

Press release

audiolab

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Press contact: Tim Bower

020 8954 8945

07854 966 071

tim@hashstar.co.uk

+44 (0)1480 447700

www.audiolab.co.uk



Above Audiolab PPA7 in black and silver finish options

Audiolab gets groovy

A high-performance phono stage with a headphone amplifier, Bluetooth transmission and USB recording, Audiolab's new PPA7 brings vinyl playback into the modern listening age

Cambridgeshire, England – Widely acclaimed for its work with digital sources, Audiolab is returning to vinyl with its first standalone phono stage for almost 20 years. The new PPA7, however, is much more than a traditional phono stage – it's a veritable multitool for vinyl lovers, designed to elevate record playback while opening up new ways to enjoy a treasured collection.

Every turntable needs a phono stage to amplify and equalise the cartridge's delicate electrical signal before it reaches the main amplifier. This circuitry may be built into the turntable or amplifier, but a separate, offboard phono stage can offer higher performance and greater flexibility. The PPA7 has been painstakingly designed to make the most of the signal as the cartridge tracks the groove, combining high-quality analogue amplification with features that extend vinyl's appeal well beyond the traditional hi-fi system.

For starters, it includes a built-in headphone amplifier. This allows listeners to connect the PPA7 to their turntable, plug in their favourite cans and lose themselves in the unmistakable analogue embrace of vinyl in full flow, without requiring any other system components.

It also incorporates an ADC (Analogue-to-Digital Converter). This has two purposes: streaming vinyl over Bluetooth to wireless headphones or speakers and connecting to a PC or Mac to convert vinyl into digital files for storage and playback.

The PPA7 will look familiar to those who know Audiolab's D7 DAC, launched last year. Its compact, desktop-sized aluminium case (208×56×180mm) is identical, right down to the two multifunction rotary controls flanking a 33mm OLED display. The D7 and PPA7 make natural companions: one is designed to make the most of digital audio sources, the other to do the same with vinyl. D-to-A conversion in one, A-to-D conversion in the other – two sides of the same expertly engineered sonic coin.

Taking the stage

Designing a truly high-performance phono stage is no easy task, particularly at an accessible price point. Amplifying a cartridge's delicate output without amplifying unwanted noise demands careful engineering, while the wide variation in cartridge characteristics means that loading and gain options are essential for compatibility with different designs.

The quality of the analogue circuitry is paramount, and Audiolab has brought more than 40 years of acclaimed amplifier-engineering experience to the PPA7. Every circuit decision matters – input noise, grounding, power supply isolation, board layout, gain structure, overload margin and output stage design all influence the sonic result.

Separate stereo RCA inputs are provided for moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges, alongside RCA outputs for connecting to a system amplifier or powered speakers. The output can be configured as fixed or variable, with the latter engaging a built-in volume control for direct connection to a power amplifier.



Left Audiolab's analogue amplification expertise, finely honed since 1983, sits at the heart of the PPA7

Clean power

A stable, well-regulated power supply is vital when handling the delicate signals produced by a phono cartridge. It helps to minimise noise, maintain consistent operating conditions and preserve signal integrity throughout the amplification and equalisation stages.

The PPA7's 12V DC input is converted internally into a symmetrical, regulated $\pm 8.5\text{V}$ supply for the analogue circuitry, using separate positive and negative regulation stages. This carefully engineered

arrangement supports low-noise operation and stable performance, exemplifying Audiolab's 'Sound of Science' philosophy: practical engineering in pursuit of more faithful music reproduction.

Cartridge tuning

MM and MC are the two main types of phono cartridge. MM cartridges are generally more affordable and easier to accommodate in a wide range of systems, making them a popular starting point. MC designs are often more expensive and typically require greater amplification but can reward listeners with exceptional refinement and detail.

The PPA7 accommodates both types, with adjustable settings to match the phono stage to the cartridge's electrical characteristics. For MM cartridges, the standard 47k Ω input impedance is complemented by selectable 100pF or 220pF capacitance. These options allow users to tailor the total capacitive load presented by the phono stage and connected cabling, helping achieve the desired high-frequency response and tonal balance.

For MC cartridges, selectable 100R (100 ohms) and 330R (330 ohms) resistive loading provides further flexibility. Different loading values affect the electrical conditions under which the cartridge operates and can influence its frequency response and overall presentation. The optimum setting depends on the cartridge, allowing users to fine-tune the sound to suit their system.

Gain can be adjusted by ± 6 dB in 1dB steps, with maximum gain of 52dB for MM cartridges and 66dB for MC cartridges. This flexibility suits cartridges with differing output levels and provides the appropriate signal to the connected amplifier. Together, these features make it easier to optimise the PPA7 for a chosen cartridge and accommodate future upgrades without replacing the phono stage.



Left The PPA7's useful feature set is accessed via neat front-panel controls and the supplied remote handset

Headphones ahoy!

Vinyl listening may traditionally be associated with loudspeakers, but headphones offer a compelling alternative – and the PPA7 makes it easy to enjoy both. Its desktop-friendly dimensions and built-in headphone amplifier provide a high-quality solution for headphone-loving vinyl fans, without requiring a hi-fi rack full of equipment.

Delivering up to 600mW of power to drive loads ranging from 20 to 600 ohms via a front-mounted 6.35mm socket, the headphone amplifier combines a current-feedback design with wide bandwidth,

high slew rate and low output impedance to support a detailed and dynamic performance with a broad range of wired headphones.

Making vinyl digital

The PPA7 bridges the gap between traditional audiophile-quality vinyl playback and modern digital lifestyles, extending the ways records can be enjoyed without compromising its role as a high-performance analogue phono stage.

Built-in Bluetooth transmission allows PPA7 owners to enjoy their vinyl collection through wireless headphones and speakers. Bluetooth 5.3 supports reliable connectivity, while aptX HD enables enhanced wireless sound quality with compatible devices.

For listeners who use wireless headphones and speakers every day, the PPA7 makes it easier to enjoy vinyl in situations that might otherwise call for a digital source. Crucially, these added conveniences do not come at the expense of the phono stage's excellent analogue performance in a hi-fi context.

Digital archiving of vinyl is another string to the PPA7's bow, its USB-C output connecting to a PC or Mac so records can be digitised for storage and playback. With support for 16- and 24-bit recording at sample rates from 44.1kHz to 192kHz, the PPA7 can convert vinyl to uncompressed CD quality and beyond. The output level is adjustable from -12dB to +3dB to achieve an ideal balance between recording loudness and the audible noise floor.



Left A versatile tool for record collectors, the PPA7 puts the sheer analogue joy of rich, expressive vinyl sound centre stage

Feature-rich yet easy to use

If the PPA7's flexible feature set is unusual for a high-performance phono stage, so is the menu system that makes it so simple to use – accessed via the crisp, clear OLED display, intuitive front-panel controls and supplied remote handset. A USB-A data input supports future firmware updates, while 12V trigger inputs and outputs allow the PPA7 to integrate with compatible system components for coordinated power-up and power-down.

Compact, versatile and engineered with analogue excellence at its heart, the PPA7 is available from late October in a choice of black or silver, at an RRP of £499.

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Formed in the early 1980s by Philip Swift and Derek Scotland, Audiolab earned worldwide acclaim with the 8000A – an integrated stereo amplifier that became a classic ‘step-up’ from the budget models of the time.

Since then, Audiolab's reputation has been further enhanced by its highly respected DAC circuitry, earning the company a plethora of awards throughout the last two decades.

Today, the company continues to make class-leading source and amp components across its highly acclaimed 6000, 7000 and 9000 product lines, delivering crisp, clean ergonomics, purposeful functionality and superb sound with everything from vinyl to hi-res digital streaming.

Audiolab products are designed and engineered at the company's HQ in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

www.audiolab.co.uk



For more information, please contact Tim Bown
T: 07854 966071 E: tim@hashstar.co.uk
