

Ella with Quad EL57's

Short Review

Valve amplification would probably not have been a consideration if not for the QUAD's I got by chance some twenty years ago. Until I bought the ELLA kit about a year ago I first used the EL57's with various low budget solid state amplifiers, something more was needed. I knew from past discussions with a sound engineer I had once worked with, and having listened to a pair of them in the past, that valve amplification was preferred. The reason for choosing the ELLA kit was mainly the affordable price. Also it would look nice if it ever came to placing it permanently in the equipment rack.

Building my own valve amplifier from scratch was also an option but the task of gathering the right components from different sources and building a presentable chassis seemed a time consuming task. So I ordered this kit without any problems, communication was good and the kit was well double packed. The preamp and driver valves were missing when I opened the kit but they were sent to me promptly without extra cost.

Assembly with the supplied manual was straightforward. Everything went fine and soon the amplifier was being connected to my QUAD EL-57 loudspeakers. Filament burn in period got under way and the bass tightened up and the sound improvement was big indeed compared to previous amplifiers. I used monster cables and the CD player was connected to the ELLA amplifier, along with a Luxman T-12 tuner, which I may add sounds quite good, via the line in switch on the rear. Soon I was also the owner of a Luxman CL-34 tube preamplifier which has a good phono stage and in order to integrate it into my audio setup I removed the PEC potentiometer along with the line in switch in the ELLA amplifier and added instead two fixed metal film resistors per channel as voltage dividers to get the appropriate input level from the CL-34 to the amplifier. I had already tried the CL-34 preamplifier with the ELLA prior to removing the PEC potentiometer.

Next I upgraded the components in my Marantz CD 63SE, I upgraded the op-amp amplifiers, the voltage regulators, the diode rectifiers, the master oscillator clock and filtered the mains input on the player. (All of them put in at the same time, so I do not know which of them was the most effective upgrade). Then I decided to try the TNT tripleT DIY (CAT5) loudspeaker cables instead of the monster cables I was using (*yes, highly recommended diy speaker cable project, cat5 rocks - ed*). The reason for listing these modifications in this article put in over a period of some months is that each of them produced a great sound improvement.

The ELLA amplifier, along with the QUAD EL-57 electrostatic loudspeakers reproduced these improvements faithfully, these speakers being very revealing of every weakness in the system and also of course every improvement. The EL-57 electrostatic speakers are a difficult load for the amplifier to drive. Their impedance drops as the frequency increases making them a highly reactive load. They are also

fragile and need about 15 watts of the purest amplification possible. This amplifier fulfills my expectations, it has of course more than enough power to drive the QUAD´s, and it does so well. It so happens that I listen mostly to acoustic jazz and the QUAD´s shine in that category. Immense low level detail, never aggressive highs, an incredible midrange and the bass there is, is fast and accurate. I also own Bang & Olufsen Type M75, 4ohms 75 (110)watt loudspeakers and they are easily driven by the ELLA amplifier producing a fine sound. Altogether money, effort and time well spent around this amplifier. Of course there will be more tweaks in the future. <Hjalti – Iceland>

