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## Simaudio Moon P-3 Preamplifier



### Jim Frane

**Simaudio** has designed and manufactured hi-fi electronics since 1980. The company was called SIMA Electronics back then. There are two different series of components: The high-end Moon series and the more-affordable Celeste series.

The Moon P-3 is next to the top of the preamplifier line from Sim Audio. The 18-pound chassis is black with a 3/8-inch thick brushed aluminum face plate that is three-inch high and 17-inch wide. The sides of the 12 1/4-inch deep chassis are aluminum extrusions each made in the form of half a ribbed cylinder extending from front to back. They serve as the heat sinks. There are four vertical black cylinders attached to the sides. The bases of these cylinders are truncated gold-colored cones that have threaded holes. Supplied small pointed cones screw into these holes. I used Mach 1 Acoustics isolation feet rather than the pointed cones.

A "standby" switch with a blue LED showing power on is in the center of the front panel; the on-off switch is on the back panel. The standby switch leaves power on

to the P-3 circuits. Simaudio recommends turning off the back power switch during thunderstorms or vacations so that the circuits are isolated from power surges. At the top center of the panel is the nameplate, a contrasting gold-colored oblong that is one-inch high by 2 1/2-inch long. Above and to the left of the standby switch is a one-inch high window that is nearly three inches long. Red LED numbers 5/8-inch high indicate a numerical value for each channel that is proportional to the volume setting, from 1 to 50, providing a constant indication of the channel balance. When a source is selected, these numbers are temporarily replaced by alpha-numeric combinations showing the source. Just to the right of the window is push-button switch that turns the display on and off if you desire only the glow of the blue LED. The manual states "The performance of the preamplifier might be slightly improved when [the display is] shut off." I was unable to discern a difference. There is no monaural switch.

On the right side of the panel is a volume control knob that is nearly two-inch

diameter. It operates a digital optical encoder and turns with a smooth, solid feel. When the decoder is operated from the remote, the knob does not turn. I'll have more on the remote later.

A quarter-inch headphone jack is located on the back panel. It is probably there because of the thickness of the front panel. Though not convenient, it is better than no jack. Many recent units have been without headphone jacks.

Gold-plated jacks on the back of the P-3 are labeled right output (to the power amplifier), CD, A1 through A7, tape out, pre out, and left output. The A3 jacks are for tape input, and the A4 jacks are for receiving the main channel signal from a THX, Dolby Pro-logic, AC-3, or DTS home-theater processor. Both of these jacks came with shorting plugs installed. There are also left and right balanced outputs for connection to a power amplifier equipped to receive them. I did not have a power amp so equipped and cannot comment on any differences from using the unbalanced outputs. The power cord is detachable and there are no electrical outlets on the back panel.

Capacitors are omitted from the signal path in order to improve the output quality. The disadvantage of this design is the potential for switching noises during input selection and volume changes if there is dc present at the source component output. I experienced no problems in this regard, so my components must be functioning properly.

The 11-page owner's manual states that A1, A2, A5, A6 and A7 are equivalent inputs with the same sensitivity. The A4 input bypasses the volume control—a home-theater processor then controls volume. The manual gives a history of the company and then talks about the P-3, starting with installation instructions. It shows front- and back-panel sketches and the remote, explaining connections and operation. Specifications and warranty information (10 years repair only, starting from the manufacture date) follow.

Bipolar transistor input is combined with MOS-FET output to keep the noise level low. Circuit design goals were also [to quote] "improved 3D sound-staging, better focus, more natural tone, more extension of the harmonics and more transparency than ever, faster and more precise sound." No r.f. filters are used in the power supply, and a

line filter is recommended if your power source is not clean. The overall signal path length for each channel is about 10 inches to reduce dielectric signatures (the manual states most products' signal paths are longer than 30 inches).

The P-3 comes with a heavy, metal remote control that uses four AA batteries which can be installed after two screws and the end panel are removed—not the most convenient scheme. This remote is designed to operate several Sim Audio components. At the top is an input button and selectors for preamp, CD, AC3 and tuner and a power button which should properly be labeled "standby." A mute button decreases the output to 10 per cent of the volume setting. Four buttons in the center of the remote control volume up and down and balance. Below these are buttons to select cuts and control a Simaudio CD player and AC3 processor and to select the preamp input.



## Use And Listening

The heat sinks never became more than slightly warm during use, and the P-3 performed flawlessly. There was nothing but silence through the speakers when no source was present. Also commendable, input source switching was done always quietly.

I found aiming the remote required less precision than most other remotes I have used. The volume control was easy to control precisely. Input selection from the front panel of the amp requires stepping through the choices one at a time, which is not a fast process, but control from numbered buttons on the remote permitted direct input selection.

My first sonic impression was of an expanded sound stage (both width and depth) the moment the P-3 was added to my system. Any changes that occurred over time were too slight to notice. I used a number of different musical selections to compare the P-3 to my Carver CT-17.

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**The Moon P-3 preamp is a well-made piece of gear and comes at a reasonable price.**

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My comparisons were made with the volume levels set exactly the same as indicated by a Radio Shack sound level meter with digital readout and a CD with pink noise. I used the P-3 and the Carver with the Parasound at different times with and without the NHT subwoofers. All of the following specific musical comparisons were made with the subwoofers on line.

Using the P-3, "In a Mellow Tone" from Gerry Mulligan Meets Ben Webster (Verve 314 539 055-2), the eye-level sound stage had great width and depth, with correct instrument tonality. The CT-17 still had a spacious stage, but not as wide nor deep. The rasp of the baritone sax was not as real as with the P-3 and the overall sound via the CT-17 took on a hard quality.

The Everly Brothers' "Wake Up Little Susie" from Billboard 1957 Top Rock'n'roll Hits (Rhino R2 70618) was centered monaural. The P-3 had realistic instrument depiction, great guitar detail and natural voices. The CT-17 made the sound somewhat harsh by comparison.

"Tom Thumb's Blues" from Judy Collins' In My Life (Elektra 74027-2) was natural and right in front of me on the P-3. The subtle instrument details came through well with spacious depth. The sound was spread wider than the speakers. The CT-17 was a bit congested, and not as real nor as spacious.

"It's A Raggy Waltz" from Dave Brubeck's Greatest Hits LP (Columbia CS 9284), as reproduced through the P-3, extended to the sides beyond the speakers with natural sounding instrument tone and great interaction of the instruments. The CT-17 limited the sound to speaker width, did not have as much depth, and was a little harder sounding.

Julie London's "Love Letters" from the LP of the same name (Liberty LST-7231) was very real with the P-3. It was spacious, wide, and deep, with super detail—very involving. The CT-17 sound dimensions and dynamics were more compressed and was not as highly involving.

With "Voodoo Chile" by Jimi Hendrix (Electric Ladyland MCAD-10895) the P-3 sound was very 3D, seeming to extend deeper than the wall behind the speakers. It portrayed the ambiance of the recording space well with effortless dynamic range. The Carver was still spacious, but less so.

The Doors' "Strange Days" from Strange Days (Elektra 9 74014-2) portrayed vocals well, and the instrumental detail, dynamics, and overall spaciousness were very good on the P-3. The CT-17 introduced a little hardness.

The Simaudio P-3 reproduced ambiance, vocals, detail, and dynamics well on "She Has Funny Cars" by Jefferson Airplane's Surrealistic Pillow (RCA LSP-3766). Front-to-back layering was very good. The stage was narrower and shallower on the CT-17, and the sound was a bit "electronic" and perhaps compressed.

On A Chopin Piano Recital by Jorge Bolet (1914-1990) on Everest EVC 9028, the P-3 rendition of piano was of a realistic size, with ambiance and overtones extending beyond the speakers. The tone and detail were accurate and precise. With the Carver, the perspective was from farther back and did not have the three-dimensional quality of the P-3.

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**The P-3's superb musical performance will overshadow whatever deficiencies you might find.**

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On the CBS Masterworks LP (IM39345) of J.S. Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suites by Yo Yo Ma, the Prelude and Allemande from Suite No. 1 had natural tone and resonance with a sense of the live performance. It was nearly as engaging as hearing my daughter playing the same music in my listening room. The CT-17 introduced a hardness to the sound.

There was a soft hiss through the speakers from the P-3. How do I know it

was the P-3? I investigated by disconnecting all inputs from the P-3. I then turned off the P-3 with the Parasound power amp still on, and no hiss. As it's only audible with one's ear very close to the speaker, it is of no consequence. It is greatly overshadowed by the superb musical performance of the P-3.

## Conclusion

The Simaudio P-3 preamplifier has high quality parts and construction. Its aesthetics are a matter of taste; I heard a variety of opinions from family and friends. Comments ranged from retro, art deco, gaudy and the nameplate is out of keeping with the rest of the design. Its styling is likely to generate more comments than many other components. But it's your choice.

The sound of the P-3 was superb and its operation flawless. The overall effect of replacing the CT-17 with the P-3 in my system was greater width, depth, and three-dimensionality, with an absence of any harshness to the sound with any of the sources or music. Each of the selections (many more than are listed here) was more involving. FM radio also sounded better in the same way. Factors other than performance are secondary. My biggest complaint is the lack of a phono preamp stage (increasingly common). Also, I missed not having a monaural switch, which is useful for speaker setup.

All in all, the Simaudio P-3 is an excellent preamplifier. I highly recommend an audition of it if you are preamp shopping or just want to hear a really good sounding piece of gear.

## NOTES

**Simaudio Moon P-3 Preamplifier**, \$2595.00. Simaudio Ltd., 95 Chemin du Tremblay Street, Unit #3, Boucherville, Quebec J4B 7K4, Canada; 21 Lawrence Paquette Drive, Champlain, NY 12919 U.S.A.; phone 877/980-2400, fax 450/449-9947.  
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### Associated Equipment

My reference system has a Parasound HCA-1000A power amplifier controlled by a Carver CT-17 preamp-tuner. Speakers are Mach One model M-Two 2-way supported on a pair of NHT SW3 subwoofers run in dual mono and separately driven by an NHT SA-3 power amplifier with integral electronic crossover. The Mach Ones were run full range, and the NHT low-pass control was set to about 40 Hz. Interconnect cables are by Gotham, WireWorld, and Monster Cable, and speaker cables are Kimber 4PR to the Mach ones and Original Monster Cable to the NHTs. Sources were a Sony CDP-XA20ES CD player, a Thorens TD-320, Mark III turntable with Grado Prestige Red cartridge, and a Denon TU-767 tuner.

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