



## Phonostages

# A Superior Phonostage from Germany

## JR TRANSROTOR PHONO II

Neil Gader

**J**R Transrotor of Germany is widely respected for its striking and innovative turntable designs—a reputation it’s earned over the last twenty-five years. Less commonly acknowledged is the Phono II, Transrotor’s one and only phono preamp. Extensively heat-sinked and beautifully machined in chunky 6mm aluminum (with an even thicker 8mm faceplate), the Phono II is a pure dual-mono design. The delicate signal paths are kept short; parts are top-notch; the circuit board is carefully isolated. An external power supply plugs into a six-pole DIN socket in the back panel and is secured by a threaded protective ring. When plugged in, power is always on. Designed for moving-magnet cartridges and higher-output moving coils, the Phono II is equipped with easy-to-access internal DIP switches that allow gain optimization as well as impedance and capacitance loading.

My first observation of a phono preamp occurs before I even drop the stylus into the groove. And with profound apologies to Paul Simon, it is the sound of silence. In the case of the Phono II there was no hum, low noise, seemingly nothing added to color the quiet background and ultra-low-level serenity of the idling T+A line-level preamplifier. And it was the reduced noise floor of the Transrotor that permits all of the ensuing observations.

First, a little background. My long-standing analog front end (Shure V15/SME/Sota) has a personality that veers toward the warmer side of the spectrum, but it’s a richness I personally favor and one that’s especially complementary to the smaller, more lightly balanced systems that I often review. So it was with some surprise that, as the needle dropped into the groove, the pace and transient energy of the Transrotor put a skip into the step of the Shure that I didn’t think it had. During Neville Marriner’s rendition of Stravinsky’s wildly colorful *Pulcinella* [Argo]—a recording that I constantly mistake as direct-to-disc—there was greater illumination of images and unfettered dynamics and a new brand of urgency and liveliness during the trombone and doublebass duet that had me considering seatbelts. The character of the Phono II wasn’t warm or retiring; neither was it lean—just focused. While preserving the midrange authority of the system, the Transrotor lifted a veil of darkness hovering over the top octave, as, for instance, in Jennifer Warnes’ performance of “Joan of Arc” [*Famous Blue Raincoat*, Cypress]. It didn’t add brightness per se; rather it added transparency and revealed



heretofore-buried microdynamic information. It also removed what has seemed like a foot brake on the transient performance of the mm cartridges I’ve toyed with, particularly the bursts of percussion from a symphony orchestra or the lightening attack a drum solo (e.g., “Murder By Numbers” from The Police’s *Synchronicity*) [A&M]). The only area where the jury is still out regards back-to-front soundstage depth—not the V15’s strongest suit.

The Phono II’s performance elevates my mm-based system to a new level. It’s not a cozy, tubey kind of sound but to these ears it’s a persuasively honest one. However, its performance with moving-coil cartridges remains an unturned stone. With any luck I’ll have an opportunity to revisit the Transrotor, moving coil in hand, very, very soon. **TAS**

## Specs & Pricing

**Frequency Response:** RIAA±0.5dB  
**Gain:** 40–60dB  
**Input Impedance:** MM 47kOhms, 47,100, 220, 470pF  
**Input Impedance:** MC 100, 220, 470, 1000 ohms  
**Dimensions:** 7" x 3" x 6.75"  
**Weight:** 6 lbs.  
**Price:** \$1800

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