



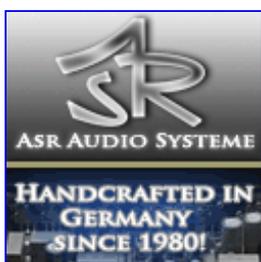
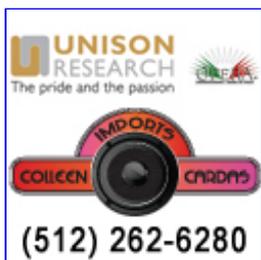
# Positive Feedback ISSUE 63

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## unison research

### Simply Phono V2 - Tubes Rule

as reviewed by Michael Mercer



I fell in love with the Unison Research Simply Phono the moment I fired it up. They say first impressions are everything, or close to it. Well, with a \$2445 price tag I had high expectations. That may sound affordable to many readers, and in high end audio terms it is reasonably priced, but two grand is two grand, plain and simple. That's not cheap to me. When I opened the box and pulled out the unit I had a feeling I was about to hear something special. The Simply Phono is a dual-chassis design. The power supply is housed in its own box, therefore isolating its noise from the phono stage. The two are connected via a seven pin umbilical cord. The gain stage is class A and has four ECC83/12AX7 tubes. The chassis that houses the tubes and outputs is slim-lined, with a combination of what looks like cherry wood (the base) and a black-metal casing which keeps the tubes safe from wondering hands. I can't tell you how many times I've reached for something, over a tube unit, with the tubes exposed, and had an accident which rendered the component temporarily useless. I welcome the protective enclosure. In all it's a pretty sexy-looking piece of audio kit. But how did it perform?



First of all, I especially like the versatility of input impedances the Simply Phono provides, making it a good fit for moving magnet and mid to high-level moving coil cartridges. There are these tiny switches on the rear panel that can accommodate 47k, 100, 50, and 20 ohm loads. Using my Ortofon 2M Blue cartridge (which is, in my opinion, one of the very best cartridges in the \$200-500 price range) on my classic Luxman PX-99 turntable, and later the VPI *Traveler*, I set the switches to 47 and I was rolling. The rest of the system included a Benchmark DAC1-HDR (used as line-stage), Classe DR-9 stereo amplifier, and Reference 3A Dulcet speakers with a Nola Thunderbolt IIIA subwoofer. All cabling was Nordost Leif: White Lighting signal and speaker cables with Magus power cords on the Benchmark and Classe. Out of the box the Simply Phono sounded fluid and vibrant. Those tubes cliches came to mind immediately: Warmth and rounded. The Classic Records re-master of Peter Gabriel's *Scratch My Back* sounded glorious; even the space between the instruments seemed to have depth. As this is a pretty sparse recording at times, I've often heard analog rigs reek havoc on the nuances of the music. The Unison Research, as part of this system, gave it such breadth and sense of liveliness that I listened to that album twice when I got things cookin'. I don't do that often, well, not with older releases usually. If a new album's sonic signature really grabs me I end up playing it to death sometimes, which drives my wife crazy. When I'm listening to one of my reference discs to gauge the performance of a component I rarely play it over and over. Usually I go through my usual reference arsenal. The Simply Phono gave me the sensation like I was listening to *Scratch My Back* for the first time. This is a true rarity—and is perhaps the greatest compliment I can bestow upon this audible gem.

#### MICHAEL MERCER'S SYSTEM

##### LOUDSPEAKERS

Zu Audio Omen Defs,  
System Audio SA2Ks  
(master version –  
internally wired w/  
Nordost Valhalla),  
CEntrance 2504 near-  
field speakers,  
Audioengine A2s  
(powered desktop  
speakers),  
Audioengine A5+  
(powered speakers),  
Nola Thunderbolt IIIa  
subwoofer.

##### ELECTRONICS

E.A.R 868 tube  
preamp, Unison  
Research Simply