



PHONO STAGE OF THE YEAR (OVER £2,500) RCM Audio theRIAA MkII

The Polish high-end distributor RCM Audio also makes a trio of phono stages; theRIAA being the middle model in the line. It has been a staple of Alan Sircom's system since he first tested it 100 issues ago, and now in its Mk II guise, it's better than ever!

A two-box, minimalist phono stage with significant flexibility in cartridge loading, as the name suggests, theRIAA MkII is not the vehicle for those wishing to explore alternative EQ curves, but the IC-based MM/MC phono stage with passive RIAA equalisation (effectively a dual mono, high-specification version of the company's original Sensor circuit but without the small value decoupling capacitors dotted around the circuit boards). Changes from the original to MkII version of theRIAA include a more significant power supply reserve, a better laid out circuit board and improved cabling throughout.

While these may seem like minor changes to the phono stage – and don't change the fundamental characteristics of RCM's superstar or even push existing owners to upgrade – the improvements to the performance are significant. In our test, Alan Sircom felt that, "It retains the original's absolute honesty as if you are direct-coupling the cartridge to your ears. There is so much to be pulled from the LP that theRIAA MkII takes in its stride, you begin to wonder just what else is holding back the sound." If a good phono stage should be transparent to the source itself, then theRIAA is nigh on perfect, "While the phono stage doesn't make you want to upgrade everything else in the chain, it does make you appreciate just how lifelike an excellent cartridge can be."

In terms of improvement, Alan felt that, "the sound of theRIAA MkII just builds on that with less in the way between cartridge and you. Eight years on, I'm still more than happy with the RCM Audio theRIAA." He concluded his review by saying, "it can get past the artifice of audio and bring you closer to the music itself. And that is the goal of all right audio equipment, after all." It looks like RCM Audio's theRIAA MkII still has a lot of staying power! +

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