

Moor Amps Angel Preamplifier and Angel 6 Power Amplifier

by Steve Dickinson

Moor Amps isn't exactly a household name and, to be fair, aside from the relative newness of the company, there's a reason for that: the Angel Pre and Angel 6 power amp is this fledgling company's first product. And it's pretty ambitious as first products go: the 'unity gain' preamp has four line-level and one AV input, and a choice of RCA or XLR (balanced) output, to the Angel 6 power amp which boasts a generous 150 Watts per channel into an 8 Ohm load, an impressive 300 Watts per channel into 4 Ohms, and a frankly remarkable 580 Watts per channel into a 2 Ohm load. Neatly finished in gently rounded casework the build quality is reassuringly solid and refreshingly free of 'high end' styling pretension. Not that I'm against a bit of styling pretension, you understand, but there's a time and a place, and when you're a small start-up, I'd say that what's in the box is rather more important than the box itself.

The designer is a software engineer by profession, and an obsessive amplifier builder by vocation. Apparently barely a Christmas has gone by in the Narramore household without a new amplifier from Tim's fertile brain, and the Angel 6 has been effectively 30 years in development, one prototype at a time. The 'eureka!' moment came when, not having managed to get the performance he sought, he went back to first principles and laid out for himself what each element of the amplifier had to do. This resulted in a design in which each stage is as linear as possible; an amplifier with the absolute minimum of negative feedback that relies instead on hefty current delivery to control the loudspeakers. A lot of attention has been given to component layout, separating voltage sections from current sections, the better to deal with intermodulation

distortion. The designer claims that the IMD is almost as low with real speakers as it is with a test load, and argues persuasively that this is a fundamental, but often overlooked, aspect of amplifier performance. The three-stage power supply has a total of 200,000µF of reservoir capacitors, which helps explain the remarkable performance into difficult loads.

It also explains the size of the thing; the Angel 6 is a bit of a beast, 575mm wide and 29kg in its stocking feet. As Tim puts it, a hefty toroidal transformer and the aforementioned 200,000µF of reservoir caps takes up a fair bit of space. It may be a beast, but the Angel 6 is not a bruiser; while it can rely on sheer grunt rather than feedback to tame a wayward loudspeaker load, it wears its power lightly. So lightly, in fact, that first impressions are more about its speed and delicacy, than about the heftiness of its output. It's a ninja, not a nightclub doorman. And that's been the story pretty much all along, the power is most definitely there but aside from the effortless sense of scale and ▶



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▶ weight, and the way it just goes on driving hard without stress or fatigue, you’re never reminded of the sheer heft this amp can bring to bear, because it’s only there when it’s needed.

The ‘unity gain’ preamp is not a conventional passive design and it doesn’t have voltage gain, just a passive volume control and active output current buffer stages. The nice thing, apart from the fact that it works just beautifully alongside the Angel 6, is that the volume control is usable pretty much through its entire range, though I chickened out once I got past the 3 o’clock position (the speakers I used didn’t belong to me; also, we have new neighbours). Over the years, I’ve decided that while passive preamps have a lovely, limpid transparency, they usually lack drive and boogie factor, so an active preamp has always been my preference. The Angel pre, into the Angel 6, isn’t shy in the boogie department, which does support the design choices for the pre-section.

The power amp seems pretty agnostic as to the choice of loudspeakers. I used it with two quite different floorstanders, the Amphion Argon 7LS, and the Fyne Audio F702 which both happened to be around at the time. The Amphion is a sealed box design with paired, d’Appolito configured main drivers and a nominal 4 Ohm load; the Fynes are a reflex ported design and a nominal 8 Ohm load. In both cases, the Angel 6 had them singing at their best within moments of hook-up with no obvious areas of concern: no overblown bass, shouty midrange or stressed treble, just expansive dynamics, natural tonality, impeccable timing and lots and lots of music. Speaker matching just got a whole lot easier.

Piano is always a good test, and Graham Fitkin’s rhythmically complex work for two pianos is never far from hand chez Dickinson. The, um, imaginatively

titled ‘Untitled II’ from *Flak* [GFCD990901] not only had two pianos of realistic size, each with their own distinct sonic signature, but the physical separation of the instruments, and the ability to follow either instrument’s melodic and harmonic contribution pretty much at will, was on a level I’ve rarely experienced. The way the two pianos fit together and work as a whole was particularly well brought out on the title track from the same album, and their dynamics and attack was pretty much beyond reproach. ‘Piano Piece Early ‘89’, for solo piano, was sonorous and beautifully proportioned; rich in harmonics, the better to appreciate the majestic harmonies so intriguingly explored in the music, and with excellent weight and scale, but not over-large – a common shortcoming in muscle amps, in my experience, which sometimes fail to resist the temptation to present you with The World’s Biggest Piano™. Not a problem here.

And rhythm and timing continued to impress: ‘Love Me or Leave Me’ from *The Very Best Of Nina Simone* [Verve] not only ▶



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► had subtlety and finesse in the fugue-like middle section, but the whole number swings like I've rarely heard it do before. You'd have to be pretty determined not to like jazz, the way the Angel 6 delivers it. It's not only jazz that benefits from the Angel 6's superb way with timing, either: Joanna McGregor's rendering of Conlon Nancarrow's 'Player Piano Study No. 11' from *Play* [Sound Circus] is untangled and laid before the listener in a way I don't think I've heard before.

The Angel 6's easy facility with timing is matched with an entirely natural layering of instruments; detail and subtlety is presented in such an unforced manner, you start to wonder why so many powerful amplifiers seem to go out of their way to flex their muscles, rather than just delivering the goods like this. Large scale classical is beautifully proportioned, expansive, dynamic, but also subtle, insightful and spacious. I was surprised to detect some 'noises off' in my recording of Leonard Bernstein playing Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' [Deutsche Grammophon] because, until then, I hadn't realised it was a live recording (the applause has evidently been edited out). But more than that, Bernstein's subtle, jazzy approach just drew me right into the performance, and the orchestra was both more subtle and more expressive, with the contributions of the many parts just laid out before me for my attention, pretty much at will. And on that subject, the cavernous soundstage and holographic imaging on Ariel Ramirez' 'Missa Criolla' [Naxos] was simply breathtaking.

The title track from the Portico Quartet's Mercury Award-winning *Knee Deep in the North Sea* [Babel Vortex] can be a challenge, but all the more rewarding when you get it right. Here, the Moor Amps combination brought out the lovely, lilting feel of the piece you only get when the timing is just so, but more than that, the bass was deep and gratifyingly tuneful; the saxophone breathy and layered with harmonic interest, energetic and insistent but not raucous; and the hang, a sort of steel drum, dripped with texture and tonal subtlety. It's an album I haven't listened to in a while, having tired of the way so many systems fail to deal with its sometimes-challenging soundscape, so it's a real pleasure to pull it out and have it dealt with so confidently.

So here we have a comparative rarity, a genuinely powerful pre-power combination that gets out of its own way and just delivers the music. It's muscular like a gymnast, not a rugby player, and just as comfortable with large-scale classical as it is with intimate girl and guitar, or strident, challenging jazz. As a first product, it's somewhat revelatory, there are many long-established manufacturers out there whose products don't get to the magic the way these Moor Amps do. So even if it's been 30 years in the making, I'd say that was time well spent. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Moor Amps Angel Pre

Pre-amp type: Solid-state 2-channel, 'unity gain'

Analogue inputs: 4 single-ended line level only via RCA jacks; 1 AV input; 1 tape loop monitor

Analogue outputs: 1 tape loop monitor; 1 single-ended pre-amp output via RCA jacks; 1 balanced pre-amp output via XLR sockets; 1 line level out (eg headphone amplifier)

Frequency response: 5Hz–50kHz \pm 1dB

Dimensions: 65 × 430 × 230mm (hwd)

Weight: 3 kg

Price: £2,500

Moor Amps Angel 6 Power Amplifier

Power Amp type: Solid state two-channel, low feedback, highly linear, high current capability

Input sensitivity (RCA phono): 1V for max. output

Input impedance (RCA): 15k Ω

Input sensitivity (XLR balanced): 1V for max. output

Input impedance (XLR): 3k Ω

Bandwidth: 5Hz–50kHz \pm 1dB

Distortion: THD <0.01%, with typical loudspeaker load

IMD <0.01%, with typical

loudspeaker load

Rated power into 8 Ω : 150 Watts per channel

Rated power into in 4 Ω : 300 Watts per channel

Rated power into in 2 Ω : 580 Watts per channel (dynamic)

Gross Weight: 29kg

Dimensions: 172 × 575 × 367mm (hwd)

Price: £7,500

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