

Norma Audio Revo SC-2 LN/PA 150

LAST YEAR, CHRIS KELLY REVIEWED THE NORMA REVO IPA 140 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER IN THESE PAGES, AND WAS MORE THAN A LITTLE IMPRESSED WITH THE UNIT. NOW HE TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO THE COMPANY'S PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER COMBINATION

Intrigued to hear how the next level of Norma Audio, in the shape of separate pre and power amplifiers, might perform – and whether the extra investment would repay the purchaser with an even greater level of musical enjoyment – I ordered up for review the £5695 Revo SC-2 LN preamplifier and £5595 PA 150 stereo power amp (the range also includes PA160 MR monobloc power amps, at £14,895/pr).

Unboxing the two units, their sibling relationship to the Revo IPA 140 was immediately apparent. Both have the same elegant design ethos, the very well-finished silver casing curving elegantly from front to rear, and very similar overall proportions. These look and feel like premium products.

The review sample of the SC-2 was fitted with both the PH3-Revo phono stage (configurable for MM and MC cartridges, and a £389 option) and the £1999 DAC1-Revo digital board, both of which are optional extras; there's also a £1499 multichannel input option for the preamp, the MCH6-Revo, with two sets of six-channel inputs.

The SC-2 is supplied with a similar remote control to that which I had used with IPA 140, which is again designed and made to Norma Audio's very high standards, with a full metal jacket – it's actually machined from a solid aluminium block – and small buttons with a very positive action. The pre/power amps come in silver as standard, with black an option at £169 apiece; the remote only comes in silver.

Although Norma equips its products with both XLR and RCA sockets, the user manual makes clear the designer's strong suggestion that RCA is preferred over XLR on sonic grounds, and therefore I stuck with RCA connections between the pre and power units and when attaching source equipment, which in this case was my Yamaha CD-S3000 SACD/CD player. The phono stage was configured for MM and so I used the Goldring 1042 attached to my Linn Ittok and modified Sondek LP12, plugged into Input 1 where there is also an earthing post available. I attached my Lyngdorf CD2 via the digital RCA socket into the DAC on the Norma Audio. For the review I used Shunyata mains cables and Tellurium Q interconnects and loudspeaker cables.

The loudspeakers used for the review were my own Harbeth C7ES XD stand mounts, which sit on HiFi Racks Fortis stands. I also had the opportunity during the review period to listen to a pair of Dynaudio Special 40 stand mounts, to be the subject of a separate review coming soon.

Cool blue

Once they were plugged in and switched on, I allowed the Normas a good half day to settle in and warm up. Norma uses cool blue LED lights to glow when power is applied, and the SC-2 has a very legible plasma display mounted centrally with shows the input selected and the volume level. The brightness of the screen can be varied according to the user's preference. Sitting over 4 metres from my equipment rack I had no problem in reading the display. Volume can be advanced or reduced in 0.5 dB steps, allowing great flexibility in setting an exact level. Switching between inputs is totally silent.

I started the serious listening part of the review by playing the same CDs through first the Yamaha and then the Lyngdorf, with the latter acting as a transport to the Norma DAC. I started with the excellent Blue Note recording of José Jones 'Lean On Me', from 2018. Mr Jones has a fine voice, well



suited to the Bill Withers songbook he covers here. Through the Yamaha the sound was full and vibrant, with a richness of tone which certainly suited the material. Moving the disc to the Lyngdorf and replaying it using the Norma's own Burr Brown DAC I felt the music seemed to flow a little more freely and sounded less 'digital', which is always a good thing in my book. I found the same thing as I moved through a whole series of recordings on the venerable 16/44 format. Beethoven's 9th, performed on the L'Oiseau-Lyre label by the Academy of Ancient Music under Christopher Hogwood, came through both players with the power and majesty that the work demands, but again I felt that the Lyngdorf/Norma DAC partnership just edged it for me, particularly in communicating the emotional impact of the fourth movement.

Mrs Kelly's choice

From that classical choral sound I switched to modern pop and played one of Mrs Kelly's favourite recordings from recent times, George Ezra's *Staying At Tamara's*, which has some really excellent songs on offer. Through the Lyngdorf/Norma DAC the music fairly bopped along and after that my silver disc replay was all done through that source.

Switching to the 'guest' Dynaudios was interesting: it became clear that the Norma amplification wasn't forcing its personality onto the speakers, but rather allowing them to reveal their own character and strengths, allowing me to hear both their similarities and their differences. The Dynaudios responded very well to the generous current delivered by the Norma amplifier.

As my listening room is also our lounge, the hi-fi system is used to provide sound for the television too. The optical cable was plugged into the Norma DAC and from the beginning the clarity was exceptional, with spoken word (at which the Harbeths do excel anyway) coming through with a wonderful natural quality, and with movie sound tracks having huge weight when required and subtlety too. Bass through the Norma pair goes very deep but the amplifier keeps a very firm grip on matters and the sound from AV system was always highly enjoyable despite being only offered in two channel. At no time did I feel inclined to introduce my REL subwoofer into the system. Both the Harbeths and the Dynaudios delivered fast and tuneful bass via the Norma electronics.

Whatever source I used, the Norma pair produced all those things that we hold dear such as a very wide, deep and tall soundstage, with every instrument clearly defined in its own space and lead vocalists out front where that had been the producer's intention. Bass was full but controlled, the mid range exquisitely expressive while the



higher frequencies were light and airy, and never harsh. Music reproduction seemed effortless and yet energetic when ever that was required. Other more familiar brands may claim that they have cornered the market in pace, rhythm and timing, but this Norma pair are no slouches in that department, as any prospective purchaser should be able to hear at audition when we can safely resume such activities.

Excellent phono option

Switching replay to vinyl showed again what masters of their craft are the designers at Norma Audio. I played a huge selection of records during the time that the Normas were in my system, and the phono stage proved to be every bit as accomplished as the DAC. Music simply flowed from the loudspeakers, and as a result I had some very long listening sessions, the musical pleasure I was experiencing prompting me to dig out albums which I sometimes overlook. Late 1970s pressings of Bob Seger and Dire Straits albums, as well as more recent remastering of 60s classics from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones kept me absolutely absorbed, as did vinyl versions of some of the titles I had played on CD. The Norma phono stage is no afterthought – I felt that it was good enough to live with without the need for an external device.

In fact, that may just serve as my summary of my time with these very gifted Norma components. Yes, they are not inexpensive but I am hard pressed to think of any other pre/power combination at this price point that would give me more long term pleasure and pride of ownership. The company pays attention to detail, and clearly plays to its strengths.

Norma isn't as widely available as it deserves, but it is more than worthy of a place on the shortlist of anyone who wants the very best in engineering and sonic prowess. Seek it out, audition it and I think you will find a musical companion for life.



Specifications

Norma Audio Revo SC-2 LN	
Price	£5695
Inputs	2 RCA, 2 XLR; phono, digital and multichannel available as options
Outputs	1 RCA, 1 XLR
Gain	0dB in passive mode, 17.5dB active mode
Dimensions (WxHxD)	430x110x365mm

Norma Audio Revo PA150	
Price	£5595
Inputs	RCA/XLR
Outputs	Combination terminals for bare wire/4mm plugs/spades
Output power	150Wpc into 8ohms, 280Wpc into 4ohms
Dimensions (WxHxD)	430x110x365mm

normaudio.com
hifidelityuk.co.uk (UK distributor)