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## RCM Sensor Prelude IC Phono-Amplifier

**High end from Poland? Well, there is really such a thing and, in fact, for relatively (!) little money! That, of course, appeals to the homo analogicus, who would like you to get close, here and today, to an analogue delicacy and who would like to recommend use of this high end from Poland.**

**written by Helmut Rohrwild [12-2008]**



Why introduce a phono-amplifier from Poland? Well, as very often, it is a side-product of inquiry for information, which first of all had nothing to do with the device, which will be introduced here.

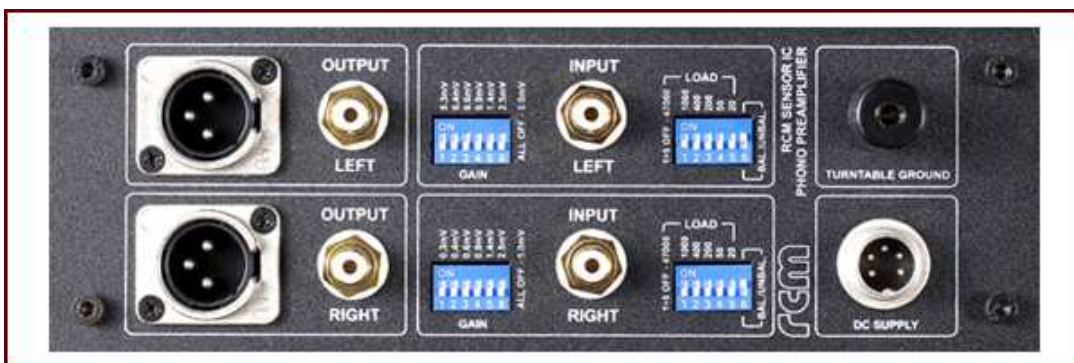
Recently, I was dealing with the software "Adjust+". On the website of "Adjust+" as phono-preamp in every listed measurement there is quoted an "RCM Sensor Prelude"; thus, making me curious. Asking Christian Feickert, the "father" of "Adjust+", it became evident, that "RCM Audio" is a Polish company, the distribution of which in Germany is run by "Dr. Feickert Analogue" ? in short: DFA. As the products of DFA have a remarkable analogue reputation, it was my suspicion, that the RCM phono-amplifier must be on a high level and, therewith, should be introduced to those who fancy analogue. And, of course, it is very exciting to find out what our Eastern neighbours are capable of. Up to now, at least according to my knowledge, the producers in Eastern EU-countries of ambitious equipment for the playback of music are very active in a very small numerable amount but do enjoy a quite high reputation.

The RCM Sensor Prelude IC consists of the actual phono-amplifier and a power supply unit, both in stable matt-black varnished metal-housings which abstain from a high standard-design, but can, therefore, be integrated in an inconspicuous way. The connecting cable between both has a sensible length which allows a proper distance of the two units from one another. According to my experience, this is always sensible because the power supply units sometimes tend to influence other components of the system. The Sensor Prelude is consequently built up channel-separated and double-levelled, and this even also symmetrically. More of this later on.



The polish developers have has chosen a configuration with high-quality ICs and a passive RIAA-equalization - about which traditionalists will wrinkle their nose concerning the ICs - but traditions can also be ballast, and, as already one of our old chancellors liked to remark: "... it is important what comes out at the back..."

There are extensive connecting and adjusting possibilities, and according to the inner construction, they exist twice on the rear panel. Exceptions: the power supply connection and the massive grounding-socket/clamp. The outputs are symmetrical as XLR-socket and asymmetrical as cinch-socket. The input sockets are designed only as "chinch" and are flanked by two DIP-switching blocks, which allow for a precise adaptation to the respective sound pick-up, and thanks to their arrangement on the outside of the rear panel this adaptation work is without problems. Immediately, the question occurs: how can a symmetric connection of a sound pick-up work with a chinch-plug at a chinch-socket? Surely not with a normal coaxial cable but with a special designed phono-cable-set which has two inner conductors. These are soldered to the middle-pin and to the mass contact. This is clearly explained with a explicit drawing in the manual. Afterwards, you only have to slide the switches on the "mice-piano" called "LOAD" to the respective operation mode and immediately you can take advantage of the specific character of sound pick-ups to deliver an earth-free-related signal as the exclusive audio source doing so. I must admit here, that I have not examined this operation mode with the Prelude IC up to now, as there was absolutely no time for extensive soldering. But surely I will hand this in later. The input-sensitivity can be chosen in seven steps of 0.3 mV up to 5 mV, the input resistance offers values of 20, 50, 200, 400 ohm with additionally 1 and 47 kohm. Except a few downright exotics every sound pick-up therefore should come into its own - also with the quick capacity of 150 picofarad.



The total assembly and the quality of execution make a very well thought out and notable solid impression. The manual, only in English up to now, is informative and understandable.

## The Sensor Prelude IC was listened to in the following combinations:

### COMBINATION 1:

Preamplifier Funk MTX Monitor V3a  
Mono-Valve-Poweramps Brocksieper LC 807  
Loudspeakers Outsider Equipe  
Cables from ETI, HMS, TMR, and Funk

### COMBINATION 2:

Preamplifier Soultion 720  
1. Mono-Valve-Poweramps Brocksieper LC 807  
2. Stereo-Poweramp Soultion 710  
Loudspeakers TMR Standard IIIc  
Cables from ETI, HMS, TMR, and Funk

The analogue food came via various pick-up arm-pick-up-combinations, such as

London Reference Cartridge  
van Hul Grasshopper III GMA in SME 312 (with internal Nordost wiring)  
Ortofon Venice, and Rondo Bronze in Ortofon AS 309 S  
Decca Stylus Expert in Rodsan Artemiz and  
Nagaoka MP 500 in Stax UA 90 N

Pick-up arms and Sensor Prelude were interconnected with an HMS Gran Finale phono-cable. Brocksieper Phonomax, Whest TWO, GSP Era Gold Reflex and Rossner & Sohn Canofer each served as references vis-à-vis the RCM Sensor prelude IC.

This time, I will abstain of single music examples, as I would have to describe these for each pick-up repeatedly, and this would be beyond the space available for this article. Instead, there is a summary of many hours listening, which gives an excellent reference to the Sensor Prelude IC. All mentioned systems - also the pick-up arm-system-combinations - with their capacities and peculiarities are very familiar to me for a long time now. And these peculiarities were "brought to the ear" by the Polish phonopre - of course always after adaptation to the pick-up - with an impressive neutrality, i.e., it restrained most pleasantly from its own character. That is a characteristic which can not be valued high enough, especially when you want to know how the pick-up plays and not what the phono-amplifier makes of it. Because that is exactly what it should not do. It should "only" equalize the signal, which is read out of the groove according to the RIAA-curve, and deliver it, amplified with a four-digit factor, to the amplifier. In the best sense, this neutrality has nothing to do with exsanguinous nitpicking, which is often alleged, but "translates" the merits of pick-ups - not more nor less. It is clear, that, additionally, a respective level of all parameters which are necessary for the implementation of an analogue signal, is absolutely indispensable. The Sensor Prelude IC did not lower its guard; it always presents to me the different candidates as I know them, and that quite to the limit. All this is underlined by a powerful pace, for which I would like to attest a noticeable - or even better - an audible trade mark.

Please note here: as usual, I connected the Sensor Prelude IC at the beginning asymmetrically with the preamplifier, not taking any notice of the advice of the distributor, that in this case the symmetrical transfer of signals should be preferred on sound reasons. I followed this advice rather late using a symmetrical TMR Ramses for the Funk-preamplifier as well as for the Soultion

720. Yes, indeed, Christian Feickert is totally right. By this kind of connection there is still more push and a gain of transparency; thus a better hearing through. But this does not change anything of the basic pace of the phono-amplifier. My advice: always connect symmetrically, if the preamplifier offers that same connection.



You must be aware of the following: the Sensor Prelude IC does make errors distinctly audible at the beginning of the analogue route. It, therefore, is of no use for beautifying the arm-system-combinations, which do not harmonize or not fit technically. With "not harmonize" I mean such pairing, which in fact does function technically, but does not allow the possible highlight when listening - which will be attained with an optimal pairing - and often results in a spiritless sterile performance. As much as this might sound like a platitude, it nevertheless happens again and again unerringly preventing that you will reach audiophile Nirvana.

## STATEMENT

**I did not believe it possible: a company from Poland, not known till today, puts a phono-amplifier on the market, which deserves – without any ifs or buts – the grade "high end". Built absolutely professionally and adaptable in a manifold way this phonopre convinces with a neutral-powerful sound-character. Considering its capacities, it is even quite cheap. I strongly recommend to try it out!**

Helmut Rohrwild

(Translation by Holly Redington)

Phono-amplifier RCM Audio „Sensor Prelude“ IC

Distribution: Dr. Feickert Analogue DFA

Internet: [www.feickert.com](http://www.feickert.com)