

## Vitus Audio SL-010 Preamp and SM-010 Mono Amps

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Hans Ole Vitus has quickly become one of my favorite audio designers. Not simply because he designs and builds audio products that are beautifully conceived and constructed, while also providing the highest level of music reproduction performance, no. I admire him because he seems to have done so on his own terms. No over-the-top ad campaigns. No exaggerated claims of other-worldly performance. Since first appearing on the U.S. audio scene at the 2004 CES, no one in high-end audio has made better built products than Vitus, period. Keeping up this tradition of excellence is the less expensive SL-010 preamp and SM-010 mono amps. At \$25,000 and \$50,000, respectively, the term less expensive is a bit of a stretch, but I'll get into that later.



### The Vitus Audio SL-010 Preamp

The SL-010 is a full featured preamp with a built-in phono section. Unfortunately, I didn't have my analog rig available for this review, so my comments will be based on the unit as a linestage for a digital front-end only. The SL-010 is a slightly scaled back version of the venerable Signature SL-101, though it uses much of what makes the SL-101 one of the world's finest linestages. The SL-010 uses high-quality parts and design techniques to ensure state-of-the-art performance in all facets of its operation. What this means to the end user is a system capable of revealing the tiniest musical details and dynamics.

Physically, the SL-010 is identical to its older sibling. It has the distinct, classic Vitus looks that feature massive slabs of beautifully machined aluminum with clean lines, minimalist graphics and a few flush-mounted control buttons for selecting sources and volume control. A small display panel down the center of the faceplate shows the current input in use and volume level. The back shows two fastidiously laid out rows of balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) inputs and outputs. The overall look of the Vitus products reminds me of Great Roman Architecture, timeless.



### **The Vitus Audio SM-010 Mono Amplifiers**

The SM-010 mono amps are a very interesting breed. At first glance it may be easy to simply think of them as scaled-down versions of the heroically sized SM-101 mono amps, but it would be more accurate to think of them as beefed up versions of the wonderful Vitus Audio SS-010 integrated amp that I enjoyed so immensely back in 2007. Though it was somewhat under-powered at only 25wpc (A/AB), it was easily the most potent 25-watts I've ever heard, and drove my Escalante Fremonts with ease. But the SM-010 mono amps take much of the same technology and high-quality parts and separates each channel into its own chassis. This means that each channel now has its own massive power supply and greater internal isolation, allowing it to now produce 40 watts of pure class-A and 100 watts of class-AB power! This also means that if you loved the music rendering capabilities of the SS-010 but wanted or needed more power, then your wish has come true.

Physically, the SM-010s also have the same gorgeous looks as the other Vitus products, but now Hans Ole is offering these, and his other designs, in a variety of colors including red, gold, dark grey and the classic light grey. The components I reviewed were a handsome dark grey.

### **RC010 System Remote**

The brilliance of the Vitus products is not restricted to just the components. Vitus also sent me a full suite of his excellent Andromeda cables which have been discussed at length on this website so I won't go into their merits here. But what controlled the system certainly is noteworthy. The new RC010 system remote control is an ingenious CPU-based device that can control every Vitus component, including their new SCD-010 CD player. This solidly built and thoughtfully designed control unit has an LED display that allows you to scroll through the Vitus components to select the one that you want to utilize. I was able to use the remote on each amp to select the operating mode (class-A or AB) and then go back to using the remote to control the preamp. This remote rocks!



## Listening

If I could change one thing about the Vitus equipment (other than the price) it would be their model naming conviction, which does little to describe what these products provide relative to music reproduction. If I were to name these Vitus products, I'd call the SL-010 the "Musical Illumination" and the SM-010 "Musical Spirit." Okay, okay. So those are some pretty lame sounding names, but you know what I'm talking about.

When I first replaced my BAT VK31SE with the SL-010, I was shocked by how much deeper I could hear into my recordings and how much more holographic the soundstage had become. It was, well ... illuminating. Spending hours playing Kurt Elling's wonderful live recording, *Dedicated to You* [Concord] proved to be more of an experience than a listening session. So detailed, spacious and dimensional was the music rendered that by the time the entire 12-track disc had played I felt as though I had just spent a wonderful night out in one of Chicago's great jazz venues. Track three, the title track, was particularly enjoyable to hear. It began with the gentle plucking of strings which lead to Elling's unique vocal style and the requisite applause from the audience (and me). The SL-010 presents this music in a way that allows you to gain a deeper appreciation for the talents of the musician and the artist. And when partnered with the right amplifier, the results can be sheer bliss. That's where the SM-010 mono amps come in.

The word "synergy" is one of those words that audio reviewers love to use to say that two components sound good together. Merely saying that the SL-010 and SM-010 sound good together is like saying that the Mona Lisa is a nice use of oil and poplar. What the SL-010 and SM-010 combination produces, particularly in class-A mode, goes beyond synergy and into the realm of art. Considering that each performance recorded on compact disc or broadcast across some other medium is in itself a piece of art, the ability to reproduce it as it was created is the apex of what anyone can hope to gain from an audio system. This is what the SL-010 and SM-010 delivers.

On Prince's *One Night Alone... Live!* [NPG Records], he goes through an array of his most popular songs, which is musically satisfying enough, but when he embarks upon the quintessential soul ballad, "Adore," the decidedly female audience erupts (in more ways than one, I'm sure) and what happens is four minutes of a brilliant artist alone in an auditorium of enraptured fans who hang on his every word and key stroke. Prince's ridiculous vocal range and keyboard mastery are on display on this song. I was able to enjoy not only the performance, but the interaction between the artist, his audience and their environment. This is why we buy high-end audio.

The SM-010 gave me the confidence to be able to drive my speakers as loudly as I wanted to without fear of losing any of the essence of the music. Even complex recordings like Andreas Vollenweider's *Cosmopoly* [Sony Classical] could not shake the rock solid foundation that these amps provided. This recording is a feast of rhythms, colors, and spectacular vocal performances from the likes of Bobby McFerrin, Carly Simon, and Milton Nascimento. Vollenweider does some serious style fusion with jazz, rock and even orchestral music. The SM-010 allowed me to get hall-filling, yet musically accurate sound from this disc even at high volume levels, whether it was from the thunderous low-end of Vollenweider's harp on track two, "Stella" or the intricate use of McFerrin's voice on "Elle Chelle."

Simply put there was not a single disc that I put on that I did not get a greater sense of enjoyment from. Whether it was the acoustic jazziness of Erin Bode's *Over and Over* at low late night volumes or the metal/funk of Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain* delivered at dead-raising volumes, the Vitus system allowed the music to maintain its artistry.

# the Stereo Times

The Complete Audiophile Magazine

## Conclusion

Now at \$25,000 and \$50,000 respectively, the Vitus Audio SL-010 Preamp and SM-010 mono amps may be “less expensive” compared to their older siblings, but they are hardly “more affordable” as Hans Ole Vitus refers to them on his website. But the issue of affordability is a purely subjective one and must be considered by the individual who may be in a position to purchase a product of this caliber. I, unfortunately, am not such a person. But if I were, I could not be happier or prouder than to own these products and be able to truly enjoy the artistry of music within my own mansion... that is when I’m not driving around in my Bugatti Veyron or playing a round at Pebble Beach with my solid gold golf clubs.

The Vitus Audio SS-010 and SM-010 get my highest recommendation to those who can afford them, and are without a doubt my “Most Wanted Components” for 2009.



*Dave Thomas*

## Specifications - SL-010

Inputs:

3 x unbalanced (RCA)

2 x balanced (XLR)

Input resistance:

10Kohm RCA

600ohm XLR

Outputs:

2 x unbalanced (RCA)

1 x balanced (XLR)

Output resistance: 75 ohms

Maximum gain: High Gain 12dB

Max output voltage: +/- 20V

Bandwith: DC-600Khz

S/N Ratio: -110dB

Internal cabling: Andromeda by VA

Dimensions Linestage: 135 x 435 x 402 mm (H x W x D)

Remote controlled: YES

Total weight: ~24 Kg.

**Price: SL-010 Preamp - \$25,000.00**

## Specifications - SM-010

Rated Output Power:

40W Class A / 100W Class AB

Frequency Response:

DC to +800KHz

Signal to Noise Ration:

> 110dB

THD+ Noise:

Better than 0,01%

Input Sensitivity:

1,3V RMS

Input Impedance:

XLR = 600\_

Slew Rate:

> 35V/  $\mu$ s

Power Consumption (RMS):

Standby:< 2W

Class AB: 50W

Class A: 250W

Dimensions (W x H x D): 435x130x430 mm

Weight: 35Kg

**Price: SM-010 Mono Amps - \$50,000.00/pair**