

I don't know if you've already read the *Fonica i Thorens – historia pewnej współpracy* (Polish) article by Mr Pawel Cendrowicz and Maciej Tulodziecki that was published in september's issue of the „High Fidelity” (No. 161) – if you haven't let me encourage you to do so. It shows the mechanism of contacts between Polish audio companies looking for their place on world's market and the Western brands in the 1980s and 90s, where the Polish entity was always the weaker party and was usually left with nothing. In turn, the history of the Czech branch of Tesla Litovel, which after transformation became SEV Litovel Company and today is the key part of the Pro-Ject Audio Systems in their efforts to offer customers ever improving sound quality, is an example of a successful cooperation of this type.



The privatization of large companies from behind the Iron Curtain producing audiovisual equipment had no common denominator, except that it was fast and required profound changes in the employment structure, different, market-oriented thinking and defining own place in it. When reading the history of the Audio-Hungary company, the owner of the Qualiton brand, I thought I witness a *deja vu*. This brand continues traditions of the largest Eastern and Central European electroacoustic equipment manufacturer founded in the late 1940s, the Rafim National Radio-and Film. The changes in company's name - 1951: Audio Voice-and-Film Technical Co., 1960: BEAG (Budapest Electroacoustic Factory), 1990: Univox Kft - is also something we also know from the history of Polish companies.

In this case, there seems to be a happy ending. In 2014, the Univox Kft was bought by Audio-Hungary Kft. The first amplifier from the two companies, the Univox APX 200 power amplifier was introduced to the market a year later. It that was sort of a tribute to BEAG's highly acclaimed APX 100.

| QUALITON A50i

The current product line bears the Qualiton logo. It is divided into two series: Classic and A-series. The former consists of only two products - the APR 204 preamplifier and the APX 200 power amplifier (rebranded Univox APS 200), both stylized for 1960s with tubes hidden inside chassis. The latter includes four products - two integrated amplifiers with exposed tubes: A20i and A50i, a phono preamplifier and a step-up transformer simply named MC.

The reviewed amplifier, A50i is currently the most expensive product. This is an integrated, class A, push-pull tube amplifier, featuring Tung-Sol KT120 beam tetrodes. Since the device features an auto-bias function one can replace these tubes with KT88 and even KT150 can be used. The input section uses NOS Tung-gram ECC83 and E88CC tubes from the new Genelex Golden Lion production. The amplifier is surprisingly compact, but the weight says the story: there is plenty of iron and copper inside. This tube amplifier operates in Class A to deliver hefty 50 W output with a very low distortion and noise - respectively <math><0.75\%</math> and <math><1</math> mV. The chassis is made of polished stainless steel with a mirror-like surface.

The black aluminum knob on the front consists of two parts - a knurled ring and a smooth roller. Once such a division was used to set the recording level for left and right channels separately. Here in this simple, cool way the volume control and inputs selection are handled. There are three unbalance inputs (RCA) and one balanced with mini-XLRs, and the selected shows a small LED just below the bottom edge of the front. The LED next to the knob informs user of the status of the amplifier. When it is red, it means that the signal is muted and the amplifier warms up; when it turns white - it's a sign that we can listen to music.

Manufacturer used many excellent components including KáCsa Audió speakers posts, excellent resistors, WIMA polypropylene coupling capacitors, but above all very good looking, mechanically stabilized output and power transformers. The latter is a toroidal transformer, and it's fixed through a large wooden core. The unit is controlled by a radio remote control that is not sensitive to the position of the amplifier, that allows user to adjust volume and activate the "mute" mode. The remote is also made of metal with polished, mirror-like surface, so a rag with the company's logo, that one finds in the box, shall come handy quite often.

— A FEW SIMPLE WORDS WITH —

ANDRAS FABIAN

Business development manager/CEO

My father, Laszlo Fabian, who is the owner of the biggest telecom company in Eastern Hungary, is the owner and founder of Audio-Hungary Ltd as well. He supports the company financially and leads the development of the products too. The whole company is his passion and an investment into future. We would like to become a recognized worldwide known brand in the future. Now Audio-Hungary has 16 employees, and more than 1000 square meters' factory.

We have brought almost all manufacturing processes in house because of the unpredictability of the suppliers. The in house manufacturing process can be more strict and much more reliable for in time manufacturing. The prototype manufacturing and development process can also be much faster, it saves lots of money and time during the developing phase. Our distribution network is expanding with new distributors in new countries every year. Development process is continuous, we are refining the products continuously according to feedback of the customers and dealers.

Our brand Qualiton entered international market in 2016 after many years of research and development. We have orders from many places all over the world now. We decided that the most important issue for a new brand would be to differentiate ourselves from other products, so we decided to manufacture high quality products at much lower price than our competitors. We believe that with passion, hard work and our experience it is going to be possible to be one of the best quality manufacturers in hi-fi industry. :)

Here is the list of the key features of our A50i amplifier:

- We have made the body in house of polished stainless steel without any visible screws
- Special unique rotary switch (the volume control and the input selector is on the same control)
- Unique radio remote control, from the same material as the amplifier
- 3 pairs gold plated RCA , 1 pair mini XLR for the symmetrical input
- 4 and 8 Ohm Gold plated speaker terminals
- Speaker terminals and almost unbreakable
- Push-Pull Class A technology
- Auto-bias function for the power tubes (Automatic BIAS from KT88 to KT150 Tubes)
- Premium quad in house selected tubes
- The Power transformer is Vacuum impregnated
- High permeability shielding for the power transformers
- Transformers are made in house
- We use Military qualified NOS ceramic optun sockets for the tubes
- Many times out-sized quality components (Nichicon, Vishay, Omron, etc.)
- We have been testing all parts of the manufactured equipment before finishing them
- More than 100 hours burning in and testing period before packaging
- ISO 9001 manufacturing process
- Decades of experience in manufacturing by our employees

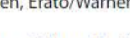
- Testing Methodology -

I placed the Audio Hungary amplifier on the top shelf of my Finite Elemente Pagode Edition rack. As the main source I used the *Ancient Audio Lector AIR V-edition* CD Player connected using the *Audio Revive RCA-1.0 Absolute-FM Interconnect*. The *Harbeth M40.1* loudspeakers was connected with 4 Ω inputs using the *Acoustic Revive SPC-3.0 Triple-C* speaker cable. For the amplifier I used the *Acoustic Revive Power Reference Triple-C* power cable and passive *Acoustic Revive RAS-14 Triple-C* filter, while for CD Player I used the *Harmonix X-DC350M2R Improved Version*. The amplifier was switched on two or before each critical listening session.

Recordings used for the test (a selection)

- Arturo Delmoni, *The songs my mother thought me*, John Marks Records JMR One/JMR 1G, gold-CD (1994)
- Chet Baker & Art Pepper, *The Route*, Pacific Jazz/Capitol/Capitol-EMI Music CDP 7 92931 2, CD (1989)
- Diary Of Dreams, *Ego-X*, Accession Records, A124, „Limited Edition Box”, 2 x CD (2011);
- Helen Merrill, *Helen Merrill with Clifford Brown*. *Singles box*, EmArcy/Universal Music LLC Japan. UCCM-9336/8, „Limited Edition” 3 x SHM-CD (1955/2014);
- Radiohead, *OK Computer*. *OKNOTOK Edition*, XL Recordings/Beat Records XLCDJP868, 2 x Ultimate HiQuality CD (1997/2017)
- Robert Kowalski, *utwory wybrane*, Master CD-R (2017)
- Schubert, *Song Cycles*, wyk. Nathalie Stutzmann, Inger Södergren, Erato/Warner Classics 4623701, 3 x CD (2014)
- Wojciech Pulcyn, *Tribute To Charlie Haden*, ForTune 0125 | 082, CD (2017)

Japanese issues available at



The KT120 was the first since many, many years, new construction in the KT series. Based on KT88, it was supposed to provide more power and more current, and it actually did. As soon as the audio manufacturers got acquainted with it, they started replacing their KT88 amplifiers with KT120 ones. The results differed from case to case. Whether by haste or lack of understanding of the new design, a lot of these devices, at least in my experience, did not perform too well. The high dynamics, high power and higher purity that the ones offered by the KT88 were obvious. There was no, however, this hint of magic that the older version offered in the midrange.



After a year, maybe two, the situation began to change. As if it was finally understood that the sheer power was not everything and it was easier to degrade the sound with it than to improve it.

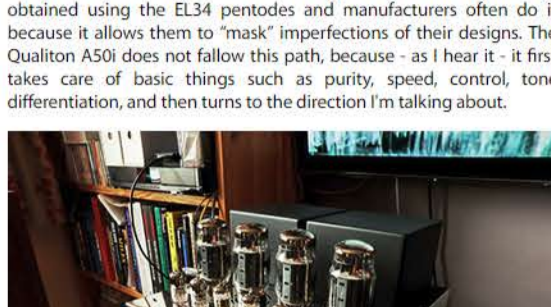
by: highfidelity

When I first listened to the *Jadis I-88*, first on the Audio Show, and then in my system, I understood that it could be done differently. For the first time, I heard the KT120 based amplifier that performed better than KT88 on. Then the Ayon Audio, Octave and so on released their products, and everything changed.

There are still some designs based on these tubes that focus on, so to say, obvious advantages ie power and dynamics, but also the scale, impact, bass control. When properly utilized these features give such amplifier a good direction, although personally I prefer devices that properly convey the depth of the sound rather than its width. Such designs are able to communicate with listener better, they make sure that the music is most important, and the rest [...] That is why this Qualiton A50i gave so much pleasure, so much fun.

Looking at the technical data, one can see that its designers were not after ultimate output power, although 50 W from tubes operating in a class A circuit is a lot. It would be easy to squeeze more power from them but that was not the point. The original sin of the about, not so successful amplifiers based on KT120 tubes that I mentioned before was lack of empathy, the inability to induce any real emotions in listeners. And already in this regards both Jadis and now Audio Hungary are light years ahead.

The sound of the test amplifier is dense, warm, unambiguously and almost ostentatiously "tube-like". This type of sound is most easily obtained using the EL34 pentodes and manufacturers often do it because it allows them to "mask" imperfections of their designs. The Qualiton A50i does not follow this path, because - as I hear it - it first takes care of basic things such as purity, speed, control, tone differentiation, and then turns to the direction I'm talking about.



The thing the amplifier immediately convinces listener with is the incredible scale of the presentation. I have not heard such a huge scale sound for a long time. And it's not an artificially enlarged sound, just a big one. Compared to what we hear from the Hungarian amplifier, most amplifiers will seem lean and dry, and delivering a very "small" sound. Along with the scale comes a fantastic differentiation of sound layers. This differentiation relays on a fluid separation of a specific tone/timbre for each instrument, voice, etc. in the space. It has nothing to do with cutting sounds out, but rather with something I'd call an "extrusion".

Plus there is this very cool, though far from what engineers consider "proper" correctness of tone. The upper treble is clearly lowered and the lower midrange and the upper bass are emphasized. It creates a "tube-like" effect that I mentioned at the beginning and makes even poorly recorded discs, if only musically interesting, sound really good, sometimes even addictive. It does not mean that the amplifier can not differentiate the recordings' class - I'm not talking about it. It can do it pretty well, but not for show, rather by chance.

Listening to a particular device involves selecting a certain pool of recordings - I have mentioned that many times. A sonic character of the reviewed device to some extent influences my choices and it allows me to realize the repertoire that the device "feels" best in. In the case of the Audio Hungary amplifier, I was just curious how many familiar albums would sound like with it, without looking at the people behind them, formats and so on, but rather focusing on music recorded on them.

And so I listened to such a different recordings as: Chet Baker and Art Pepper's *The Route* from the 1989 remaster, Schubert performed by Nathalie Stutzmann and Inger Södergren, *OK Computer* by Radiohead in the new version *OKNOTOK* released on Ultimate HiQuality CD, a Master CD-R with electronic music of my friend Robet Kowalski and sophisticated released on gold *Songs my mother thought me*, where Arturo Delmoni plays the Stradivari violin from 1721. And on top of all these I also played the *Ego: X* Diary of Dreams.

As I said, differences were clear, but they did not dictate my choices. The Hungarian amplifier, in its own way, integrated it all only because of the fact that due to my eclectic taste I like music on each of these albums and I am always happy when it sounds as good as in this particular case. The device in a way made them all sound similar, because the modifications of the sound I mentioned are common to everything I listened to. So do not expect a precise reproduction of the technical aspects of the recordings.

You can and should expect a proper reproduction of emotions, tone and scale. These are the strong advantages of this device. Bass goes really deep and is really well controlled. The designers did not bother to try to make it very taut, contoured so that it would sound like a solid-state amp with a low damping factor and higher current output. Instead, they focused on the rhythm, fluidity, and density of the sound, keeping enough power headroom to to keep the music clean.

Summary

An unknown company from a small country has prepared an expensive amplifier. Maybe not quite so unknown and not from an unknown country, and not at all that expensive, but I think you understand what I mean. Let's move it aside, because it's kind of like the foam in a hot tub, where the water is important and what's going on with it.

The Qualiton A50i is an absolutely "tube" amplifier, in the sense that its tonal balance has been specially voiced in this way. But it is not an end in itself, but a mean to offering user a possibility to enjoy every album for the music recorded o it and not for sound. The scale, tone, layering - these are elements that user will discuss with friends, even if he does not buy this amplifier. There is something magical in this sound, which seems to be an inherent feature if tube technique. Whenever designers manage to use that to their advantage, as they did in this case, the result is a beautiful performance with focus on music rather than on technical aspects of the recordings.

- Design -

I've already said this, but I would like to emphasize: the external design of the reviewed amplifier is a classic, and yet these classic elements have been modified in a fresh way. Qualiton integrated amplifier A50i is a tube device featuring a semiconductor power supply unit. In the output it features Russian KT120 Tung-Sol beam tetrodes, two per channel, that deliver up to 50 watts. The push-pull output operates in a Class A, same as all other tubes, the double triodes in the input stage. The Genelex Golden Lion E88CC tubes from current production work as drivers, while in the preamplifier section one finds NOS Tung-gram ECC83.

Behind the tubes there are two large cups housing output transformers. The toroidal power transformer is hidden inside the main chassis. Due to this solution the amplifier has a narrower front wall than usual and is extremely compact. Since the power transformer is large, the chassis is slightly raised. In order for it to not look "heavy", the lower edges were cut and the chassis was made of thick steel sheets with a mirror finish.

Front and rear

There is only one knob and several LEDs on the front panel. Made of anodized black aluminum, the knob has features parts - the internal one, which allows user to adjust volume and the outer ring that works as input selector. An active input is indicated by a white LED; the rest shines weaker and red. There is one more LED there next to the knob - the red light indicates that the unit is warming up and you can listen to music only when it turns white.

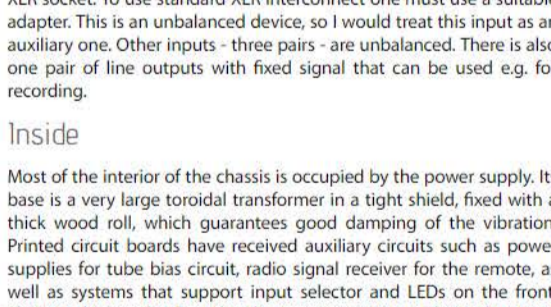
The rear looks very interesting, and it is mainly due to the fantastic speaker sockets made by the Hungarian company KáCsa Audió. They feature a spring element that makes it easy to firmly press the spades. There are two groups of three connectors - a ground and live connectors for 4 and 8 Ω loads. The RCA sockets are really good, but what really catches the eye is a pair of rarely used, look great mini-XLR socket. To use standard XLR interconnect one must use a suitable adapter. This is an unbalanced device, so I would treat this input as an auxiliary one. Other inputs - three pairs - are unbalanced. There is also one pair of line outputs with fixed signal that can be used e.g. for recording.

Inside

Most of the interior of the chassis is occupied by the power supply. Its base is a very large toroidal transformer in a tight shield, fixed with a thick wood roll, which guarantees good damping of the vibration. Printed circuit boards have received auxiliary circuits such as power supplies for tube bias circuit, radio signal receiver for the remote, as well as systems that support input selector and LEDs on the front. There is also another board with a protective circuit. The audio circuit is assembled using a classical point-to-point method, that is time-consuming, and thus expensive, but guaranteeing the shortest signal path. The ground is carried here by thick copper wires. Manufacturer used lot of high quality components such as large metallic resistors and WIMA capacitors.

Remote

The remote control is also manufactured by Audio Hungary Kft. It features a metal mirror surface housing and three push-buttons: two to change volume and one to mute the device. It is a solid unit and one could probably use it (please don't!) to hammer nails into a wall. If you have a hammer the remote will work well as a remote too.



This is a very solid, well-made amplifier, combining classic features with modern approach to tube amplifiers.

Technical specification (according to manufacturer)

Rated output: 2 x 50W (Class A)
Total harmonic distortion: <math><0.75\%</math> (f = 1kHz, @ rated power)
Frequency range: 30Hz - 100kHz (-3dB, @ rated power)
Frequency response: 425mV, unbalanced output
Number of inputs: 3 unbalanced, 1 balanced
Gain: +33.5dB (8 Ω); +25.5dB (4 Ω)
Input impedance: 10k Ω
Nominal load impedance: 4 Ω | 8 Ω
S/N: > 95dB; output noise <math><1</math> mV
Power consumption: 300W
Tube complement: 4 x Tung-Sol KT120; 4 x Tung-gram E88CC; 2 x Tung-gram ECC83
Dimensions: 350x210x400mm
Weight: 25kg