



Attack on the Establishment

With its fully balanced MC Phono Preamp MCCI the young label B.M.C. wants to make a splash. And in STEREO-Test it achieved more than a moral victory.

Newcomers who want to be successful on a Hi-Fi market already flooded with great products must have something special to offer. Bernd Hugo and Manfred Penning are also aware of this. Until far into the '90s they co-determined skills at Restek and, after forays in other domains, are now reporting back with B.M.C. Audio. Also belonging to the company is Carlos Candeias, who also operated with High-End components under his own name but in the meantime has acquired a first-class reputation as a developer for C.E.C. or Aqvox. He is equally at home with both analog and digital electronics.

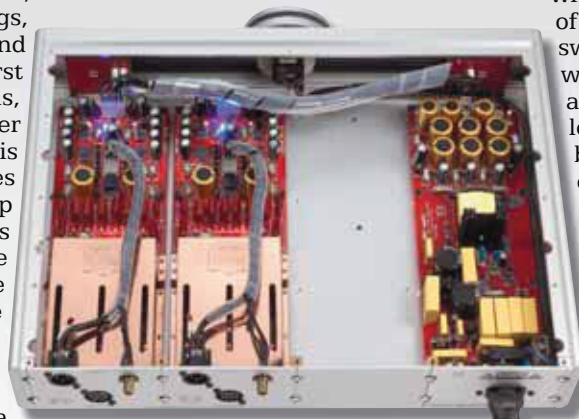
At a meeting in our office we were presented with the prototype of a CD player and a D/A converter, which, despite their reasonable price tags, brimmed over with complexity and detailed solutions. The first completed model to come to us, however, was the phono amplifier MCCI for approx. 1890 Euros. This model of normal dimensions serves solely to amplify the MC pick up and needs balanced operation. This is why, on the input side, there are only a couple of XLR jacks, while subsequent amps can be connected via cinch.

This consequence makes sense, as while the signals of, for example, a CD player are much weakened by a preamp or amplifier, the tiny currents of pick ups, especially those of the

extremely "quiet" MC types, have to be really inflated, which happens mostly between a magnitude of just over 50 decibels and just under 70 decibels. At the same time, disturbance, interference and other "smut" are also pulled up, which blend in with the sensitive MC signals and which cross over in a balanced three-pole mode with its normal phase and inverted side, which then generates a lasting boost in the reproduction.

MCCI is really something special

And there is at least one more distinctive feature which characterizes the MCCI with its silvered front panel and a large knob



The two fully balanced phono modules (l.) are fed by a multiple stabilized power supply which sits in the casing on the right.

as on/off switch: this is not about voltage but about one of the rare current amplifiers. Only one of the advantages of this is that of optimal adjustment in the pre stage to any MC pick up, which at the same time becomes part of the a circuitry as generator. For this reason one finds in the MCCI no adapter sockets for resistive loads nor corresponding switches. The two small buttons on the left and right either dim the already discreet lighting or activate a mute mode.

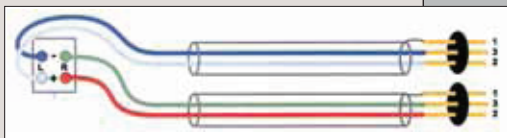
Bass Boost for "Analog Feeling"?

There is still plenty to regulate, but for this you must open the lid of the quality, exquisitely crafted casing. Then two amplifier modules fitted with both opulent and top quality components become visible – one per channel – whose especially sensitive part is insulated by a copper-plated steel cap. On the other side of the casing there is the multiple stabilized power supply.

On ten tiny jumpers, which according to the handbook should only be handled by "professionals", three amplification factors can be connected using the provided micro-jumper and a pair of tweezers, whereby we found the middle setting of a total of approx. twelve decibels' sweep the most suitable for MCs with standard output voltage. In addition, a subsonic filter against low frequency disturbance can thus be activated – practical! It can be combined with a likewise offered bass and/or key tone boost, the sense of which remains a closed book to us. At best, the owners of compact speakers can thus have more pressure generated and, who knows, perhaps one listener or another will nurture the prejudice that a vinyl record has an especially round and opulent sound. Well, in that way, certainly! We naturally dispensed with this

PHONO BALANCED

If one is aware of the advantages of a fully balanced phono connection, one might ask oneself why this operation mode proves an exception. An MC pick up is, per se, already a balanced component with two "hot" sides per circuit. Instead of, as is usual, wiring the minus pole to ground, when connecting to the MCCI, the plus poles red/white are each connected to the Pin 2 of the XLR connectors. The minus poles green/blue contact with Pin 3. As a rule, the conductors run in an insulated cable as shown in the above illustration,



whose shield can be wired to Pin 1. The adapter operation of cinch to XLR (below) is technically irreproachable, for the sound quality, however, only a compromise, whereby the plus and minus poles of each circuit belong on Pin 2 and Pin 3.



kind of "logistics". The alternately offered RIAA equalization with Neumann correction appears to be more interesting, for the treble boost, when cutting, naturally does not run up past the range of audibility but somewhere finds its limits. The MCCI regulates itself, if so desired, according to the curve of the widespread Neumann cutting machine, which should effect a more precise frequency-phase response and so a more open high frequency reproduction.

Best sound only without cinch/XLR-adapter

In practice B.M.C.'s phono-pre proved to be perfectly problem-free. It didn't hiss or hum, there was only a sonorous "murmuring" to be heard when the volume was turned up very high, which stayed far below the wanted signal, as documented by the superb signal/noise ratio. Of course we connected our MCs in a balanced way, and in doing so any ground connection with the chassis of the record player must be avoided. If this happens, the manufacturer sees the threat of possible damage to the appliance and/or pick-up. Although the possibility admittedly exists to connect your pick-up per cinch cable and an appropriate adapter (see box), we must advise against this option. In our experiments the adapters

CATCHWORD

RIAA equalization:

On LPs the basses are lowered and the high tones lifted, which has to be equalized in the reproduction.

limited the result too strongly, pulled the energy into the upper middles and narrowed the space. No, whoever wants to put on a really good show with the MCCI must connect his pick-up directly per XLR.

It played no part whether this was was a Benz LP-S, Clearaudios Talisman or a type from the new Cadenza series by Ortofon: The B.M.C. – which stands for "Balanced Music Circuit" – left the listeners speechless. Due to the only two-stage feedback-free current amplifier circuitry of the Phono-Pres, in which believe it or not 82 transistors per string work, the different internal resistances of these MCs might lead to slightly varying amplifying factors, but the potential of their sound was fully exhausted. Irrespective of the price range and the fact that the MCCI is made in China, the verdict reads: great High End!

B.M.C. draws level with Nagra

The reproduction flows perfectly, it has breath and elegance, but also a non-artificial, versatile dynamic from the finest to the most crude impulses. A significant characteristic of all components to which the above is applicable is their self-evident but serene presentation which is also very concentrated. The B.M.C. can unite all and any adjectives in itself. It draws on a remarkably wide and deep spatial spectrum, which is brilliantly ordered. The voices placed in the stereo center appear to be tangibly three-dimensional and one can almost hear around them.

If sound patterns from MCs connected in a balanced way have always impressed me by the aromatic/delicate aura of their high tones and a special suppleness, this applies in a special manner to the presentation of the Candeias-Pres. On the one hand it engenders an almost intimate atmosphere, but always keeps track of the whole, doesn't throw itself at the listener in a servile manner. Thus a fascinating, natural musical tension comes into being.



The MCCI has balanced inputs exclusively; outputs are available in XLR as well as RCA.

B.M.C. AUDIO PHONO MCCI

Size: 44x10x34cm (WxHxD)
Guarantee: 3years (with Guarantee Card)

www.bmc-audio.de

With its technically self-contained, terrific in both test results and sound MC pre-stage, B.M.C. has succeeded in creating a sensation. Never before could vinyl listeners acquire such quality at this price. Obligatory prerequisite for top performance is the balanced pick-up connector without adapter.

TEST READINGS

Distortion Factor at 0.2mV, 1kHz, 10 Ohm	0,08 %
Output Voltage	7,7 V
Signal-to-noise-ratio Phono MC at 0.2mV, 1kHz, 10 Ohm	87 dB(A)
Output Impedance	101 Ω
Channel Separation	109 dB
Power Consumption Off St.by idle	0 - 12 Watt

LABORATORY COMMENT: Test readings out of a picture book. In S/N ratio, the MCCI is close to the lab record. The channel separation is extremely high, a sign for fantastic spatial presentation. In the middle stage we reached 72 decibels in the test set up with amplifying factor.



FIXTURES

An XLR input, outputs in Cinch and XLR, lighting dimmable, muting, internal possibilities for adjusting amplification, subsonic filter, bass reproduction and RIAA equalization.

STEREO-TEST

SOUND LEVEL 100%

COST PERFORMANCE RATIO

★★★★★
OUTSTANDING

This identifying feature of the dream class also marks Nagra's Phono-Amp VPS (ca. 4950 Euros) with its dignified and committed appearance. Strong demands were made on this model by the MCCI, whose reproduction is even roomier and "larger". The Swiss, however, could chalk up no real advantages. A sensation, when one remembers that the VPS belongs to the absolute cream. When listening for a longer period, it was to be noticed that the B.M.C. played more lightly and clearly, while the Nagra offered a more physical, lusty sound. In the end, it was a head-to-head finish between the two and the MCCI earned top references. B.M.C. has managed to make a brilliant entry into the market. More "speciality" from a newcomer is hardly possible. Matthias Böde