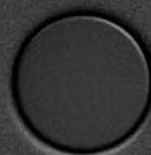
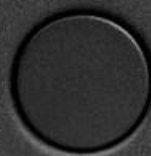




INPUT

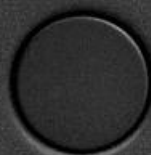


MENU



SELECT

STANDBY







## Integrated amplifier Vitus Audio RI-101 mk. II

Author: Andreas Wenderoth Photography: Rolf Winter

**The name Vitus Audio is synonymous with elaborate class A amplifier behemoths so large and heavy that they can hardly be moved by anyone without superpowers. The RI-101 Mk. II integrated amplifier is comparatively modest, weighing in at a slender 42 kilos. It is the entry-level model into the Vitus world – and yet anything but a lightweight.**

### Beauty through neutrality

It's always one of those things when you hear an amplifier (and of course any other part of a hi-fi system) not at home, but rather, in an unfamiliar room and under conditions with which you are not one hundred percent familiar. You get a certain impression, that's true, but you can only truly make a judgement if you know exactly what contribution the other components make to the sound. So I can no longer exactly say under what circumstances I heard the predecessor of my current test unit a few years ago. I only remember that the amplifier at that time – for all its quality – did not grab me nearly as much as the device I have been enjoying in my listening room for the last few weeks.

What I had perhaps missed in terms of dynamics and speed during this first somewhat vague contact with Vitus, has now proven to be the amplifier's primary strength. It plays with finesse and power simultaneously, doesn't gloss over anything, but opens up the music to such an extent that you can almost listen into it layer by layer. Please do not misunderstand: this is not one of those devices that demonstrates purely analytically with the greatest possible resolution how it can transmit individual frequencies better than other amplifiers, no: it is wonderfully illuminating, but the amplifier does not draw attention to itself, but instead is wonderfully flowing and always to the benefit of the music. It shows details that I haven't heard with my own pre-power combination (which may be due to my not-so-new power amp), but details alone, as I know from many other amps, do not make music. This amplifier, however, performs in an enthralling musical way.

But external appearances first: the unit captivates with simple elegance, an excellently crafted black housing, minimalist Nordic design with a clear design language, rounded corners (and ventilation slits on the top and sides). Despite its not inconsiderable weight, there is nothing 'heavy' about this integrated amplifier. It is, in my opinion, an extremely successful design, in the centre of which is the central, slightly recessed display, which is barely more than a strip. The yellow-orange digital display is adorned with the discreet logo, made up of the two letters V and A: Vitus Audio. To the left and right of the display extend two large areas of anodised



Originalgröße





aluminium. On this wonderfully restrained front panel, three buttons each side, responsible for source selection, volume (including mute function), stand-by and menu. Behind the simple menu button is an extensive array of options. From brightness control to individual volume settings for the individual sources, there are so many choices that I can't even list them all.

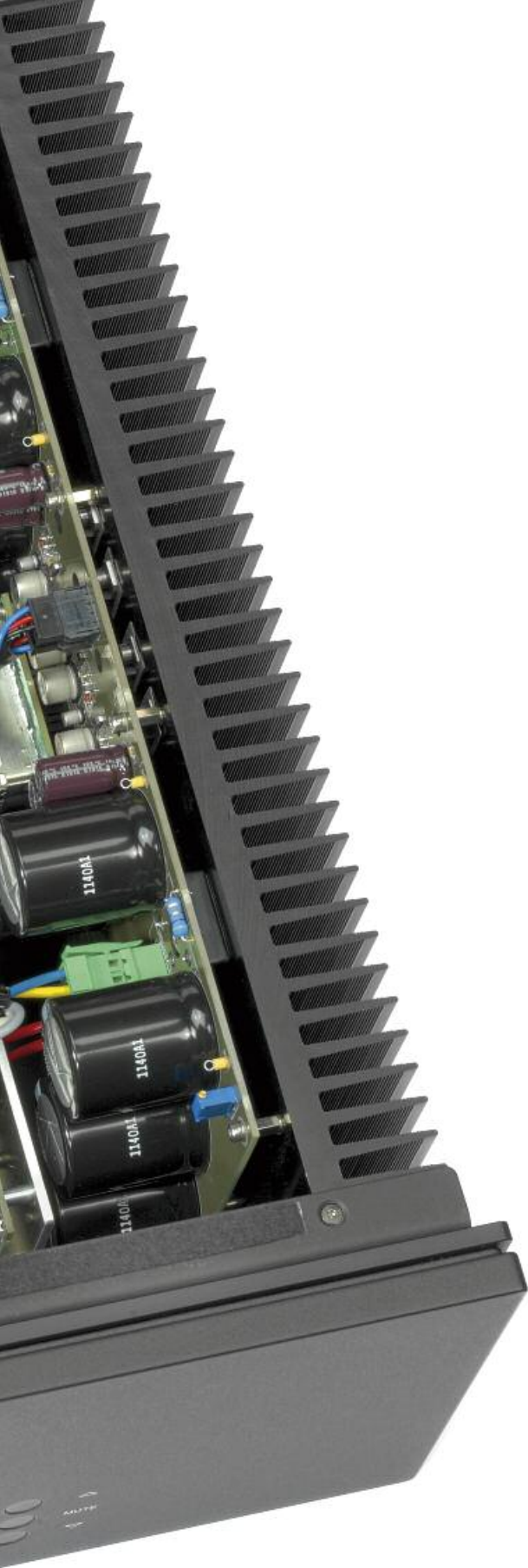
The remote control is a common and functional Apple remote control that continues the artful understatement of the amplifier's appearance. Personally, I very much like the flat little thing; if someone will only accept housings milled from solid billet, he will have to suck it up. And he will do so gladly, I dare say, as soon as he hears the first tones of the Vitus. But we'll get to that. I switch the unit on via the remote control from stand-by mode, "Init" appears on the display, a gentle relay click is heard five times, then the source ("Line 3") appears and in exactly ten seconds the unit is ready to play. You should then really give it a couple more minutes, but my impression is that you don't need to wait the usual half

hour before the amplifier makes music worthy of the name.

A first impression: The "Pictures At An Exhibition" in Ravel's arrangement for orchestra (Analogue Productions, RCA Victor Red Seal, LSC-2201, US 2013, LP). The amplifier brings out the brass of the Promenade very finely, the orchestra fans out with impressive depth, the sound is transparent and open. The fact that this is a bridged amplifier with enormous output power – 300 watts per channel into 8 ohms and 600 watts per channel into 4 ohms – becomes apparent when the gnome enters the stage. Now comes into play the immense power which the RI-101 Mk. II can supply at the drop of a hat. It is immensely dynamic, almost like an ambush and very lifelike. Instinctively, one ducks for cover from the timpani beats, although this is unnecessary, because despite all that power, the amplifier has its lower registers completely under control at all times. What I personally find particularly pleasing is how the Vitus sounds so involving and by no means with that posh reserve that puts the listener in row 17.







No, in many passages I rather have the impression of being in the middle of the music. As if I were sitting between the musicians. The Old Castle, which seems wistful, as if from a distant century, via the RI-101 Mk. II leads to a time long past. The saxophone, which in Ravel's arrangement represents the troubadour's lute, captivates the listener almost magically. The impulses are immense, the rhythm of the piece is excellently transmitted. And when the cattle truck with its big wooden wheels rumbles along and the bass slowly swells in the drum roll, it is an almost physical experience beyond the images that arise in the mind (it's as if the amplifier has activated areas of my brain that have lain dormant for quite a while). You sit there with your mouth open, filled with the joy of deep musical listening. Even a comparatively "weak" recording of Pictures, like the old DGG recording with Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft, 139 010 SLPM, DE 1966, LP), is still more illuminated (and thus more interesting) than I have previously experienced in my own listening room. This certainly awakens a desire for more.

For mastermind Hans-Ole Vitus, the ideal amplifier is one that isn't fatiguing, but is rousing and emotional, because music without emotion is ultimately "just noise". But it must also guarantee the highest resolution without (and in my experience this is a real feat!) compromising the emotion. According to Vitus, the RI-101 Mk. II sounds very similar to the much more expensive SIA-025, but with less Class A. The topology is similar, but with a "high biased Class AB amplifier" approach (about the first twelve watts are driven in pure Class A, after which the amplifier switches to Class AB) and a simplified preamp stage.

About the history of the amplifier: the RI-100 was on the market for eight years before it was superseded by the RI-101. At that point, the entire preamplifier stage was redesigned and balanced, the output stages revised and the transformer design and power supply for the analogue sections of the amplifier were optimised. With the RI-101 Mk. II, the digital power supply in particular has been redesigned and optimised, primarily benefiting listeners

Neatly constructed circuit boards: The preamplifier section on the back panel with the volume control board on top. The black box front left contains the power transformer. An optional DAC/streamer can be inserted into the gap behind it up to the rear boards



## Integrated amplifier Vitus Audio RI-101 mk. II



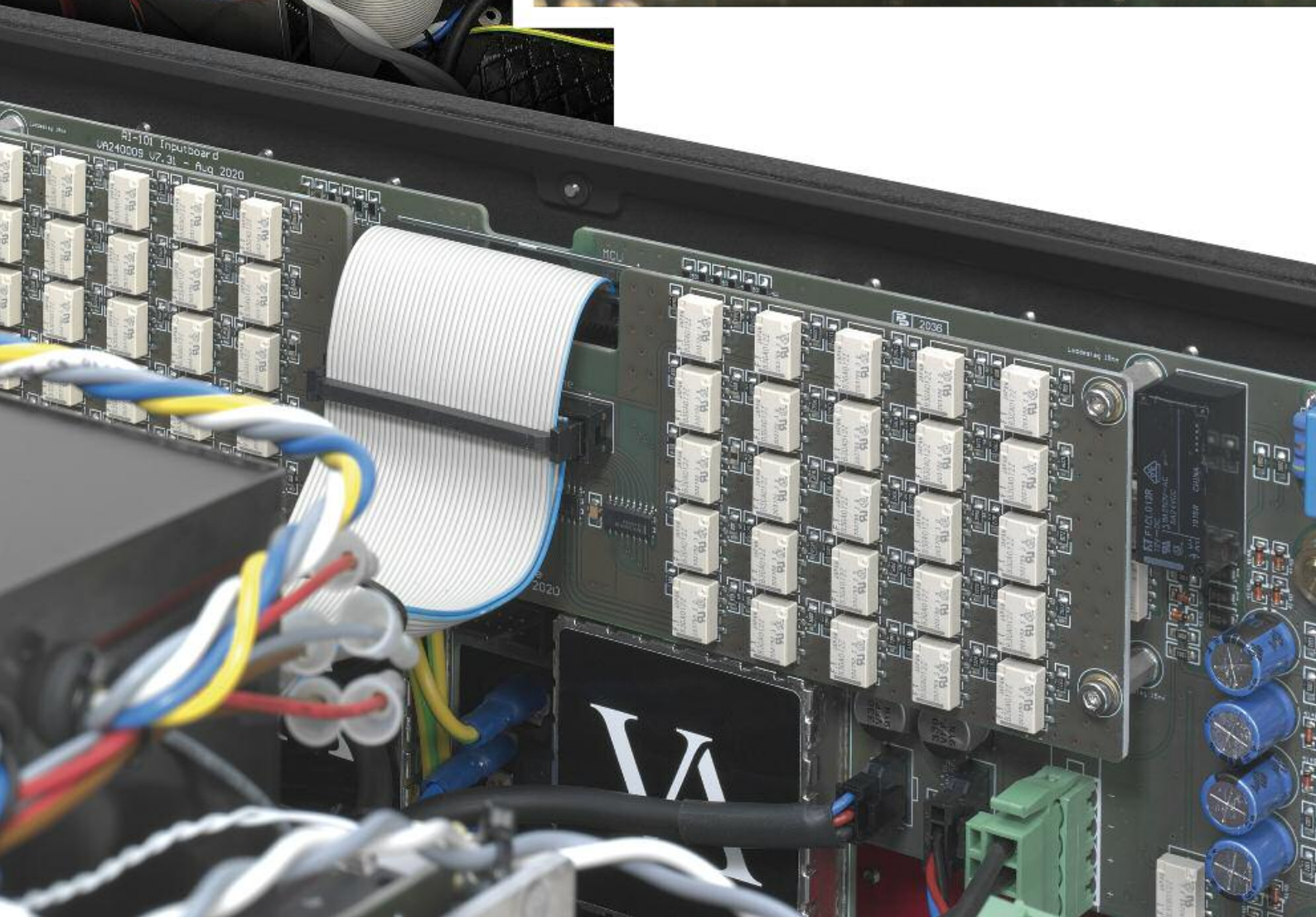
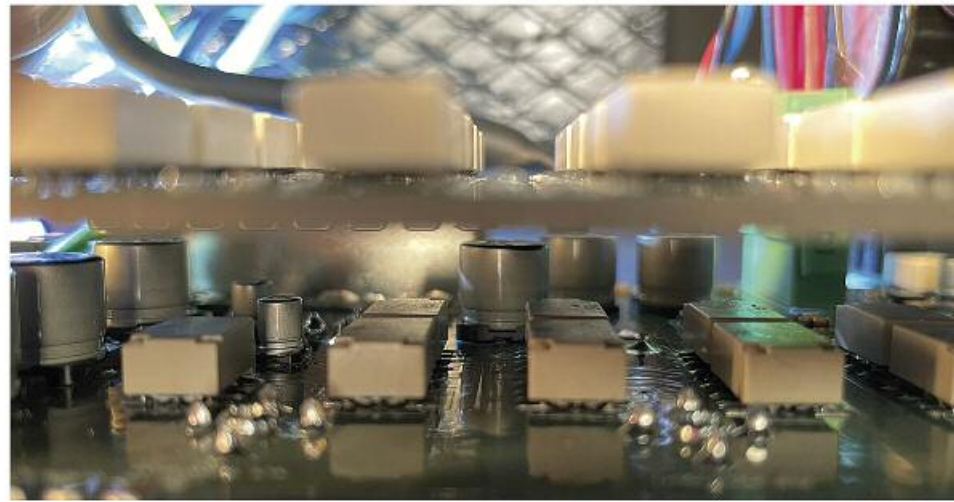
who use the rear enclosure slots for a DAC/streamer option (Vitus are going to release a new DAC/streamer board later this year that will also support Roon). It's also possible to upgrade from the RI-101 to the RI-101 Mk. II - for half the price of a new one.

The preamplifier, like its predecessor, is balanced, and now has the same relay-controlled volume control used in the more expensive series, and some local negative feedback; the power amplifier does without any. Vitus is not a fan of global negative feedback because it affects the sound performance. No negative feedback in combination with bandwidth-strong small-signal modules, that is his preferred sound recipe. He doesn't wish to reveal exactly how this is achieved. Only this: in order to avoid the distortions in which occur in a truly symmetrical setup when in-phase and out-of-phase parts of the circuit are not in sync, so to speak, requires considerable effort and expense. But Hans-Ole Vitus has never shied away from such things. It is, to some extent, his *modus operandi*.

When I am interested in a product, I always want to know what kind of person is behind it. After all, it is his philosophy, his knowledge and his experience that has gone into the device. Those of you who are familiar with Vitus' biography can safely skip this paragraph. For everyone else, fast-forward: his passion for music began when he was eight years old and started playing drums in the local marching band. A few years later, he is the drummer in a youth band. At 13, he gets his first stereo system from his parents, which would spark his lifelong passion for music and audio equipment. Very soon, the first upgrades occur: he upgrades his Pioneer system with a

The small square module is the fully balanced input amplifier for the power amplifier. To the right of it are the first voltage regulators for the preamplifier. The six large black towers are the main capacitor banks in the power supply – to minimise ripple. Their proximity to the actual power transistors is exemplary







self-made preamplifier and a power amplifier which he got through a local hi-fi magazine. Now his interest in electronics is so permanently awakened that he wants to develop his own devices with which beautiful sounds can be elicited. He decides to become an electronics engineer, and after graduating in 1986 he works in various industries, including a component distributor and later at Texas Instruments, where he is responsible for technical design in Denmark, Norway and southwest Sweden. In January 1995 he founded Vitus Audio, and eight years later the first of his own products were on the market. In 2005 Vitus finally resigned from Texas Instruments and from then on was purely his own boss. Hans-Ole Vitus lives about 20 kilometres from his 1200-square-metre factory site, including his own PCB production facility. He has eight employees and plans to hire two more for production this year.

Let's listen to the amplifier again. With the wonderful disc by the New York Trio *Blues In The Night* (Venus Records, TKJV-19100, Japan 2002, LP). Translucent, airy, open (and a little reminiscent of old TBM recordings) finally the first track of the B-side: "My Funny Valentine". Of course, you've heard this hundreds of times before, but rarely like this: without any creeping prelude, the piece starts in full instrumentation. And the amplifier is there imme-

diately. Seemingly effortlessly interspersed piano chords, which are continued with a few reduced notes. The double bass resonates deeply, truly beautiful timbre. Cymbals, snare, hi-hat in wonderful presence, the drums seem like someone has set them up in my living room. The tense dragging and re-tightening of the tempo makes the listener a witness to a totally compelling interplay. The real appeal of the piece comes from the restrained virtuosity (which is very evident in other pieces on the record) that the musicians impose upon themselves. Timing and rhythm are at the heart of this interpretation. And the amplifier makes that clear. Makes it happen. And lets us be part of it. It does not interfere with the rhythm, yes, the music grooves immensely through the RI 101 Mk. II, but it doesn't put its own signature on the music (as many effective amplifiers do). It is fast, with accurate timing, clean and fully in control at all times.

---

## Partnering equipment

**Turntable:** Raven LS **Tonearm:** Acoustical Systems Aquilar **Cartridges:** Soundsmith "Hyperion", Kiseki Blue **Phono stages:** Tom Evans The Groove 20th Anniversary MK II, Aurorasound Vida Supreme **Preamplifier:** Audio Research LS 28 **Power amplifier:** Pass XA-30.5 (modified by Sehring) **Loudspeakers:** Sehring S 916 curved **Cables:** Acoustic Revive Power Sensual and Power Absolute (mains), Gutwire Uno-S (XLR cable); Gutwire Ultimate Ground (earth cable); Harmonic Technology Amour (RCA); Harmonic Technology Pro-9 (speaker cable); power strip: CT Audio Resonance Technology Mirage Bleu **Accessories:** Furutech FT-SWS NCF wall socket, GigaWatt G-C20A circuit breaker and LC-Y MK3 + 3X4 in-wall cable, Quadraspire Reference rack, CT Audio Resonance Technology - Steppness I + II, Doppio, Pace, Songer; Woopies, Acoustic System resonators, audiophile room resonators, Audiophile Schumann generator, Acoustic Revive RR-777 Schumann generator (with improved power supply), Audio Magic Beewax Ultimate + Audio Magic Premier Ultimate fine wire fuses, Lyra SPT stylus cleaner, Onzow ZeroDust, Acoustic Revive ECI-50 contact spray, Cardas Frequency Sweep and Burn-in Record

---

Top left: The EI core transformer is hidden behind the black box, the slow start and the power supply for the control system in front of it on the left

At the top right you can see the preamplifier board

Below: The circuit board for the relay-controlled volume control, below, in the black box with the Vitus company logo, the fully balanced preamplifier module



## Integrated amplifier Vitus Audio RI-101 mk. II



The two red rectangles on the back of the unit are the slots into which a DAC/streamer can optionally be inserted. There are three balanced inputs and two unbalanced

By the way, the integrated amplifier is from the Vitus “Reference” series, which is a bit misleading because this is the entry-level series at Vitus (above it are the Signature and Masterpiece series). Of course, this could be mistaken to mean that Vitus considers their entry-level amps to be better than other companies’ top-of-the-range amplifiers. But the company boss vehemently denies this. The series name, he says, merely stands for their design philosophy, i.e. his general approach to development. In 2004, he also abandoned the former Vitus motto “We start where all the others stop” because he did not want to place himself above others (he would rather leave the judgement of the devices to the listeners). What he meant by that sentence was simply that he never made compromises to reach certain price points, as is usual in the hi-fi industry (and in most other industries, too, of course). He always wanted to build the best possible products, no matter what the cost. For his first (Signature) series,

he spent four years just developing the transformers. The “Reference” is now the first approach toward a “cost-optimised” Vitus product series, the main compromise compared to the “Signature” being that it does not contain pure Class A amplifiers. This allows for smaller heat sinks, different transformers and thus simpler and less extreme enclosures - which significantly reduces costs. Whereas in the pure Class A series six millimetre thick aluminium is fundamentally used for the housings, in this case it is “only” three millimetres. The front panel is also slightly less protruding at just two instead of three centimetres.

When developing the linear power supplies (which are always a special cost item at Vitus), the main focus was on the voltage drop between no-load and full-load, which can be quite high with standard transformers. By using the right combination of core type, core material, copper type, among other things, they were able to reduce this to as low as 1.5



per cent, which makes the power amplifier very resilient in the lower frequencies. There are several main capacitor banks with a total capacity of 120,000 µF per channel to reduce ripple, up to six regulator stages for the preamplifier section, the output stage comes without regulation. When asked about the components on the circuit boards, Vitus is somewhat cagey. Yes, they would also use “particular capacitors in a special selection” and exclusively “high-current resistors with very low tolerances”. Nothing more is given away.

So instead let's let the music speak once again: Convergence (EmArcy 374 593-2, EU 2014, LP) with Malia and Yello sound tinkerer Boris Blank. Heard it many times before. But now it suddenly seems as if a fog has evaporated to suddenly reveal a huge sound stage. The bass in “Celestial Echo” is deep and powerful, but always controlled. The resolution so good that I hear details I had never noticed on the record before. That in the second repetition of “Here I am” during the chorus and also a little later, the voice was doubled. I also hear significantly less distortion than through my own system, which in some places may sound less spectacular but 1000 times more honest. My old Pass amplifier tends to make instruments seem a bit bigger than they actually are (which can have its appeal, as not only flat panel speaker owners will know). With the Vitus, I have the impression that the scale of the reproduction is “more correct”. And indeed a violin does not grow to the size of a viola. What is there to say against size and beauty? The answer is: authenticity, genuineness. You can create beauty with circuit tricks and even distortion, but real beauty, and I perhaps see this a little differently today than I did a few years ago, can (and must!) come from absolute neutrality – by the way, all really good tube amplifiers also sound extremely neutral. However, to achieve this (and this is the other, unfortunately usually very expensive side of the coin) you usually need extremely high-quality electronics. Otherwise it can quickly sound boring and rather banal - especially with solid state gear. I maintain that the RI-

101 Mk. II is one of those rare devices that really does sound neutral. And arouses emotions precisely by doing so. The amplifier is “a little less emotional” than his pure Class A amplifiers, according to Vitus. But in this case, that “little” seems to me to be much more than I am accustomed to from most other transistor amplifiers with which I am familiar. Hats off!



---

### Vitus Audio RI-101 mk. II integrated amplifier

**Construction principle:** Class A/B transistor integrated amplifier without global negative feedback **Inputs:** 3 x balanced (XLR), 2 x unbalanced (RCA) **Outputs:** 1 pair of speakers, 1 x pre/tape (XLR) **Output power:** 2 x 300 watts (8 ohms), 2 x 600 watts (4 ohms) **Bandwidth:** ≥800 kHz **Special features:** Volume control via relay-controlled resistor network. Expandable with DAC board (+ 3500 euros) or DAC and streamer (+ 3700 euros), a new DAC board (which will then also support Roon) to be released this year **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 43.5/18.2/47 cm **Weight:** 42 kg **Warranty:** 2 years (6 years with registration) **Price:** 15000 euros

**Contact:** Audio Offensive Hifi-Vertrieb, Münchener Str. 5, 14612 Falkensee, telephone 03322/2131655, [www.audio-offensive.de](http://www.audio-offensive.de)

---