

Lindemann 882 Integrated Amplifier



Premium quality integrated amplifiers are the most interesting product group in the amplifier sector right now. This could be because a lot of the technology that was once the province of much more expensive pre/power amps has been trickling down to their less exalted brethren. With this in mind, Markus Sauer listened to the Lindemann 882 integrated amplifier.

Many years ago – around 1997, I think – a hi-fi dealer friend was kind enough to lend me a Lindemann Amp 4. It had just been the subject of a review in a leading hi-fi magazine that was so enthusiastic, it still gets a mention on Lindemann's web site today. When I auditioned it, I understood why it had earned such a strong recommendation, but it was not quite my cup of tea. It sounded as if it had been developed using speakers with a bass response in dire need of taming. Although it was certainly very crisp and transparent, it was also rather restrained: the Amp 4 simply lacked slam and drive. If I may be forgiven a fanciful comparison – if the Amp 4 were a person, it would be intelligent, interesting and amiable, but it would go to the disco wearing grey flannel trousers, a tank top and sensible shoes. If you know what I mean.

Many people apparently still believe that the Amp 4 and its predecessors are typical of what Lindemann is building today. When I mentioned to someone from the hi-fi industry that I was going to review a Lindemann component, he said he thought the products were good, but they sounded a bit too thin for his taste.

However, I later had an opportunity to listen to the Lindemann CD1 CD player which, although still on the polite side of the fence as far as dynamics were concerned, was significantly less restrained than before. And whenever I visited the Lindemann demo at the High End show in Munich in recent years, the demonstrations were nothing like my prejudices had led me to expect. About time, I thought, to find out whether my prejudices were well founded or not. It turns out they were not.



For my review I was sent not just the 882, but also the matching 820S CD/SACD player together with a number of interconnects from the new Lindemann cable range. Any cable that goes by the name "Kind of Blue" has already earned bonus points in my book - so I decided to use them in the system between the player and the integrated amp. Unfortunately, I couldn't make use of the speaker cables because the ones that were sent to me were too short for my system. I therefore stayed with my usual Auditorium 23 cables. Player and amp can also be connected with a special system

cable (SYSCOM) that allows one component to control the other. There's an awful lot of software in the 882. You can name each input to suit your preferences, adjust the display brightness, specify input sensitivities, and so on. In fact, if you are so inclined, you can do all of this via the comfortably shaped remote control. The remote does much more, of course, but this is explained on the Lindemann audioteknik website, where you can download a detailed instruction manual in PDF format.

I am old fashioned. I like turning the volume control by hand. And the volume knob on the 882 is a delight to touch. It has a slightly rough finish (as does the input selector) that stops it feeling like a cold piece of metal when you grip it. This slight texturing makes the knob seem warmer and more organic. Indeed, all the controls on the 882 are a real pleasure to use. The mechanical precision with which they operate gives you a great sense of confidence in the product. The overall build quality is faultless.



On the rear panel you will find three unbalanced inputs (RCA phono) and two balanced inputs with XLRs. These are the first indication of one of the more interesting things going on inside the 882: it is fully balanced internally, so the XLR inputs are not just for show. Unbalanced signals are converted into balanced signals directly at the input and remain balanced through to the speaker output. According to Norbert Lindemann, the main advantage of this balanced construction, where the speaker is 'clamped' in push-pull between two identical amplifiers, is stability. However, the symmetrical topology is not the only noteworthy feature; a lot of effort was spent on component lay-out to ensure that mutual interference is kept to an absolute minimum.

Another development objective was to keep the circuitry as compact as possible by using short signal paths. Analogue amplifiers often contain quite long signal paths. Designers of switch-mode amplifiers (I'm not a fan of the term 'digital amplifier') have learned that short signal paths cause fewer problems because they are less susceptible to picking up the electromagnetic 'pollution' that permeates our modern environment. It makes sense to apply this lesson to analogue amplifiers, too. The output stage of the 882 uses small H-bridges, with each pair of output transistors located as closely together as possible. This keeps the signal path down to just a few centimetres.

The electronic input switching uses components that have not been on the market for very long and that Norbert Lindemann preferred us not to name in view of the amount of listening time he had invested in the selection process. In his opinion, these electronic switches are much better than even the finest relays used in other amplifiers. Volume adjustment is also electronic. Norbert Lindemann claims that the volume control components he uses are far superior to any conventional potentiometer, particularly when working with low-level signals. The sonic degradation caused by the volume control is said to be equivalent to that of a short piece of wire – virtually zero – whereas you can easily hear the effect of a normal potentiometer in the signal path.

What is being amplified, by the way, is not voltage but current, and the benefits are felt primarily in the negative feedback circuitry, which is 40dB lower in the 882 than in the Amp 4 I referred to earlier. The 882 gets slightly warm when it is idling. This indicates that there is an appreciable amount of quiescent current at the output transistors – 10W in fact. Norbert Lindemann takes the view that this specification is in fact meaningless because the output transistors in this amp are 'Thermal Track' types. The bipolar MJL 3281A and MJL 1302A from ON Semiconductor are the successors to the famous Motorola transistors that were fitted to many high-end amplifiers in the 1980s and 90s – Krell and Mark Levinson, for example. A temperature-sensing device is incorporated within the transistor die that allows instantaneous stabilization of the bias current whenever the temperature of the transistor moves out of a specified band. According to Norbert Lindemann, this contributes



greatly towards the amp's consistent distortion performance. With normal amplifiers, the distortion spectrum can only ever be optimized for one specific voltage. This is always a compromise because an amplifier normally deals with changing signal levels – music signals – rather than pure sine waves. Thermal Track transistors allow the amplifier to maintain optimum distortion characteristics at all times.

This is state-of-the-art technology. For what is admittedly a premium price, the potential purchaser gets an amplifier built in Germany by Lindemann in limited quantities and to an impeccable standard. In terms of what you get for your money – the 882 is essentially an 832 preamplifier and an 852 power amplifier

in a single box – it represents excellent value. Moreover, a five-year warranty demonstrates the manufacturer's confidence in his product.

So, what exactly does the 882 sound like? Well, what can I say? This review should have gone online a week earlier but I wanted to polish up my copy a little. I ended up completely re-writing every word of my original description of the amplifier's sound quality.

Trying to describe the 882 using the hi-fi reviewer's normal vocabulary results in one superlative after another – pinpoint imaging, soundstaging that reminds you of the opening credits of Star Trek (Space, the final frontier...), absolute freedom from colouration, no trace of harshness in the upper registers, lightning-quick transients irrespective of volume level, absolute stability throughout the frequency range, and so on and so forth.



But none of this does this extraordinary amplifier justice. The first CD I played, not to test the equipment but because I wanted to listen to the album, was Solo Piano by Philip Glass. I went into the kitchen to get something to drink, and suddenly realized to my surprise that I was humming along to the piece. I don't remember which one it was – I didn't make a note of it at the time. The music was playing very quietly in my living room, but the piano still reached right through to the kitchen. That was my first experience of one of the outstanding traits of the 882, which I can only describe as 'precision'. The 882 defines pitch and tone colours so clearly that there is no need to listen attentively, or to play the music particularly loudly. It takes no effort at all to follow a melody or pick out individual instruments within the mix. This might seem obvious, because of course you can follow a melody with any other amplifier, but I always had the feeling that it was easier with the 882 than with many other amplifiers.



This 'precision' allows the 882 takes a back seat so that you can concentrate on the music and what it has to say. 'Music for Strings in the Republic of Venice 1615 - 1630' performed by Sonatori de la Gioiosa Marca, a beautifully recorded WDR3 production issued on CD by the Swiss Divox Antiqua label, revealed the 882's great sense of musical exuberance. Could it delineate the individual tones of three period violins and accurately depict their spatial positions? Piece of cake. Would it acknowledge the seriousness of the musicians playing on this unusual and historical recording? Certainly. But the music grabs you by the lapels and pulls you inside once you get used to the unusual tonal colours. Accelerations and retardations in the tempos, and subtle and strong dynamic accents are some of the reasons why Baroque music is continues to be popular today, and why it is sometimes called the rock'n'roll of the classics. This is physical music, not cerebral. The way the 882 lives and breathes all of this makes for an exciting experience. You can follow each individual instrument at all times, whilst also fully appreciating the performance of the ensemble. Within the limits of the medium, I don't know how it could be done any better.



I was also very interested to find out whether the 882 is able to let its hair down. This is still something I can best judge using analogue disks. I put an English pressing of Deep Purple's 'Made in Japan' on a borrowed Garrard 401 equipped with a Naim Aro tonearm and Lyra Skala cartridge, phono equalization being provided by my Loricraft Missing Link phono stage. The sound that Deep Purple achieved in these recordings still represents, to my ears, one of the definitive statements in rock. The sound is tightly-woven, yet each instrument is clearly distinguishable, driving and being driven in turn. No matter that it is pure teenage angst (just listen to the lyrics), it nevertheless manages to define high-powered machismo rock. My favourite track on this album is 'Sweet Child in Time', which builds from a subdued beginning to an ecstatic crescendo propelled forward by Gillan's incredible vocal. The 882 makes the listener forget the world outside. I was gripped by the dynamics of the piece and surprised to learn that twelve minutes had elapsed when it ended. Fantastic.



'Beds are Burning' is a classic dance track and one of the most successful agit-pop pieces of all time. The song calls for parts of Australia to be given back to the original inhabitants – 'It belongs to them/Let's give it back'. The song is brought alive by a relatively simple but ingenious bass line that defines the song's momentum by remaining slightly ahead of the beat. Very cleverly done.

The 882 gives the low bass the depth of attack needed to thump you in the pit of the stomach, and forms each note so precisely that it even inspired this humble reviewer – who really is old enough to know better – to jump up and have a quick dance around the room with his wife. But seriously, the 882 is so spot-on

rhythmically that it becomes easy to analyze the structure of a song and the interplay between the members of the rhythm section. But this is not what the 882 invites you to do it is not about dispassionate analysis, it is (at the risk of repeating myself) about involvement in the music.

Does anyone need more than this integrated amplifier has to offer? The 882 is probably not the ultimate amp, as indicated by the fact that Lindemann audiotechnik also has separate pre- and power amps in its range. This will be for a very good reason, I am sure. However, the source, loudspeakers and room tuning (and your software!) would have to be of an extremely high standard to justify the additional investment in separates.

Specification:

Power output per channel:	160 W/8 Ω , 300 W/4 Ω
Minimum speaker impedance:	2 Ω
Dimensions:	440 x 135 x 360 mm [W x H x D]
Weight:	20.4 kg
Power consumption [normal operation]:	75 W
Power consumption [full power]:	800 W max
Power consumption [standby]:	0.5 W
Manufacturer:	Lindemann audiotechnik GmbH Felix-Wankel-Str. 4 82152 Krailling / KIM Germany E-Mail: info@lindemann-audio.de http://www.lindemann-audio.de Tel. +49 (0) 89 891 36 79-0 Fax. +49 (0) 89 891 36 79-29



STATEMENT

Not just any integrated amplifier, the 882 is an integrated amplifier with a fine pedigree whose advanced technology nevertheless remains subordinate to the needs of the music. The timbral accuracy, transparency and rhythm of the 882 are of a very, very high standard. It is likely to be the last amplifier you will ever need to buy.

Markus Sauer E-Mail: ms@hifistatement.net

VALUE: VERY GOOD

