

NEW PRODUCT:

ARIES CERAT Protos Integrated Amplifier

(Retail Price HK\$240,000)

ARIES CERAT Protos is a tube & solid state hybrid integrated amplifier. If you just look at the appearance of this integrated amplifier, you may not be able to guess its "sky-high" price, but if you have the opportunity to listen to its sound performance, there is no way that you could imagine an integrated amplifier with a rated output of 2 x 20 watts RMS could achieve such unprecedented high-end sound performance. For such an audio product, any brilliant gifted writers would have failed to faithfully record its great design achievements that carry forward from the past and linking up with the future. When I was listening to Protos' magical playback capabilities, my only suggestion is that audiophiles must need to listen to it themselves so as to understand its breakthrough powerful driving abilities. Protos really restores 100% of the source to playback the music which is simply magical. If you start from the perspective of "art is priceless", any sky-high price it asks for is actually a bargain.

According to the report written by Ma Chung Chiu, editor of this magazine, in the last issue, Protos driving the British classic compact loudspeaker, ATC SCM-7, has extraordinary "god-level" performance. After I read his report, I went to the Central showroom of the distributor of ARIES CERAT in Hong Kong for a demo of it as I would like to find out what level does the Protos belong to. The result turns out to prove that Protos can drive a pair of ATC SCM 50 Towers loudspeakers in their demo room with the sound performance which was absolutely stunning and earth-shattering. It was one of the most beautiful sound performance I have ever heard since being in the audio industry for decades. If only judging its playback capability of an integrated amplifier, the Protos is undoubtedly the best sound quality integrated amplifier I have ever heard. The overall listening experience on that day was so good that it was impeccable. Such stunning Hi Fi sound effects/performance is due to good cooperation with the right time, the right place and various factors. The distributor's showroom "Stereo Kingdom" with the demo room size of 14' x 20' filled with sound-absorbing objects. The famous prerequisite for best sound is the room acoustics. The decisive factor is that the showroom manager "Jacky" who has better sound tuning skills than anyone else is also indispensable. The Playback Designs CD system together with the high-end ability of ATC loudspeakers, are no doubt to be able to playback the beautiful music. However, the equipment that stands out the most and contributes most to the entire playback process must be the Protos, an integrated

amplifier, can create such perfect musical realm which can hardly be criticized. In fact, it is really shocking, but the supreme truth for audiophiles is "listening is believing/accepting". After listening to the sound of Protos, I really wonder that isn't it unnecessary for the audio designers have ever spent so much time and effort to produce a separate system with preamp and power amplifier?

Protos has this amazing achievement, witness the designer, Stavros Danos's genius-level creative ability. He founded ARIES CERAT just slightly more than ten years ago, but it has already established a famous presence in Europe. In addition to the fact that ARIES CERAT is the first high-end audio manufacturer in Cyprus, an island country in the Mediterranean, it is extreme rare that it has rapidly and in a short period of time got famous in several countries (including Mainland China) and won a group of loyal fans. Since the High End Audio market was formed in in the 70s of last century, Stavros Danos has quickly become an icon high end audio designer/engineer. Such experience can only be comparable with the American Mark Levinson at his early years. As today's top audio manufacturer, ARIES CERAT products consist of digital equipment, amplifiers and loudspeakers offering "One-Stop" audio products. Although everything is incredibly expensive, it is still in short supply. The brilliant success of audio product being designed by Stavros Danos is still in its infancy segment. However, there is now a large amount of information available on the internet can be found about the process of ARIES CERAT and Stavros Danos becoming famous in the industry. Check it out and you'll find that Protos as an integrated amplifier may be the most expensive Integrated Amplifier in the world, but it is only the manufacturer's entry-level product. ARIES CERAT's higher-end products often cost more than one million Hong Kong dollars. Not to mention the retail price of its flagship horn loudspeaker system which is 800 million HK dollars. Also it has already settled in a private cave of an enthusiast in Guangdong Province, playing beautiful music. In other words, if you want to experience the supreme sound quality of ARIES CERAT products at the lowest cost, Protos is the best choice.

As a senior audiophile, I have listened to countless hybrid (tube & solid state) amplifiers in the past. After passing through thousands of sails, I can't disagree that in the most high end systems, the separate system of preamp and power amplifier are necessary. Although historically there have been very few integrated amplifiers enchanting to listen, like the MARANZ 18 (solid state amp) and MCINTOSH MX110 (tube amp). However, when the source players and the loudspeakers are the super high end class products, the clarity and potential capacity of the integrated amplifiers are significantly inferior to those separate systems of preamp and power amp. All in

all, once the audiophiles have experienced with the separate system of preamp and power amp, the integrated amplifier will easily be given up. Now listening to Protos, the most surprising thing to me is its clarity which is boundless, and is not inferior to any of the separate system of preamp & power amp at all. While playing back of the full orchestra music, Protos demonstrates its strong, powerful and invincible momentum. The sense of strength is so powerful and invincible that as if its rated output power of 20W x 2 were clearly "under value". Listening is believing and accepting - its power is stronger than many so-called 200 watts x 2 tube amp or solid state amp. I believe Protos stated its output specifications are based on the numerical values measured by the instrument. However, why is it so transcendent with amazing manifestations when driving the loudspeakers? I am also curious about how, and not to say, although the ATC SCM-50 Tower is not really a low sensitivity loudspeaker, but it is not easy to drive it upside down. Jacky played his signature audition album on that day - ARGO Noye's Fludde's "Noah's Ark"- the chorus with bells and drums ringing with the 3D sound stage breaking-through the walls; the complete details, the surging bass and the sharp dynamics are definitely the best I have ever heard. The amplifier performs at its best. If you listen to the sound with your eyes closed, it is impossible to believe that the sound actually comes from a 20-watt integrated amplifier. Protos is a tube & solid state hybrid design integrated amplifier with FET for output, and it uses 6j11p-e small tubes in the front end for sound tuning. According to the online interview with Stavros Danos talking about the difference of the tones in the design of tube and solid state amplifier. Obviously he thinks that the sound of the tube is relatively pleasant. In the listening room of "Stereo Kindgom" (Sound Concepts' showroom), the timbre created by Protos is rich, bright and pleasure with overtones, but the tone is still biased towards the harmonious and beautiful characteristics of the tube amplifier. The design of tube & solid state hybrid amplifier is not a new thing. Every now and then, there is similar designs appeared in the market. However, all the tube & solid state hybrid amplifiers I've ever heard of have a problem, that is, theoretically, the design following the golden mean, hoping to get the best of both advantages (from the tube and the solid state) , but in fact it is often turned out to be unpleasant on both sides. There is neither the rich tone of a tube amp nor the clean and neat low frequency speed/transient of a solid state amp. As a whole, it gives people the feeling of "this is a difficult thing to achieve since the ancient times". In order to understand how successful the Protos' hybrid design is, I specially brought an audition CD with me and gave it to Jacky to playback. "The Girl From Ipanema" by Stan Getz recorded in the 1960s, Bossa Nova performance being mastering by the recording master, Bob Simpson. The sound of the saxophone, guitar and double bass are so beautiful that I

can almost enjoy a glass of good wine. At home, I use the "Western Electric" antique amplifier driving the WILSON WAMM speaker system and the sound performance was so good that I asked for nothing more. Now I switch the listening location to playback at Stereo Kingdom with the Protos/ATC system, the elegance tone and vividness of all the different instruments are completely in line with the combination of "Western Electric/WAMM" system at the same level, which proves that Stavros Danos designed this tube and solid state hybrid integrated amplifier with the excellent sound calibration technique and it's hardly to find someone better than him. As Protos has such an excellent sound performance, I really can't imagine how fantastic the sound of its higher-end, million dollars, amplifiers from the same manufacturer would be?

"There are talented people in every generation" – based on the sound performance of Protos, Stavros Danos is the only one audio engineer wizard available today. I'm sure that we will certainly often to have the opportunity to appreciate his extraordinary creativities in the market in the near future.