

TEST

Symphonic Line
RG 10 MK 5
Reference HD Master S

lite Testurteil
2022

99/100

Referenzklasse

www.lite-magazin.de

Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S

FULLY FEATURED FOR PERFECTION



**Outstanding dynamics,
intoxicating freshness.**

Revelation in self-evidence
and harmony

Roterring

Unadorned noblesse: The packed high-quality integrated amplifier Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S features a brushed aluminium look and satin-finished metal knobs.



Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S In Vollausstattung zur Vollendung

No frills, excellent core: the legendary RG 10 also has a noble design in the MK 5 Reference HD Master S version - now Symphonic Line has bundled forty years of high-end development into this compact integrated amplifier. This results in a world-class amp for analogue music enjoyment, including an MM/MC phono module. In the test, we experienced the perfection of this full-feature set.

Sustainability! Rolf Gemein has nothing but a smile for the supposed novelty of the responsible use of resources. The high-end pioneer and founder of Symphonic Line has been building the finest audio components - and especially the finest amplifiers - according to this maxim for more than forty years. They all follow Gemein's philosophy of quality and continuity: the handcrafted components must be durable, updatable and upgradeable. For decades, the Duisburg-based manufacturer produced amplifier models in select numbers and constantly developed them further. Even after many years of use, you can upgrade them to maximum expansion level. This also applies to the RG 10: this transistor integrated amplifier, which, like its little brother RG 14 already tested by us, has cult status in hi-fi audiences, is now in its fifth genera-

tion - and comes to the editorial office fully equipped as an opulent RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S.

Subtle design with characteristic quality

The physicality of this maximised amplifier is as impressive as the model name: it weighs a massive 17 kilos - despite the moderate dimensions of 106 by 450 by 420 millimetres. Classic styling and a discreet design add to the compact dimensions. Nevertheless, the RG 10 is immediately recognisable as a Symphonic Line component. The front features an artistic engraving of the curved company lettering - followed by straight-line milling of the model name and the function designations of the controls. These engravings seem extremely discreet because the one-centimetre-thick front is realised in finely brushed and anodised aluminium. Alternatively, you can order a front panel in black. A chrome-plated version is also available for an additional charge. The appearance of our amplifier continues in an exceptionally harmonious way with the satin-finished metal knobs. They come with a distinctive bevelling and an engraved dot, providing orientation concerning the current setting.



The satin-finished, all-metal control knobs offer an excellent feel due to their material quality and pleasant weight. The volume control scores with smooth operation. The other knobs act as outstanding rotary switches.



The centrepiece front panel of carefully chamfered, brushed, and anodised aluminium intensifies the high-quality appearance.

As a result, the RG 10 conveys a sober, straightforward appearance and, at the same time, an extremely high-quality impression.

Premium haptic feel

This visible quality is also haptically tangible. The solid metal knobs feel pleasantly cold and have a nice weight. Switching on the RG 10, therefore, already conveys a premium feel. The large rotary switch snaps into the "on" position in a perfectly defined way, followed by the magnificent click of relays: the signal paths and loudspeaker outputs switch completely mechanically and thus precisely. This material quality continues with the source selection switches and the monitor switch for integrating a tape deck - and also with the volume control: the volume wheel delivers the perfect combination of durability and supple smoothness. Behind it acts a first-class rotary potentiometer from the top specialist Alps. Combined with the infrared sensor embedded in the front of the amplifier, you can change the volume even from a distance. For this purpose alone, Symphonic Line supplies a modest system remote control made of plastic. Optionally, they offer a version in a noble metal housing harmonising with the quality of the amplifier.


Testurteil
2022

99/100

Referenzklasse

www.lite-magazin.de

Model:	Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S
Product category:	Stereo integrated amplifier
Price:	14.800,00 €
Warranty:	2 years
Versions:	- Cabinet: silver or black - knobs: matt silver - Chrome-plated front panel, lid and knobs (surcharge: 700.00 €)
Distribution:	Symphonic Line, Duisburg +49 (0) 203 31 56 56 www.symphonic-line.de
<hr/>	
Dimensions (HWD):	- Amplifier: 106 mm x 450 mm x 420 mm (incl. speaker terminals)
Weight:	- Amplifier: 16.9 kg - Power supply unit: 10.2 kg
Power:	2 x 250 W / 4 Ω (manufacturer's specification) 2 x 120 W / 8 Ω (manufacturer's specification)
Principle:	stereo, analogue, transistor amplification, Class AB
Inputs (analogue):	2 x Phono MM/MC (Cinch) 4 x Line unbalanced (Cinch)
Outputs (analogue):	1 x Headphone jack (6.35 mm) 1 x Tape Rec (Cinch) 1 x Pre Out (Cinch) 1 x Loudspeaker
Phono module:	- MM mode: 47 kΩ terminating resistor / 150 pF terminating capacitance - MC mode: 500 Ω terminating resistor

Rating

Sound (60%):	99/100
Practice (20%):	98/100
Equipment (20%):	98/100
Overall score:	99/100
Class:	Referenzklasse
Price/Performance:	angemessen



You could almost miss the unlabelled socket - but it is a fully-fledged headphone output.

The inputs: complete phono luxury portfolio featuring MM and MC

Two select and monitor switches illustrate the RG 10's versatility. It offers everything you might wish for in a classic analogue integrated amplifier. Vinyl enthusiasts even benefit from the twofold service. The RG 10 provides phono inputs for two turntables - for analogue drives with moving magnet systems and moving coil cartridges. A toggle switch on the back of the unit selects between MM and MC modes. In MM mode, the amplifier provides the standard resistance and capacitance values of 47 kilohms and 150 picofarads. In MC mode, the default resistance is 500 ohms. You can increase it by 100 ohms with the help of the enclosed (but practically hardly necessary) matching plugs. The RG 10 comes with four unbalanced line-level inputs for connecting further analogue feeders. You can expand them with an optional balanced high-level jack. The "Tape" section features an input, an output and a tape loop function to connect a tape recorder, a cassette deck or any other analogue recorder that provides tape monitoring.

Topline outputs for tape, power amp, speakers and headphones

The front panel "Monitor" switch toggles between playback and signal output for recording. As a second output path, the RG 10 offers a Pre Out. This way, it also makes an excellent pre-amplifying stage. Then it performs in conjunction with a subsequent external power amplifier. However, up to a certain level of quality, separating pre and power amplifiers does not make sense or is even cheaper. This is where the RG 10 pushes the limits of an integrated solution to the maximum. For operation as a full amplifier, it offers four terminals for connecting a pair of speakers. WBT terminals from the current Plasma PVD series are absolute premium components. However, these terminals cannot accept bare-stranded wires. They are designed for cables with banana plugs or shoes. Those who prefer to enjoy their music via headphones: Here, too, the RG 10 leaves nothing to be desired and offers a phone output on the front. Thankfully, this is a robust jack socket.



Full service for vinyl lovers: The RG 10 boasts two phono inputs. Accordingly, allowing the connection of two turntables. The analogue turntables can have either MM or MC systems: The toggle switch selects the integrated phono module for the desired mode of operation. The ground terminal, visible on the right, prevents the risk of a hum loop. The corresponding ground wire coming from the turntable connects to this terminal.



The input section for analogue line-level feeds includes four unbalanced channels. One is part of a classic tape loop which has become a rare feature. The two larger bezels underneath the RCA sockets indicate: This amplifier comes with a balanced input as an option. Using the Pre Out, you can use the RG 10 purely as a pre-amplifying stage.

Excellent design with the best components

Why is the RG 10 the most advanced MK 5 Reference HD Master S model? First of all, let us stick to the basics: in its already high-end basic version, the RG 10 is a Class AB transistor amplifier manufactured according to the same principles for decades: cleanest amplifier construction, straight-lined circuit board layout with the shortest possible, wide signal paths and solid, high-quality cable connections. The components are of premium quality throughout. The heart of the unit is formed by the original and highly sought-after Toshiba power amplifier transistor pairs 2SA1943/2SC5200. They contribute to the amplifier's output of 120 watts to eight-ohm speakers and 250 watts to four-ohm transducers. But this nominal power is of little importance. Crucial is the capability to deliver high and prompt current - and to do so evenly across the entire frequency range. That current stability, which also reflects in a constant damping factor, is essential for the musicality, quietness and dynamics. Rolf Gemein has steadily come closer to this goal - through numerous improvements that have led to the current MK 5 version.



The RG 10 features excellent binding posts from WBT's PVD Plasmaprotect series. They allow the connection of a pair of speakers and accommodate assembled cables with banana plugs or cable lugs but have no openings for bare stranded wire. The outgoing wire attaches to the external power supply unit and connects the preamplifier's internal power supply to the mains. The power amplifier's output stage receives current from the external power supply via the built-in plug you can see on the left.

It gets even better: the audiophile refinement

Like every amp from Symphonic Line, this RG 10 MK 5 basic version can now be upgraded at will. The suffix "Reference" means that the amp comes with an even higher-quality Reference preamp module. The designation "HD" tells us that the power amplifier has also undergone refinement through modification and re-tuning of the circuitry. The "S" indicates that the amplifier's power supply does not use the standard toroidal but a "super transformer", as Rolf Gemein called it. That is a wickedly expensive, hand-wound and specially burnt-in mu-metal transformer in a nickel-iron casing. Due to this electromagnetic shielding, the delicate amplifier circuitry remains free from the influence of the high-powered transformer. Five hundred volt-ampere guarantees a high current delivery capability. The high-reserve supply of the amplifier stages is the prerequisite for relaxed, quiet playback. The power supply now uses special pulse capacitors with higher capacitance and lower losses. As a result, the reproduction achieves more imaging power and transparency of detail.

External power supply for maximum power and calmness

The most noticeable upgrade, however, is the "master" upgrade: here, the amplifier comes equipped with a separate master module. In this case, we are talking about an outsourced turbo power supply. The power supply, which is housed in a black metal casing weighing 11 kilos, also comes equipped with a "super transformer" and its rectifier, whose filter capacitors provide an additional capacity of a whopping 280,000 microfarads. This master module once again increases the current delivery capacity - significantly. Furthermore, the RG 10's pre and power amplifier receive separate power supplies: the amplifier's integrated power supply concentrates exclusively on the preamp section, while the external master module takes care of the power section. Such strict separation prevents mutual influence and thus improves accuracy. Therefore, this separation continues with the



Symphonic Line provides the amplifier with a separate "Power" rotary switch. A small green LED indicates the operation of the power amplifier. Engraved next to the "Select" selector, you can choose the inputs. The "XLR" input is available as an option for retrofitting.

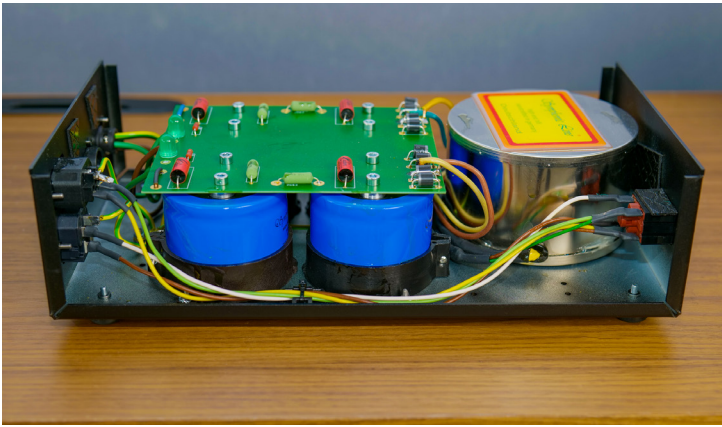
mains connection: The master module connects to the mains socket. From here, the amplifier power stage receives its power via a second mains cable. The preamplification stage links to the mains via a third cable with a special four-pole connection which cannot be removed from the amplifier.



The external power supply provides the "master" in the model name. It feeds the RG 10's power amplifier.

Individual tuning to perfection

So now the RG 10 is maximally expanded in the MK 5 Reference HD Master S version - but it is still not finished. Because Symphonic Line is a manufacturer, each amplifier is individually checked and tuned by Rolf Gemein until the maximum possible 3D reproduction, dynamics and coherence are achieved. For this purpose, Gemein uses damping bitumen pads, special adhesive pads and selectively applied C37 lacquer on various components and at neuralgic cabinet points. These measures are in-



A look into the master module shows its material-intensive qualities: A second, referred to as a "super transformer", is at work here. On the right, you can see the encapsulated special transformer. The separate power supply provides an additional capacity of 280,000 microfarads. This significantly increases the entire current delivery capacity. Also, it allows for a sonically advantageous independent power supply of the pre and the power amplifier.

tended to eliminate unwanted resonances, vibrations and disturbances and to promote a natural sound. Gemein describes this final tuning as "resonance pattern tuning"; the high-end pioneer carries it out by ear alone until the amplifier plays harmoniously in his sense, offers the full spectrum of timbres and achieves the musicality typical of Symphonic Line.

The Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S in the field

Let us finally take the RG 10 into our listening room. First, we put the Oppo UDP-203 SACD player at the amplifier's side, and two Audio Physic Midex act as speakers. After connecting the amplifier, we allow the RG 10 time to settle for a more coherent performance. We kick off with Donald Fagen's "Security Joan". Beforehand, however, we set the amplifier to the lowest volume - and after a few seconds, we are amazed: despite the low level, the music delivers an outstanding presence and effortlessly floods the room! We are particularly astonished by the bass: it already boasts volume and low frequency and provides a rich foundation. We take a seat on the sofa and are amazed for the second time: already at this low volume, the RG 10 performs harmoniously, putting numerous musicians on a roomy stage on which every instrument can be perceived - and we are talking about 14 musicians here!



The milled surface tells the tale: this high-end amplifier is hand-crafted. The serial number identifies it as unique: Each amplifier is individually tuned by Symphonic Line boss Rolf Gemein.

Musical merit in perfection

Frontman Fagen has gathered a background choir, three guitars, an organ, piano, bass, percussion and drums behind him for a clever mix of rock, funk and jazz. The music is complex, the instrumental set interwoven and dense. Yet every single vocal and instrument is traceable, clearly locatable on the imaginary podium and perfectly staggered, even down to the drums positioned in the back. We have not heard that before - wow! With a grin on our faces and looking forward to listening to it louder later, we let the RG 10 warm-up - it now delivers all the musical excellence we already enjoyed in perfection. We only have to crank the amplifier up to a third of its volume to reach the most saturated level. The bass comes with immense energy. We feel every touch and every low note of Freddy Washington's five-string all over our bodies. What power!



The super transformer is recognisable through the ventilation slits in the amplifier bonnet. It provides the "S" in the model name - and acoustically causes an increased power and sound culture compared to the standard transformer. The applied yellow pad indicates the "resonance pattern tuning" that Symphonic Line boss Rolf Gemein performs himself on each amplifier.



The RG 10 is a true powerhouse: If you turn it up almost halfway, as in this case, you will already enjoy an opulent volume. If you prefer to use it as a headphone amplifier, you will not encounter any sound problems, even with models suffering from low efficiency.

Outstanding dynamics, intoxicating freshness

In addition, percussionist Keith Carlock drives straight to the guts with a snare, toms and bass drum. The drum set packs an opulent punch while remaining tidy and crisp. This shows off even the finest intensity gradations that the gifted drummer masterfully incorporates into his patterns. The RG 10 achieves all this with outstanding dynamics and an intoxicating freshness - and so we notice after a few seconds how we involuntarily bob along to the irresistible groove of the music. Here, the RG 10's high and fast current delivery capability and ample reserves pay off. It also leads to an effortless and self-evident reproduction: Despite the powerful drum work, we hear the refined, silvery ride cymbal, which Carlock plays consistently but gently. It asserts itself effortlessly despite its unobtrusiveness. Through the dense sound fabric, we can even perceive how this cymbal tone changes as it decays. This is also enabled by the RG 10's excellent openness and transparency.

Revelation in self-evidence and harmony

Our setup remains suboptimal: We placed the external power supply unit along with the other components of the sound chain on the sideboard. We now follow two recommendations by Rolf Gemein. Firstly, it is advisable to place the master module on the floor. We do this - and are astonished for the third time: The reproduction becomes noticeably more stringent and more defined, especially in the bass. Secondly: Place the power supply unit on its narrow side. We do this as well - and are impressed for the fourth time: the dynamics increase again in excellence. Drums and percussion show even more agility. Singers and instruments seem even livelier. We perceive every stroke of the strings of the overdrive guitars. RG 10 also wins again in terms of openness and airiness. In addition, there is an even stronger serenity and calm. We have already sunk into the sofa and enjoyed listening to music with the utmost relaxation. Now, however, the naturalness and harmony are a revelation.



Symphonic Line supplies a simple plastic system remote control to adjust the volume from a distance.

Overwhelming live authenticity

In addition, this amplifier reflects even the subtlest changes highly sensitively. So any cable change is noticeable: First, we swap our high-quality signal cables for the Symphonic Line Reference, then our high-class loudspeaker cable for the Symphonic Line Harmonie HD - and in both cases, we obtain yet another benefit in terms of resolution, dynamics and coherence. Likewise, the plasticity and three-dimensionality of the imaging are even more impressive with each tuning step. That makes the live recording of the Brindisi from Verdi's opera "La Traviata" a delight: we listen to the opening orchestra, but also the whispering and laughter of the audience in the hall - and thus experience, even feel the atmosphere of the Munich National Theatre. Things are lively on stage, too: In the background, the chorus, who appears here at a festive party, clink glasses and toast each other. In front of them, Anja Harteros as Violetta and Piotr Beczala as Alfredo are charming each other - and this banter has an overwhelming live authenticity.

Imagination running wild

Harteros and Beczala vividly occupy the stage during their charming duet and audibly move around the podium. All this is perfectly captured in the recording and is rendered flawlessly by the RG 10: The soloists make us revel with their gifted singing and, especially in the case of Anja Harteros, with an utterly beguiling voice. The festive company floods the stage in the tutti passages with concentrated choral power. The excellent Bavarian State Orchestra, audible right down to the bowing of the violinists, provides the instrumental accompaniment. With our eyes closed, we spend a glamorous evening at the opera, sitting in the middle of the theatre. The immersive illusion also occurs through headphones: We connected our Focal Utopia to the RG 10 - and our imagination is running wild at its best: now the nuances, particularly the clinking of glasses by the musicians and the lively action of the soloists, including the sound of their steps on stage, appear even more intense.



The back of the external power supply unit: The mains plug on the bottom right provides the connection to the mains socket, while the socket above it feeds the power amplifier. The four-pin socket on the left provides the necessary juice for the preamplifier.



The entire rear panel of the RG 10 shows the ample analogue equipment of this amplifier

Clarity, purity and perfection

Here we hear another quality we already experienced and tested in loudspeaker operation: The RG 10 amplifies incredibly noise-free. This also contributes to the clarity, purity and perfection of the sound. How does the RG 10 perform in vinyl playback? We hooked up our Transrotor Dark Star turntable. It is equipped with the MM system Uccello which samples "Ordinary Guy", the opening song of the current LP "Let The Hard Times Come" by Jacob Dinesen. The Danish singer and guitarist, audibly inspired by Bruce Springsteen and Allan Taylor, delivers a beautiful intimate singer/songwriter ballad with "Ordinary Guy". Dinesen opens the piece with a plucked Western guitar. It is perfectly recorded and equally perfectly reproduced by the RG 10: We witness the gorgeous brilliance of the steel strings, which Dinesen audibly plucks with his bare fingers, which is why the sound also has a beautiful warmth, and we also able to notice the resonating wood of the guitar body.



They still exist: The tape loop allows for tape monitoring when integrating a cassette deck or tape machine.

Vinyl playback via MM is to die for ...

Now Dinesen enters with his calm, slightly rough and yet melodious voice, which is amazingly reminiscent of Springsteen. This singing gives us goosebumps: Dinesen feels very close to us, and we hear every little breath, every rubbing of his vocal cords, every turn he takes vocally, sometimes towards the throaty, sometimes towards the smoky, always intense but never intrusive. The intimacy catches us even more because the sound remains clear of artefacts. There is no sampling noise or crackling, which other amplifiers sometimes emphasise strongly. As a result, pure music sounds like a matter of course and makes you forget all technology. It is to die for. Soon Dinesen receives company from Jens Pilgaard on bass and Jesper Andersen on percussion. The bass plays discreetly but provides a soothing foundation. The percussion consists primarily of a snare played with a broom - but here, too, you can listen to the individual metal wires hitting the drumhead.

... and even more catchy via MC

Could it possibly get any better? Now, we equip our record player with the Goldring Ethos MC system, play "Ordinary Guy" again - and promptly receive the answer. Dinesen's voice now sounds even more articulate and insistent, the guitar has more wire and wood, the percussion acts more agile, and the bass acquires more contour. In addition to Dinesen's vocals and the instruments, we also understand the subtle reverb embedding in the voice, the guitar, the bass and the snare. As a result, the imaging appears even more impressive in its spatiality: in our perception, it replaces the listening room surrounding us in its existence. Finally, the beautiful background vocals unfold entirely: Together with Dinesen's solo voice, they establish a pleasantly melancholic polyphony. This choir warms our hearts. This music touches us. We imperceptibly hold our breath so as not to spoil this precious moment. You can't ask for more from a musical reproduction.

The Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S in a listening test: The powerhouse resides next to the Transrotor Dark Star turntable and the Focal Utopia headphones.



Conclusion

The Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S represents the maximum expansion stage of the RG 10 with Reference preamplifier module, external auxiliary power supply and additional refinements. In this ultimate version, the legendary amp represents an unspectacular sensation: the no-frills, purely analogue integrated amplifier delivers music reproduction with delightful purity, outstanding resolution and impressive richness of detail, as well as excellent dynamics in both coarse and fine detail. The imaging possesses an almost immersive three-dimensionality and plasticity. In addition, the amp shines with tremendous power as the basis for a marvellous calmness and composure. The RG 10 bundles all this into a reproduction with absolute coherence and perfect harmony. Listening to music becomes a thrilling and moving experience - and so the Symphonic Line RG 10 MK 5 Reference HD Master S emerges to be a world-class amp.

Test & text: Volker Frech
Photos: Branislav Ćakić