

COVER STORY

Prima Luna EVO 400

\$4,699 each

primaluna-usa.com

Listening to the MoFi version of Santana's *Caravanserai*, in the context of a significant system, I'm amazed at how far PrimaLuna has come in almost two decades. They have gone quietly about their business of constant refinement, now offering the EVO 400 amp and pre that you see here. And at only (I know, *that word*) \$4,699 each for the power amplifiers, which can be turned into monoblocks at the flip of a switch, and \$4,499 for the matching preamplifier, these components both match or exceed the performance of stuff we've reviewed that costs more. Way more.

It's no secret to anyone following us for a while, my journey with PrimaLuna goes back to before TONE. It goes to ground zero. The first hifi review I wrote for *The Absolute Sound* was the PrimaLuna ProLogue One. That cool little integrated amp was where the brand began, and you could order it with a set of KT88s or EL34s, for \$999 or \$1,099. I bought the review sample, and other than a brief stay at a former staffers house, I've been playing music on it for going on 17 years without a hitch. How's that for reliability?

We've either owned or reviewed most of the PrimaLuna lineup, and where they had ProLogue, DiaLogue, and HP products, there are merely the new EVO products, with integrated amplifiers and separate preamplifiers in 100, 200, 300, and 400 configurations. As you might expect, as you move up the line, more performance is available, and more music is revealed.

A simple recipe for success

PrimaLuna does something that is almost deceptively simple; they stick to the plan. They came out swinging with that first ProLogue, with reviewers and audio enthusiasts all blown away by the quality of fit and finish, along with meticulous construction. They haven't cut corners anywhere, and they've improved the breed, with better parts and refinement of the circuitry that has won them tons of awards (and more importantly) happy customers worldwide.





A look underneath the chassis of both the EVO400 power and preamplifiers reveals beautiful point to point wiring like you'd see on a vintage McIntosh or Marantz amplifier, but honestly, it's executed even better. The execution is so tidy, it looks like the streets in Sim City. This is as near perfection as I've ever seen in anything at any price. Parts quality is equally impressive, with dual-mono construction throughout, (including the power supplies) and dual vacuum tube rectifiers in the preamplifier.

One of the most significant additions to the EVO400 pair is their balanced capability, so if you have a phono preamp or DAC that uses balanced outputs (like our Boulder, or the BAT that's in for review), you can now integrate balanced components into your system without buying adaptors. Those wanting the refinement of the EVO400, but not needing balanced inputs and outputs can go for the less expen-

sive (\$3,799) EVO 300. It's also a handy touch for tape lovers that the EVO preamplifiers now have a tape output.

Stunning sound

All of this would be for nothing if the EVOs didn't deliver the goods sonically. We have in-depth reviews of both components coming on the TONE website shortly, but suffice to say these are both world class components.

The T's and I's

Finally, because these are both tube components (or all three should you choose to use them as monoblocks), they are *heavy*. The EVO400 preamplifier weighs 52.8 pounds. That's more than most power amplifiers weigh! And the EVO400 power amplifiers weigh 68.2 pounds each. Save your back, get some help!

The simple remote allows you to switch the EVO400 amplifier between triode and ultralinear mode from the comfort of your listening chair.

The EVO400 ships with 8 EL-34 tubes per amplifier. Where many tube amplifier manufacturers are telling you to re-tube after as little as 2000 hours, PrimaLuna amplifiers have always been incredibly easy on tubes, because they don't drive them as hard, and use more tubes per channel in their output stages. After 17 years, our ProLogue One still has the original driver tubes, and they even test within spec! PrimaLuna has chosen the 12AU7 tube in the driver and gain stages of both amp and pre, which makes tube replacement and tube rolling, for those who fancy experimenting with their sound, that much easier. And much, much less expensive.

For many of you, the 70 watts per channel that the EVO400 produces will be enough. Those who have inefficient speakers or really like to crank it up can go the monoblock route, and like some amplifiers that need to be sent to the factory for modification, this mode is only a flick of the switch away. As is the ability to use these amplifiers in triode mode. For those unfamiliar, triode mode is a little sweeter than standard operation, but the amplifier produces half as much power as a result.



The bottom line is that the adjustability gives you more options and flexibility is a wonderful thing in audio. No one gives you more sheer flexibility than PrimaLuna. The full reviews will be out shortly, as there is so much more to go over with these new EVO amplifiers. But if you've never heard PrimaLuna, these are well worth an audition. They are some of the finest vacuum tube components we've had the

pleasure of listening to. The EVO 400 amplifiers will be staying around as a permanent reference—and we've had the opportunity to use some much more expensive amplifiers. These are the best bang for the buck going in top-line tube amplifiers. Nothing offers more performance per dollar (and per pound, according to the PL website!!) than these.



The Prima Luna EVO400

Peripherals

Analog source

Grand Prix Audio Monaco/Tri Planar, Koetsu Jade Platinum, Luxman PD-717/Kiseki Purple Heart

Phono stage

Pass Labs XS Phono

Digital source

dCS Vivaldi One

Speakers

Sonus faber Stradivari

Cable

Cardas Clear, Tellurium Q Statement

