

# A SHORT REVIEW of SOLAJA AUDIO SA-R PREAMP

*by Rainer Weber*

First I would like to tell you why I got in contact with Mr. Dragan Solaja, head and mastermind of Solaja Audio in Serbia. We are a small ultimate audio speaker company and we are currently developing our top line serie of speakers. Due to that we searched for the best components which might fit our design approach. After spending two years in searching for the best tweeter we finally ended up using RAAL ribbon tweeters from Serbia.

We were very pleased with the RAAL sound and were curious what amplifier equipment Aleksandar from RAAL might use personally. We got the answer that we should try tube preamps which are custom made from Solaja Audio.

So we emailed Dragan and pointed out that we might be interested in his preamp designs. We stated that we are only interested in the best design he can offer and after some nice conversation we decided to give a go to the project "Solaja SA-R", which stands for the best design Dragan can do. We wanted to have an unbalanced design to check the performance of Solaja Audio against our well known Belles 21 A preamp. If Dragan could reach this superb sound quality we would be satisfied.

The SA-R is a state-of-the-art design. It is battery biased, tube rectified, C-L-C tube regulated and has Teflon tube sockets and tube

dampers. Volume control is an ELMA step attenuator, signal cable is Mundorf silver-gold, Connectors are WBT next generation.... So every ultimate audio's wish is considered in this preamp. Some weeks after ordering the preamp arrived in our listening room. First

impression was that it is very heavy for a preamp and it is build like a tank. A 10mm aluminum front plate is not usual for a preamp in this price range.

Then I switched on the SA-R in my system. At that moment I was completely surprised and my knowledge about high end audio was improved by a big step. I could hardly believe how good the SA-R sounds and I never thought that such a big sound improvement can be made with another preamp. Everything sounded more neutral, more live and just absolutely right. For instance bass reproduction: More quantity like my other preamps, but also much more control, more punch and more information about the bass instrument you hear. It is a very musical bass which is an important fundament for authentic reproduction. The midrange and voice is by far the best I have ever heard. The height of the voice is just right, focusing is excellent and you have the imagination that it would be possible to walk around the singer and to pat him on his back. In that criteria it obviously outperforms all other preamps I know. On good recordings the SA-R is a real winner, I call it a goose bump machine. The tone colors are so realistic that you can even recognize this feature in the next room. It just sounds like life music. What may contribute a lot to that is that you here much more details. You can easily distinguish between the material of a string of a violin and it is really an easy task to identify different famous violin brands.

Treble is very smooth. It is very well integrated in the music and you really do not think about it. It is just here and it is never annoying or harsh. This is a very important thing for me personally, I just can't stand if the "S" on voices is sharp.

Image and room information:

The scene is extremely broad (much wider the distance of the speakers) and also very deep.

The imaging is furthermore very stable and does not change due to different playback levels

Musicality:

Awesome. I'm usually not to patient when I check a new component and zap from song to song. With SA-R I heard almost every song till the end because it was so good. Also with older recordings with less sound quality you can hear good music, because SA-R is never harsh and annoying. On one day I

listened to music until 4:30 am when my wife entered the listening room and shouted “When the hell do you wanna go to bed?” The SA-R gives you the possibility for long time relaxed enjoying your records.

#### Conclusion

Is the preamp the most important device in a system like a conductor is the head of an orchestra? My experience with SA-R gives some hints that this statement might be really true. I never had such a great improvement in sound quality, when I changed a component. After being 20 years in this business I thought I would pretty good know what are the limits of sound reproduction caused by a preamp. Certainly SA-R has set new limits for sound quality and I decided to sell all my other preamps. I don't use them anymore and I can recommend that anyone interested in best music reproduction should give this SA-R a try. Additionally this preamp is a real bargain considering its outstanding performance. For me hunting for the best preamp has finally come to an end. A few months ago I never expected that this unknown Serbian preamp would be my “Heavens Preamp”

PS:

After some thinking I will try Dragans ultimate power amp design (which is brand new) which shall replace my Krell amp. Without having heard it yet, I'm absolutely convinced that this combo outperforms everything

Best Regards

Rainer Weber

Director of RWA Akustik Systeme

Source: Audio Aero Capitole Reference SE

Preamps: Belles 21 A, Burmester 848, Audiolabor Fein

Poweramp: Krell KSA-200 S

Speaker: RWA Akustik Systeme Model 1 (Prototyp)

Cables:

Speaker Cables Nanotec Golden Strada Nano 3

Signal Cables Nanotec Golden Strada #201

Power line

Conditioner: Isotek Titan

Room size: 35 m<sup>2</sup>

Room Treatment Reverberation time constant 0,4 s over 100 Hz

Used records:

30 years fidelity (Kirkelig Kulturverksted)

various Kari Bremnes

various Kati Melua

Eva Cassidy

Hillary Hahn

Various Opus 3 records

etc