

2009 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

AMPLIFICATION COMPONENT



Ayre KX-R preamplifier

(\$18,500; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.31 No.11, November 2008 WWW)

Wow. The jewel-like Ayre Acoustics KX-R preamplifier won significantly more first-place votes *and* more overall votes than any other product in our competition. In fact, with its total of 26 nods, the KX-R *doubled* the tally of our first runner-up, the magnificent Parasound Halo JC 1 monoblock. Put another way, only five of our 16 reviewers chose *not* to vote for the KX-R, and the majority of those who did ranked it as their top choice. While mention must also be made of the Peachtree Audio Nova D/A integrated amplifier, which won three first-place votes, the Ayre KX-R is certainly respected, admired, and often *loved*, by all who hear it.

Designed to match Ayre's MX-R monoblock—which in 2007 topped this very category in similarly indisputable fashion—the KX-R is a zero-feedback, fully balanced design milled from a 75-lb billet of aluminum and forming one cool hunk of audio *presence*. It uses Ayre's Variable Gain Transconductance topology to maintain a constant signal/noise ratio independent of volume setting, for improved resolution of low-level detail. Wes Phillips was convinced. He praised the KX-R for its astonishing transparency, and enjoyed how deep—how *very* deep—it took him into the soundstage. "If it's not the eighth wonder of the modern world, I say demand a recount."

No recount needed in this poll, Wes. The Ayre is the clear winner.

2009 RUNNERS-UP

(in alphabetical order)

Benchmark DAC1 USB Pre D/A preamplifier (\$1595; reviewed by John Atkinson, Vol.32 No.3, March 2009 WWW)

Boulder 865 integrated amplifier

(\$12,000; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.32 Nos.4 & 8, April & August 2009 WWW)

Conrad-Johnson Classic SE

preamplifier (\$1750; reviewed by Sam Tellig, Vol.32 Nos.2 & 7, February & July 2009)

Nagra BPS phono preamplifier

(\$2399; reviewed by Michael Fremer & Fred Kaplan, Vol.32 Nos.6, 8, & 10, June, August, & October 2009 WWW)

Parasound Halo JC 1 monoblock

power amplifier (\$8000/pair; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.32 No.9, September 2009 WWW)

Pass Labs XA30.5 power amplifier

(\$5500; reviewed by Brian Damkroger & Erick Lichte, Vol.32 Nos.5 & 8, May & August 2009 WWW)

Peachtree Nova D/A integrated

amplifier (\$1199; reviewed by John Marks, Vol.32 No.8, August 2009 WWW)

Simaudio Moon I-1 integrated

amplifier (\$1700; reviewed by Robert J. Reina, Vol.31 No.12, December 2008 WWW)

Simaudio Moon Evolution P-8

preamplifier (\$15,000; reviewed by John Atkinson, Vol.32 No.9, September 2009 WWW)

VTL MB450 Signature

monoblock power amplifier (\$15,000/pair; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.32 No.3, March 2009 WWW)

ACCESSORY PRODUCT

Sennheiser HD800 headphones

(\$1400; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.32 No.7, July 2009 WWW)

The race for Accessory of the Year is one of the most interesting because it involves such a diverse cast of contenders. This year, the XTZ Room Analyzer (a favorite of multichannel man Kal Rubinson) and the Keith Monks Omni record-cleaning machine (a favorite of LP-loving Art Dudley) locked room modes with brush blocks in a tie for second place. But it was Sennheiser's HD800 headphones that stood apart from the pack.

The HD800 is an all-out attack on the state of the headphone art. Its 56mm ring-radiator transducer is the biggest dynamic driver currently used in any headphone, and its large earpieces are made

from a combination of absorbing composites and functional metal accents that looked and felt great on Wes Phillips's happy head. What Wes found most impressive was the HD800s' "awe-inspiringly huge" soundstage, a quality that even his beloved AKG K701 'phones, winner of our 2006 Accessory of the Year award, couldn't match.

Though the AKG K701 remains a top contender, Wes crowned a new champion: "I was stunned by the Sennheisers' ability to project scale, to reveal dynamic



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(in alphabetical order)

Channel D Pure-Vinyl LP-ripping

program (\$229; reviewed by Michael Fremer, Vol.32 No.3, March 2009)

Keith Monks Audio Works Omni

record-cleaning machine (\$6495; reviewed by Art Dudley, Vol.32 No.5, May 2009 WWW)

PS Audio Power Plant Premier AC

regenerator (\$2195; reviewed by Robert Deutsch, Vol.32 No.2, February 2009 WWW)

Shure SE310 earphones (\$300; reviewed by John Atkinson, Vol.32 No.9, September 2009 WWW)

XTZ Room Analyzer program

(\$320; reviewed by Kalman Rubinson, Vol.31 No.11 & Vol.32 No.11, November 2008 & November 2009 WWW)

nuance, to present timbre with realism," he said. "It may very well be the best headphone I've ever heard—for me."