



## The Amplification Connection: Part II

by MGD

We're moving quickly now, I think you'll enjoy the following.

**The Simaudio Moon W-3 stereo amp, \$3,195. Simaudio Ltd., 95 Du Tremblay St., Unit #3, Boucherville, Quebec, Canada J4B 7K4. ph 450.449.221; fax 450.449.9947; e-mail info@simaudio.com; www.simaudio.com.**

The review here is of the *second* Simaudio Moon W3 sent to BFS for review. You've heard the stories of UPS going gorilla on a parcel. Well, they certainly left their imprint on the first amp sent to us (tore the power transformer loose). They ruined it. With time, a second W3 arrived and this time in perfect condition.

The units from Simaudio are in some respects different from components received from Other companies... they are so beautifully built. Which isn't to say that other companies don't make competently constructed components, they do. But this equipment always looks like it just came from a jeweler's shop, all clean, pristine and perfectly assembled. And when you pay a not inconsiderable amount of money for a component, little things like internal construction and appearance mean a lot. And of course, you can pay much more for a component and not have it built to such a degree of quality. This is in the same league as Krell, Levinson and Rowland build wise.

**Tale of the tape.** The W3 can be used as a stereo or mono amp. They have a rather unique way of providing for mono operation, that being standard and inverted RCA inputs for hook up. You can also use the inverted inputs to change, or invert, absolute phase if you are into the "Wood Effect". The W3 also has XLR inputs for balanced operation. During this audition I used the W3 exclusively in the stereo mode. The W3 weighs 48 lbs., and measures 7.5" x 19" x 14" (HWD). Power is rated at (a big) 120 wpc into 8 Ohms, 240 wpc into 4 Ohms, and 400 wpc mono. Power supply starts off with a 100 VA toroid transformer with 108,000uf supply capacitance. The output section uses 8 bipolar output devices per channel. Output impedance is 0.01 Ohms (800 damping factor). Input impedance is 47,500 Ohms. Class of operation is A/AB. No biwiring option. Do not have the AC chassis to ground potential figures, but did check proper AC polarity and it was right, no need to reverse polarity for best sound.

**Set-up.** The input impedance of 47,500 Ohms made the use of a tube preamp a bit iffy. Not that a tube preamp can't be used with the W3, but it will take a suitable tube preamp to get the sound right and not compress dynamics. Solid state preamps were no problems, but most of my listening with the W3 was with preamps from Symfonia and Aloia. My power cord of preference with the W3 was the Audience. Know someone who doesn't believe in break-in for electrical components? Let them hear a new, out-of-the-box W3. Dead sounding is a complement. The amplifier takes some time to come alive, about three to four weeks in this case. Powering even difficult to drive loudspeakers was no problem with the W3, though. The amp has superb current drive capabilities, that being in large part due, to the large toroid transformer, and the relatively large number of bipolar output devices per channel. The W3 will tolerate no DC at its inputs, and if your preamp puts out any DC, the amp will shut down - it's a protection thing. Powering up the amplifier is a little different than the usual. First one depresses the standard toggle on the back of the amp. But nothing happens. There is a little circuit breaker button on the back that has to be pressed also. This breaker will trip at the slightest lint of DC, so if your preamp puts out a little DC burp upon turn on or turn off, the amp goes down until the circuit in the amp resets.

A final point regarding set-up of the W3. Like no other amplifier in this survey, the W3, benefited from the use of the Tritium Triphaser made for loudspeakers. The W3 is a good sounding amplifier on its own, not a whole lot to complain about, and some real positives. With the addition of the speaker Triphasers, the amplifier came alive with tonal color and energy. My listening notes say the following:

"Inserted TRIPHASERS today, vastly improved every aspect of sound. Thought that going from Clayton M-100s to W3 would be a great let down - has been anything but... Transient action is outstanding. Edges are caught largely without compromise..., Sense of space and presence is stunning. I'm straining to find anything negative about this amp... Amp has abundant energy in the mids and upper mids. Awesome, playing with fire, on verge of being overly aggressive - but not there. Walks a very satisfying tight rope. Bass has energy, but not quite as clearly contoured as the Clayton..."

This is what I wrote the next night. "Noticed that images are larger - closer - less outlined than with M-100s. Still sense of space and presence is stunning... Ambiance retrieval is superb, fills in all the gaps. Tonally lush, and a very nearly completely harmonic, without being overly bloomy... I love the energy!!! Dynamic action is setting it apart - mega dynamic contrasts, tonality, everything... The way this amp sounds now, it could be my reference..."

I've exceeded the general scope of "set-up" with all the superlatives spewed in the last couple of paragraphs, but I thought going into some of my immediate reactions after inserting the Triphasers warranted repeating. It was an experience.

**Sonics.** After the above, there isn't much suspense in reading the rest of this review. However, I'd like to refer once again to the Buddy Guy, Junior Wells disc. It was the W3 with Triphasers that most vividly exhibited to me just how amazing that CD really is. And I'm not sure that any power amplifier has rendered that disc any more realistic or alive than did the W3. Mind you, I don't think that the reproduction was perfect with the W3, with or without the Triphasers. The midrange dynamics of the W3 were just short of the near perfection found with the NTA Callas, so they were still very good. And in that same range, I felt that the W3 was actually a little better than the Calla when it came to fleshing out low level detail.

The highs were almost crisp. Why say that? Some people may find the W3 a little more snappy, or quick sounding than they prefer. For example: acoustic steel guitar strings have a real leading edge with this amp in the system. I have spent some time with an acoustic guitar on my lap, and from where the mic sits, the W3 gets the snap of a steel string correct. If you don't like that sound, that's one thing, but wrong?, the W3 is not. The W3 is a very accurate sounding amplifier, particularly from the lower mids up through the treble. Through that range, the W3 captured the certain shades of life that are part of a complete harmonic presentation. Of course, this aspect of the performance was heightened by the use of the Tritium Triphaser.

Strictly speaking, one might feel that the W3 could present more "body" to the presentation. And it probably could ... and for this reason. Ambient retrieval with the W3 is tremendous in the upper octaves, and it continues to be very good right on down through the midrange. Once into the lower mids, ambient information decreases slightly, and this takes away, subtly, from the body or dimensionality of the sound. The W3 is still extremely revealing in this regard, though when compared to the Clayton (for more that double the money) it can't match the almost brutal and powerful control exhibited by the M-100's from the lowest octave up through the lower mids. This is where I would expect the more powerful and expensive Moon W5 to compete with the likes of the Claytons and Sierras of the world.

**Conclusion.** What a tremendous amplifier. I only wish that the sound was not so dependent upon it being set-up so precisely. But, if only upon potential alone, this amp is extremely worthy of an audition and being on one's power amplifier short list. And don't forget the quality of construction, there's nothing kludgy about this design - quite the opposite. It looks beautiful, and if you were to lift the internals out of the W3 and insert them into a Krell chassis, they would look perfectly in place, right down to the shiny rows of T-03 bipolar output cans.

There was much about this amplifier that reminded me of the RE Design LNPA-150. Both are clean sounding machines that give up little in terms of real world power and dynamics. Plus both amps can throw a wicked image when set-up just right, though I would have to state that the RE was easier to get sounding "just right" under a variety of conditions.