



electromod  
the sound connection

## Press release

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écoute

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Above Écoute TH1 Bluetooth headphones in Gunmetal finish

## Headphones with valves: meet the Écoute TH1

**More like a wearable hi-fi system than typical Bluetooth headphones, the Écoute TH1 incorporate a high-performance DAC, valve-based preamp and dual-mono amplification**

*Buckinghamshire, England* -- The TH1 by Écoute Audio is a pair of high-end Bluetooth headphones unlike any other. Leading 'head-fi' distributor Electromod is delighted to officially bring them to discerning ears in the UK, with immediate effect.

What makes the Écoute TH1 so different? An obvious factor is the incorporation of a vacuum tube – or valve, as we say in the UK – as a preamp stage within the headphones themselves. (The valve is a genuine triode, albeit not a conventional one.) This alone makes them unique, but it's only part of the story...

Most Bluetooth headphones use SoC (System on a Chip) technology, supplied by IC specialists such as Qualcomm. These chips incorporate all necessary functions to deliver an audio signal to the headphones' drivers, from Bluetooth reception and processing to D-to-A conversion and amplification. This is an efficient way of doing things; but in terms of sound quality, it is restrictive and lacks refinement.

The Écoute TH1 headphones are designed differently, with a technical architecture distinct from even the most premium Bluetooth headphones. In fact, their design is more akin to a high-end hi-fi system with discrete electronic elements, each engineered to maximise sonic performance and deliver a true dual-mono signal path. Highlights include:

- **High-resolution dual-core DAC** captures every detail.
- **True valve preamp** breathes life into the midrange.
- **Dual-mono Class A/B amplification** maintains channel separation and dimensionality.
- **Firmware-level DSP tuning** lets you shape voicing precisely to your taste via an iOS/Android app.

Remarkably, Écoute has engineered all these elements into the headphones' durable aluminium body whilst maintaining a comfortable weight of 424g.

When developing the TH1, Écoute asked itself this question: "How do we make the sound of a high-end audio system portable – without compromise?" The result is the closest thing to a hi-fi system you wear on your head.



*Left As well as Gunmetal and grey, the TH1 headphones are available in Satin Aluminium with fawn-coloured earpads and headband*

### A hi-fi system on your head

At the headphones' heart nestles a Nutube 6P1 dual-triode valve acting as a stereo preamp, shaping the signal with harmonic richness and dimensionality before it reaches a pair of discrete Class A/B analogue amplifiers. Developed in Japan by Korg and Noritake Itron, the Nutube 6P1 is tiny in size, runs cool and consumes a fraction of the power of conventional audio valves. Its existence makes the Écoute TH1 concept possible.

The valve is visible through a small display window in the left ear cup, emitting a turquoise glow when the headphones are powered up – a striking visual reminder of its presence. With an expected service life of over 30,000 hours, the Nutube 6P1 is built for many years of use.

The inclusion of the Nutube valve is not a mere effect layered on after the fact – it's a fundamental part of the discrete signal path within the headphones themselves. With its dual-triode construction, the Nutube 6P1 adds voltage gain whilst keeping the left and right channels separate, handing over to the two mono solid-state amps which maintain channel isolation through to the 40mm titanium-coated Mylar drivers.

This discrete, dual-mono DAC/amp design – unique in a pair of headphones – eliminates crosstalk and preserves imaging with remarkable space, depth and warmth. Instruments lock into place, vocals sound human, details unfold naturally across a three-dimensional soundstage – a listening experience that feels grounded, expressive and unconfined, more like hi-fi separates than Bluetooth headphones.

### Listen how you like

As well as Bluetooth for wireless convenience, the TH1 headphones include a USB-C input for cabled digital connections, and a 3.5mm input for analogue sources and external headphone amps. This means you can choose to listen in the following ways:

- **Bluetooth:** High-definition wireless sound with LDAC and AAC support; Bluetooth 5.3 delivers reliable low-latency performance up to 10m from the source device (smartphone, tablet etc).
- **USB-C input:** Hi-res lossless digital sound, up to 32-bit/384kHz.
- **Analogue 3.5mm input:** Select 'active mode' to utilise the headphones' built-in valve preamp and dual-mono power amp. Or 'passive mode' to enable an external amp to power the drivers directly, like a regular pair of corded headphones.

### Summary of other features

- **Construction:** Closed-back design; aluminium body and armature; adjustable headband; replaceable fabric-covered over-ear memory foam earpads; physical controls on right ear cup.
- **Microphone:** Built-in mic for calls and voice assistant compatibility.
- **Noise control:** Choice of passive isolation or Active Noise Cancellation (FF and FB) with Transparency Mode setting – the latter uses the built-in mic to pass through some ambient noise, so the listener stays connected to their environment.
- **Battery:** 1600mAh capacity provides 20-plus hours of playback.
- **Finish options:** Gunmetal or Satin Aluminium.

A true world-first, the Écoute TH1 Bluetooth 'Tube Headphones' are now officially available in the UK, at an RRP of £900. Customers who purchase the TH1 from an official UK stockist benefit from UK-based tech support and a two-year warranty through distributor Electromod.



*Left* The Nutube 6P1 dual-triode valve is visible through a display window on the left ear cup, lit with a turquoise glow

## More about the Écoute TH1 design philosophy

### The joy of valves

Vacuum tubes, or valves, amplify sound differently to transistors. Their transfer curves are smoother and more gradual, producing even-order harmonics – the same harmonic relationships found in real instruments and the human voice. Those harmonics aren't 'distortion' in the unpleasant sense; they're consonant. They reinforce the fundamental tones instead of clashing with them, which our ears interpret as warmth, depth and realism.

Valves also handle dynamic transients – the micro-swells and decays that define musical expression – with a natural elasticity that solid-state circuits can struggle to reproduce. Transistors switch on and off with sharp edges, which can make complex passages sound clinical or mechanical. Valves, by contrast, transition gradually, allowing notes to bloom and fade in a way that more closely mirrors the behaviour of acoustic instruments.

This is why valve-based systems can feel more three-dimensional. The harmonic structure they generate creates a richer sense of body around voices and instruments, lending recordings a physicality that can feel more lifelike.

Valves also excel at preserving low-level detail – the quiet textures beneath the main performance. Instead of masking them with high-order distortion, valves gently elevate nuance, revealing room tone, trailing echoes and micro-dynamics that contribute to realism.

That is not to say the valve-based sound is inherently better than solid-state amplification; both have their technical advantages. But it does explain why some music lovers – and some music makers – swear by the natural realism and emotional engagement delivered by valves.



*Left Écoute brings the musical benefits of valve-based audio to wireless headphones for the first time*

### True valve sound, wherever you go

Until now, the only way to enjoy the sound of real valves with headphones was to buy a valve amp for stationary use at home, or one of a small handful of valve-toting 'portable' amps of varying size with cable

connections. If you craved true valve sound with the mobile convenience of wireless headphones, forget it – the size, fragility, power requirements and heat generation of audio valves made that idea entirely impractical. That is, until Korg introduced the Nutube 6P1.

This new-technology triode is designed for robust portable use, whether making music (instruments and amps) or playing back recordings. It delivers true vacuum-tube behaviour at a fraction of the size, heat and voltage, enabling real analogue valve stages to be built into portable, battery-powered audio gear – not emulated valves or DSP filters, but actual triodes in the signal path.

The Écoute TH1 is the first pair of headphones to successfully integrate this new triode technology into its topology. Which also makes it the first to put true valve-based sound on your head to enjoy wherever you go, untethered to a valve amp.



*Left Écoute's TH1 are the world's first headphones with dual-mono amplification and a built-in valve-based preamp stage*

### **Designed like a hi-fi system**

Most Bluetooth headphones collapse the DAC, DSP and amplifier into a single chip – this is efficient but sacrifices refinement. Écoute decided there is a better way, harnessing the talents of the Nutube valve.

Each channel runs its own discrete path – high-resolution DAC to valve preamp to solid-state amplifier – in a dual-mono layout. The Nutube dual-triode valve functions as the preamp for each side, shaping the timbre and harmonic structure before the left/right signals reach the high-bias Class A/B dual-mono amp stage. The result is stereo separation and tonal realism more like a home hi-fi system than headphones.

Dual-mono channels, discrete amplification, valve preamplification – Écoute has engineered the signal path of a high-performance hi-fi system, uniquely miniaturised in a pair of headphones. The result is a sound much closer to valve-based hi-fi than other Bluetooth headphones – voices feel more present, instruments sound as though projected into the room rather than confined inside your head, and recordings take on the dimensionality of a live space. These headphones deliver the sonic realism and emotional weight of a high-end audio system – now available wherever you listen.

## How firmware-level DSP tuning differs from regular EQ

Most people think of EQ (equalisation) as the primary way to shape sound – boosting or cutting frequencies according to taste. But in Écoute headphones, true precision happens inside the DSP (Digital Signal Processing) firmware rather than as an overlay.

The Écoute Tuning App for iOS and Android devices modifies parameters within the headphones' DSP at the digital source level, before conversion to analogue. The result is cleaner, more accurate control that preserves the signal's integrity and resolution.

DSP handles the signal mathematically in real time before it reaches the DAC. In the TH1 headphones, a dedicated processor manages filtering, correction and timing with far greater precision than analogue circuits or external EQ software. Algorithms control phase, crossover and driver balance – essentially shaping how the transducers behave rather than simply adjusting tone. These firmware-level adjustments allow listeners to fine-tune the system without introducing distortion or phase errors.

In contrast to an app-based EQ that applies a digital filter before the signal leaves your device, the Écoute Tuning App communicates directly with the headphones' DSP, adjusting the digital coefficients that define how it processes the signal. It may look like EQ, but this is firmware tuning – integrated into the signal path rather than layered on top.

Firmware-based DSP can correct driver behaviour, phase alignment and distortion in the digital domain before conversion to analogue. With full knowledge of the headphones' architecture, it optimises the waveform that the DAC outputs – ensuring accuracy without added latency or loss of detail. With eight fully parametric bands and up to  $\pm 12$ dB of control per band, the Écoute Tuning App works purely as a control surface for this internal processing; every change is computed in the headphones' own domain, maintaining resolution that software EQ cannot match.

Why is this an important feature? Because every 'ear' is different. Every music library, every genre, every source brings its own sonic signature. The Écoute Tuning App provides access to 15 preset frequency response curves, including seven genre-based settings and one based on the Harman curve, with the option to add up to five custom sound profiles. Whether you want a more neutral sound, greater vocal clarity or a low-end bump, Écoute gives you that control – precisely and without compromise.



*Left Uniquely designed and beautifully built, the TH1 deliver a luxurious headphone experience with sophisticated custom-tuning*

## ēcoute

Co-founded by Joshua Fairbairn and Kendall Liddle, Écoute Audio was formed with the express intention of bringing the TH1 concept to the world. A newcomer with serious engineering intent, these headphones set the tone for the company's philosophy: built around a complete hi-fi signal path rather than typical mobile-audio circuitry. Écoute describes the TH1 as "the world's first and only headset featuring dual-mono amplification and a built-in vacuum tube preamp stage". The company continues to expand its presence globally as it introduces the TH1 to new markets – including the UK, via distributor Electromod.

[ecouteaudio.com](http://ecouteaudio.com)



Founded by Mark Dolbear, Electromod is a leading UK distributor specialising in head-fi gear, from DACs to amps to headphones and associated accessories. The company focuses on product excellence and a personal style of customer support, operating as official distributor for class-leading brands such as Dan Clark Audio, Dekoni Audio, Schiit Audio, Topping and Vioelectric. Mark has an engineering background and has worked in the audio industry since 1995, servicing products from the likes of Mark Levinson, Goldmund, Ayre Acoustic and Stax before forming Electromod.

[electromod.co.uk](http://electromod.co.uk)

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