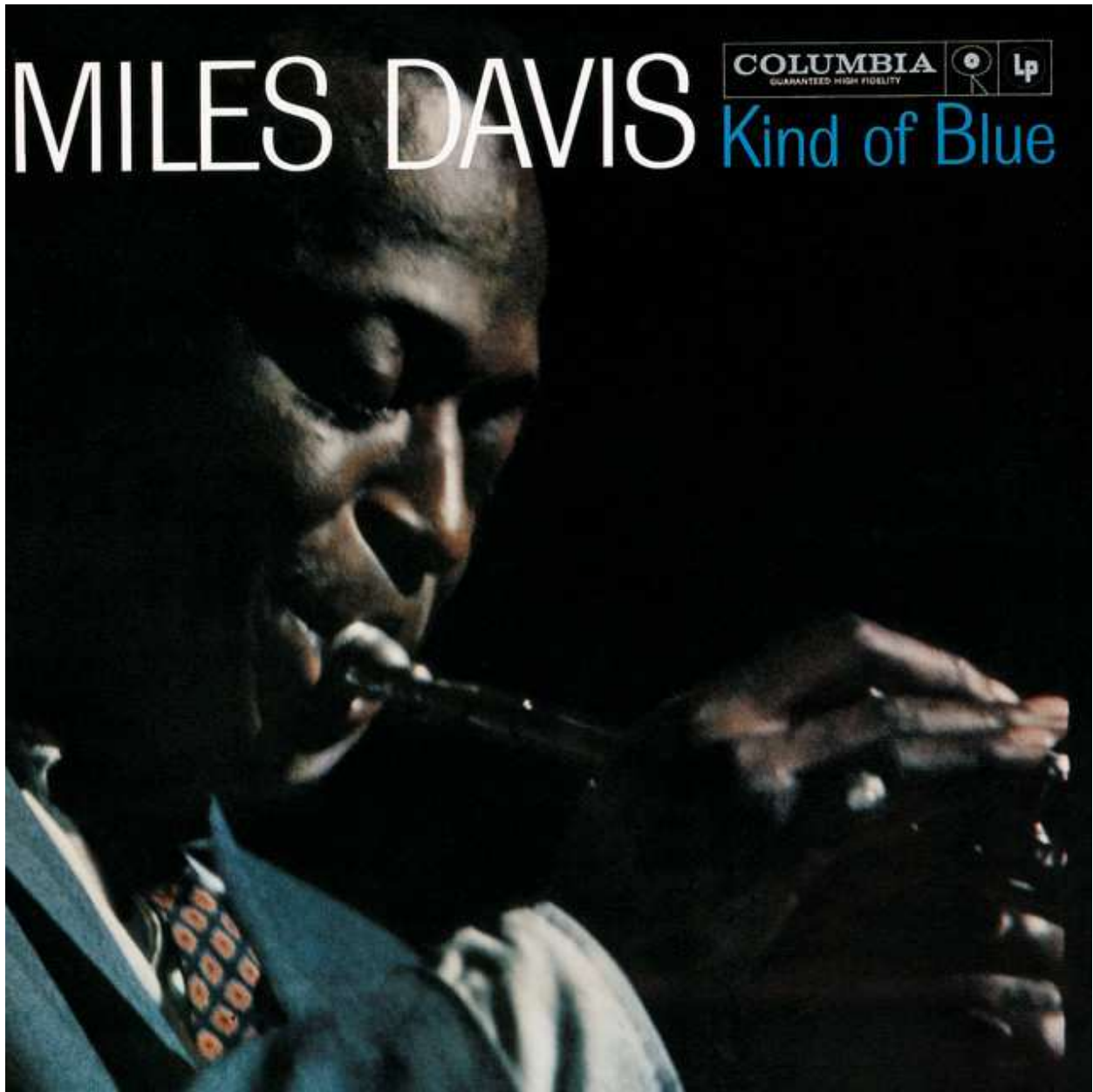
When Miles Davis's trumpet plays, you can feel the charming balance of the XP-12 showing the thick and loud brass. It is bright enough to show the strength of the brass, but it must be thick enough to make the brass hot. Pressure is not enough to just hit the treble, but to present a small speaker with full energy and spirit, so as to make the recording more realistic. XP-12 is not simple, it is just an entry-level preamp for Pass, but its performance is so excellent.

# MILES DAVIS

COLUMBIA  
GUARANTEED HIGH FIDELITY



Kind of Blue



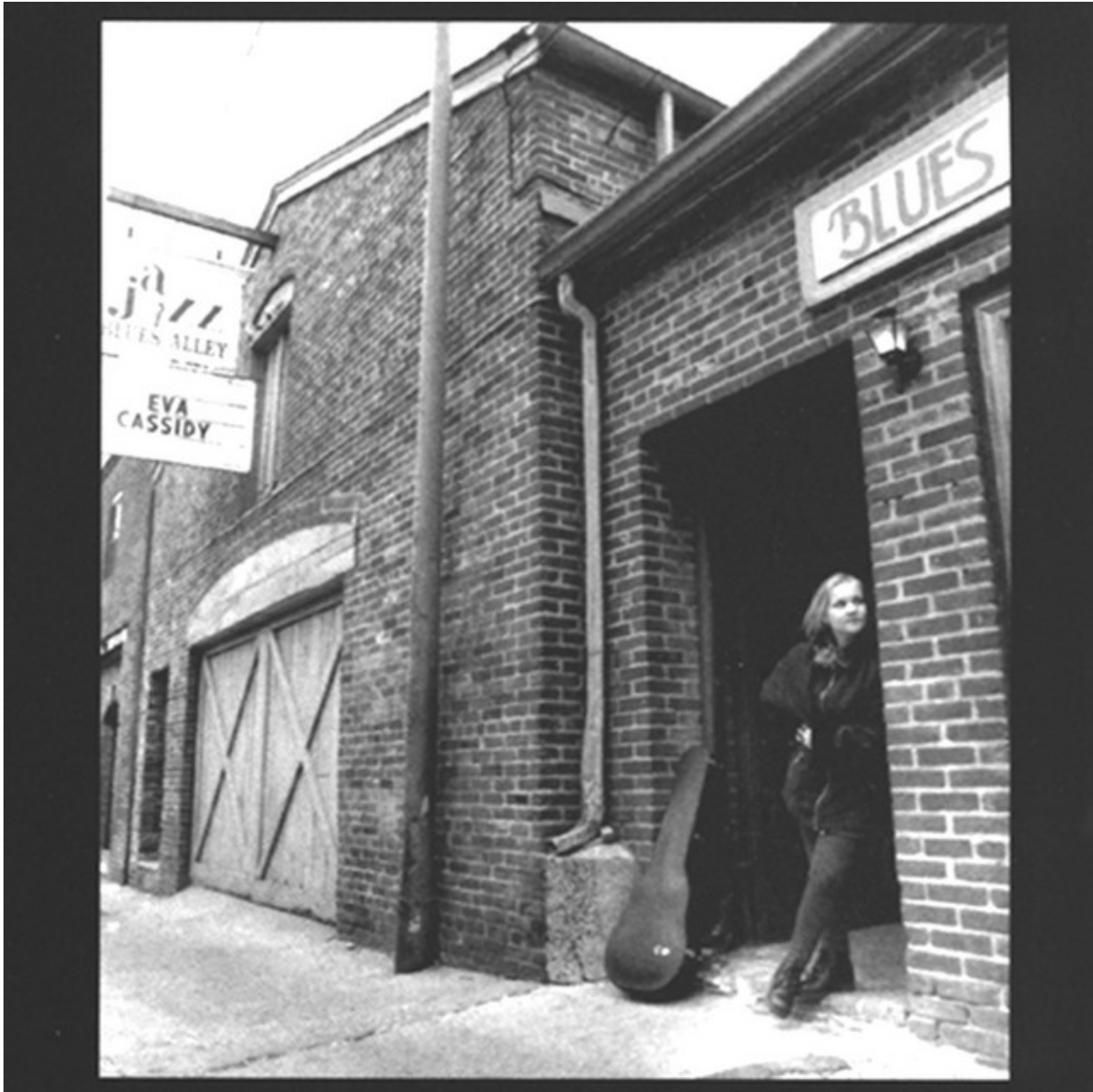
## **The live music is brought to life**

by Eva Cassidy. Listen to "Live At Blues Alley" and listen to her singing "Bridge Over Troubled Water". The electric guitar intro is concentrated in the center of the sound field, and the sound of clinking cups and plates is hidden in the background of the music. Let me tell you This was a live recording. Eva Cassidy's singing was accompanied by an electric guitar. The XP-12 gave the recording a sense of space and a closer sense of

intimacy. However, when the electric bass and jazz drums came in, the strong low-frequency graininess made the music more intimate. The lower plate is fully filled and the strength is very good. I really want to know what compressor was used on the electric bass at that time, which can produce such a beautiful grainy texture, full and elastic, compared to the crisp and hearty broken chords of the electric guitar. .

After the electric guitar solo, the last section of singing prepared to rush to the climax of "Bridge Over Troubled Water". Then the music faded away, the jazz drums disappeared and the sound of cymbals was gently struck. Applause broke out on the scene, and the XP-12 showed a charming performance. A sense of recording presence.

This live recording of Eva Cassidy is a masterpiece because she died of illness in the same year. However, this live recording made Eva Cassidy famous after her death. Every time I listen to it, I am moved. I use XP-12 to listen to it. I was even more moved, as if I had returned to the recording scene of Blues Alley.



### **Piers's piano interpretation is vivid and realistic**

. The XP-12 expresses the graininess of the piano, which is also a masterpiece. Listen to Piers's "Bach Partita No. 1", BWV. 825's "Praeludium", by At the beginning of the weak note, the XP-12 spreads the beautiful hall sound, allowing the condensed piano to spread a natural sense of space. Then the piano gradually increases its intensity, from weak to strong, then from strong to weak, and the finale becomes more powerful. As if

from far to near, the piano notes enter the listener's heart.

The next "Allemande" is a dance music, starting with a strong intensity. The changes in the bass of the left hand are like the leaping steps of the dance. The fast sound group of the right hand is like a gorgeous dance. The beauty of Piece's interpretation is hidden in the delicate piano. The intensity changes are not too dramatic, taking away Bach's sense of balance, and are not too bland to show the excitement of the dance music. The intensity of the left and right hands is balanced. On the XP-12, you can clearly hear the pianist's intention when playing. Heart, the arrangement of the strength and weakness of each note is the musical mood painstakingly managed by the pianist, and the XP-12 uses smooth and clear strength and weakness contrast to bring us closer to the pianist's performance expression.



Hearing this, I want to say that maybe it's because I haven't listened to the Pass preamp for a long time, so I feel that the XP-12 has evolved a lot. The focus is not on the acoustics, but on the comfortable and natural musicality. The XP-12 not only focuses on The most charming part of the recording is the slightly warm smoothness, the intensity of Piece's piano playing, the sheen of the final rhyme, the contrasting smoothness of the weak playing, and the legato. The denseness and crispness of the staccato all add color to the music and make listening more fun.



## **The tension of the brass is intense with thick timbres**

. Listen to Ashkenazy conducting the Philharmonic Orchestra's "Shostakovich: Celebration Overture". In fact, the protagonist of this album should be Symphony No. 5, but I more often use "Celebration Overture" to test the sound. This is an orchestral piece with heavy use of brass. If the brass becomes angry, it means that the sound quality is too much, and it will become restless and irritable. But if it can hold up The loud and powerful brass, while also taking into account the layering of string groups and percussion, is a first-class instrument, and the XP-12 undoubtedly achieves this.

When I use the 509 MK II with the XP-12 to push the Alexia 2, the mid-low frequency has a pleasant flexibility, but using the X250.8 to push the Alexia 2 is more powerful, denser, and the tone performance is better. However, The X250.8 has better driving power and can push for stronger sound pressure, but the XP-12 brings out the brilliant luster of the copper pipes while maintaining a fairly good sound thickness, showing the copper pipe group at the rear, a large area The momentum competes with the string group in front, while the percussion is hidden in the back of the sound field, accelerating the intensity of the string symphony.

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CLASSICS

*V. Ashkenazy*

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY  
SHOSTAKOVICH

FESTIVE OVERTURE  
SYMPHONY No.5

Philharmonia  
Orchestra

Ashkenazy's conductor's expression is clean and neat, and it is really wonderful to use the XP-12. The opening of "Celebration Overture" is the sound of the brass. The XP-12 opens up the wide sound field, and the voices of the brass group are intertwined. The left and right sides complement each other, and the timpani is behind the center. The crisp and bright impact of the triangle embellishes the momentum of the brass, entering the theme motive of the "Celebration Overture". The woodwind plays a light and pleasant melody, adding the bright sound of the piccolo, and connecting to the brass.

The thickness of the group and the rapid playing of the string group present the joyful musical atmosphere of the "Celebration Overture".

The XP-12 opened up the music scene very much, and Alexia 2 completely disappeared into the space, leaving behind a pleasant and dramatic orchestral symphony. The rapid sound group progression in the middle heralded the coming climax of the celebration, with brass, woodwind, and strings. The band alternately rotates rapidly and rushes to the highest point. The orchestra plays hard and echoes with strong percussion. Bravo, XP-12 presents a patchwork and clear-layered sound field, but maintains a beautiful sense of balance and loud copper. The pipe sang the joy of the celebration, filling the room with warm light.

### **The musicality worthy of careful appreciation by music lovers**

is that I haven't listened to the Pass preamp for a long time, so do I think the XP-12 is a big upgrade this time? It's possible, but I can't help but reflect on myself. Over the years, I have only thought about the Pass amplifier, but rarely cared about the Pass preamp. This XP-12 has changed my perspective. The mid-range is dense and smooth, almost as good as the tube. machine, but the crystal machine is clear and bright, and the XP-12 can also take care of it, but the most important thing is the gentle and smooth musicality. This is not a water-clear preamplifier, but a preamplifier with self-assertion, XP The musicality of -12 is worthy of careful appreciation by music lovers.



(Picture taken from Pass original factory)

## Equipment **Specifications**

Pass \_\_\_\_\_ W×D×H) Weight: 20 pounds Reference price: Please contact the agent General import agent: Jinyinfang Tel: (02) 2838-0729 passlabs website: <https://www.passlabs.com/jinyinfang> website : <https://www.gloriaaudio.com.tw/>