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EAR 834P tube phono preamplifier [▲ back to Reviews](#)

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The EAR 834P makes music. You know, you spend some money, you expect good sound. You spend some more money, you expect better sound. I do. The EAR easily exceeds this "value proposition" by providing a higher level of enjoyment and connection to the music than I expected at the entry fee. I used several different cartridges with it over the period of about a year. A Benz Ruby for the most part, a Koetsu Urushi, and a Shure V15-VMR.

The EAR had these characteristics: somewhat "fluffy" (hey - a new audio term!) but very deep and powerful bass, a beautiful midrange (really outstanding), and a sweet, rolled off sounding but extended treble. A good match for the Benz, not bad for the Shure, and a very seductive but can't-live-with-it-for-long match for the Urushi because they have the same strengths and weaknesses. Really, the midrange of the EAR/Urushi was painfully lovely. Female voices especially came through this pairing with a feeling of virtual reality. It was like a good book that you can't put down. Audio nirvana from about 100 to 5k Hz. (Get the picture?) In this range, the EAR was entirely competitive with the phono section of the Nagra PL-P (\$9500). Note: The Nagra's phono section is one of the best I have ever heard and very hard to fault; its line stage is okay. The control flexibility of the Nagra allows one to use just the phono stage and still be able to control the volume.

I would suggest this phono preamp in a system with a somewhat bright or forward transducer - either speakers or phono cartridge, or both. Or if you are not particularly interested in the top and the lowest of the bottom octave. During the period I had it, it worked flawlessly. I had the black version with volume control, and used the stock tubes. I bypassed the volume control because by the time the volume control started to work, it was



already too loud. One other thing I did was change the input impedance by changing R1 and R2 to higher values. This greatly helped the treble "darkness" that I heard and which was noted in other reviews. It makes sense: 500 ohms really dampened the Ruby too much. 2k to 10k ohms was better in my system, and quite acceptable. Changing the resistors banished the 'dark side' from the EAR (and, of course, voided the warranty). Another example of 'no free lunch'. And so it goes...

Overall rating: 8 LPs, for the outstanding midrange