

Herron VTPH-2A Review by Michael Catucci 2018

So I wanted to wait a bit before posting a review on the Herron VTPH-2A so I could really give it a chance to break in and get to know its nuances. I've had it about a month now and I gotta tell you, this is one heck of a phono stage. I've been lucky enough in the last 6 months to own some really nice stages. This journey started when I purchased a new Rega Planar 6 with the Ania cart and phono stage. The sound was not what I was expecting from a 2k purchase. My Lounge Audio actually sounded better and so the hunt began. I worked my way up the price line trying to find what each brand did differently and see which I could live with. That story is in another thread and I won't repeat it here, but suffice to say I ended up faced with a tough decision and decided to take the plunge and give the Herron a shot. I like to research to death and there is not a lot out there on the Herron. But what was out there was stellar and I now know why.

When it finally arrived I played the albums I knew very well. During each jump in price I made with the previous stages, I found they offered more. Some more detail, others better bass or staging. You get the idea. The Herron hits on all of them. It leaves nothing out. Each aspect of what you want in a sound stage the Herron delivers in spades. As I went through each album, I swore the other stages had opened them up and allowed me to hear all the album had to offer. I did not think there could be anything else hidden, no new instruments or nuances going on that I never heard before. I honestly didn't think the Herron could improve in that area, I did expect other things from it, but again not in this area since I already had heard several layers into my music thanks to the other stages. Boy was I dead wrong on this. In fact it may be the biggest thing that continues to catch me off guard and gets that smile going from ear to ear.

I have been taking notes during my listening sessions. Rather than me summing them up in a long sentence, I thought why not just post them raw:

- Focus, clarity -everything is clearly defined and layered
- Presence
- Bass has improved with nothing else changing but the stage
- Separation
- Inner detail
- You know where the musicians are standing, no guessing
- Background singers/vocals have more of an impact on the music -you can clearly hear them and where they are in the soundstage
- Everything sounds different, guitar, drums, etc. Can't explain it, but it is REALLY good.

Drums -you can feel/hear the depth when the stick hits. I'm not experienced enough to put better descriptors here. A friend said it was timing. Everything has more body to it.

- Music sounds so real, like I am in a club. I can feel the thump of the drums like never before.
- Guitars, you hear the vibration of the string....the pick strumming the strings. Inner detail galore!
- This stage ensures you hear every instrument on the recording with adequate separation
- I guarantee you will hear instruments you had no clue existed in your recording. Dire Straits -I know these like the back of my hand, or so I thought.

These are my notes in the raw. Suffice to say the Herron is one heck of a phono stage. I never imagined the stage could have such an impact on how the overall table sounds. Inner detail is incredible; instruments like bells, tambourines, triangles, etc come to life. Where you may not hear them at all with some equipment, the VTPH 2A isolates them like a laser. It also does a great job of creating the soundstage in regards to depth and width. There is definite dimension going on, especially with the well recorded stuff. I'll be sitting there listening and many times I hear something off to the side and look that way to see if someone came in the closed door only to find it is in the music. Lots of 70's recordings are great for this. Steely Dan, Seals and Crofts, etc. It does justice to vocals as well. I'm a huge Straits fan and Mark's voice never sounded more lifelike and "in the room with me" than it does now.

But let's be honest, all these things have been said before about other stages and maybe the Herron does it all better (it does) but what really sets it apart from other stages and why is it worth the asking price? One word: LIFE. Yes life, it brings everything to life. I have not heard sound like this in any other stage I have purchased this year. Not even close. The JC3 Jr does a lot of things right and is my next favorite, but even that stage cannot replicate what the Herron does. It's not that I feel like I am at a live concert, no I feel rather that I am in the studio watching these guys play. Every instrument from drums, guitars, bass, brass, etc sounds so real. This may sound odd to some, but you "feel" the drums and I don't mean feel as if you turned the volume up all the way and feel the beating in your chest, no...not at all. You can keep the volume low and yet you still feel the drums. You feel the guitar....the strings sizzle as they are struck and just hang there in space for a second or two. The stage is EXTREMELY accurate, the musicians are where they should be with no question at all as to who and what is occupying that space in front of you. I sold a collectible from my other hobby to help purchase this Herron VTPH 2A and I was worried I would have regret. I have ZERO regret and can now absolutely, positively cross off the phono stage as my upgrading days for that piece of gear are done. I have no interest in hearing anything else. Thank you Mr. Keith Herron for making one incredible piece of musical equipment. It is worth every bit of the asking price if you are into vinyl.

VTPH-2A Vacuum Tube Phono Preamplifier: <http://www.herronaudio.com/vtph2specs.html>