

The Great Preamp Survey

By the Staff of The Audio Critic

The Advent Model 300

Advent Corporation, 195 Albany Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Model 300 FM Stereo Receiver. Three-year warranty; manufacturer pays return freight. Tested No. JO 02876, owned by The Audio Critic.

The very first unit in our alphabetical listing will recoup the subscription cost of The Audio Critic many times over for anyone who is looking for the greatest per-dollar value of all time in preamp performance.

The Advent Model 300 isn't even a preamplifier, but who cares? For \$260, you get a neat little FM tuner and a 15-watt-per-channel power amplifier thrown in free of charge. We haven't tested these, but we can assure you that they work. The Editor's two young sons are blasting away with our expropriated 300, straight through, even as these lines are being written. The only reason for the inclusion of the Advent 300 in this survey was the announcement ad from Advent that asserted that the 300 incorporates "an entirely new phono preamp section that is audibly equal or superior to any separate preamp at any price." While we find ourselves unable to endorse that claim without any qualification, we must report that it's far from the usual advertising bombast and is substantially truthful. Only a small handful of the preamps we tested come even close to the Advent when you convert it to a separate preamplifier by removing two thick, U-shaped aluminum jumper wires in the back of the receiver. As we hint on our front cover, the Advent sounds better than, for example, the Yamaha C-1 at \$1800.

We still can't recommend the Advent to those

who want absolutely the best, regardless of price. While completely open, free, neutral, and non-fatiguing in sound, with excellent depth perspective and very impressive dynamics, the Advent still doesn't possess the ultimate refinement of inner detail audible on the top four or five units in our survey. It would be grossly unfair to pit the Advent against each of these, freckle by freckle and eyelash by eyelash, since even the cheapest of them costs almost twice as much. What's more, even their narrow margin of superiority must be somewhat qualified.

Whatever slight blunting or veiling of detail the Advent may produce (and we must emphasize that it's very slight) is due, in our opinion, to the tone control circuit, which cannot be switched out. This is the feature we liked least about the unit; in fact, we discovered in the lab that when the tone controls were set for dead-flat response on the right channel, there was a 2 dB bass boost on the left channel. Furthermore, the dead-flat position of the treble control was a few minutes past the 12 o'clock position. (Of course, we mustn't forget that we're dealing with a \$260 stereo receiver here; it's really a schizophrenic situation! Next thing you know, we'll complain that the controls don't have that expensive feel. They don't, damn it. ..)

The point we're trying to make, though, is that when you bypass the tone control circuit and the volume control by testing the Advent at "tape out," unbelievable things begin to happen. We absolutely drove our keen-eared Associate Editor up the wall by going from those "tape out" jacks into the "remote phono" inputs of the Mark Levinson JC-2 and A-B-ing the phono stage of the Advent against the JC-

2's own phono stage. He couldn't decide which one he preferred! After a long evening of agonizing reappraisal, we came to the reasonably firm conclusion that we preferred the JC-2 with its own phono stage. It seemed just the slightest bit higher in resolution of inner detail. Whew!

About the only thing to add is that the Advent Model 300 has rather low gain when used as a separate preamp, preferring to see a power amplifier with an input sensitivity of 1 volt or even less. And that all the lower-priced preamps in the world are dead, dead, dead.

Recommendations

With the reminder, once more, that all of the above is work-in-progress and that our conclusions may change as this survey goes into its second part, here are our present recommendations to those who wish to buy a preamplifier immediately.

Best sound through mag phono, regardless of all other considerations: Rappaport PRE-1 (with the caveat about hum-see review).

Alternate choice for better system compatibility in specific cases: Mark Levinson JC-2.

Close to the best at a much lower price: Advent Model 300.

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ADVENT