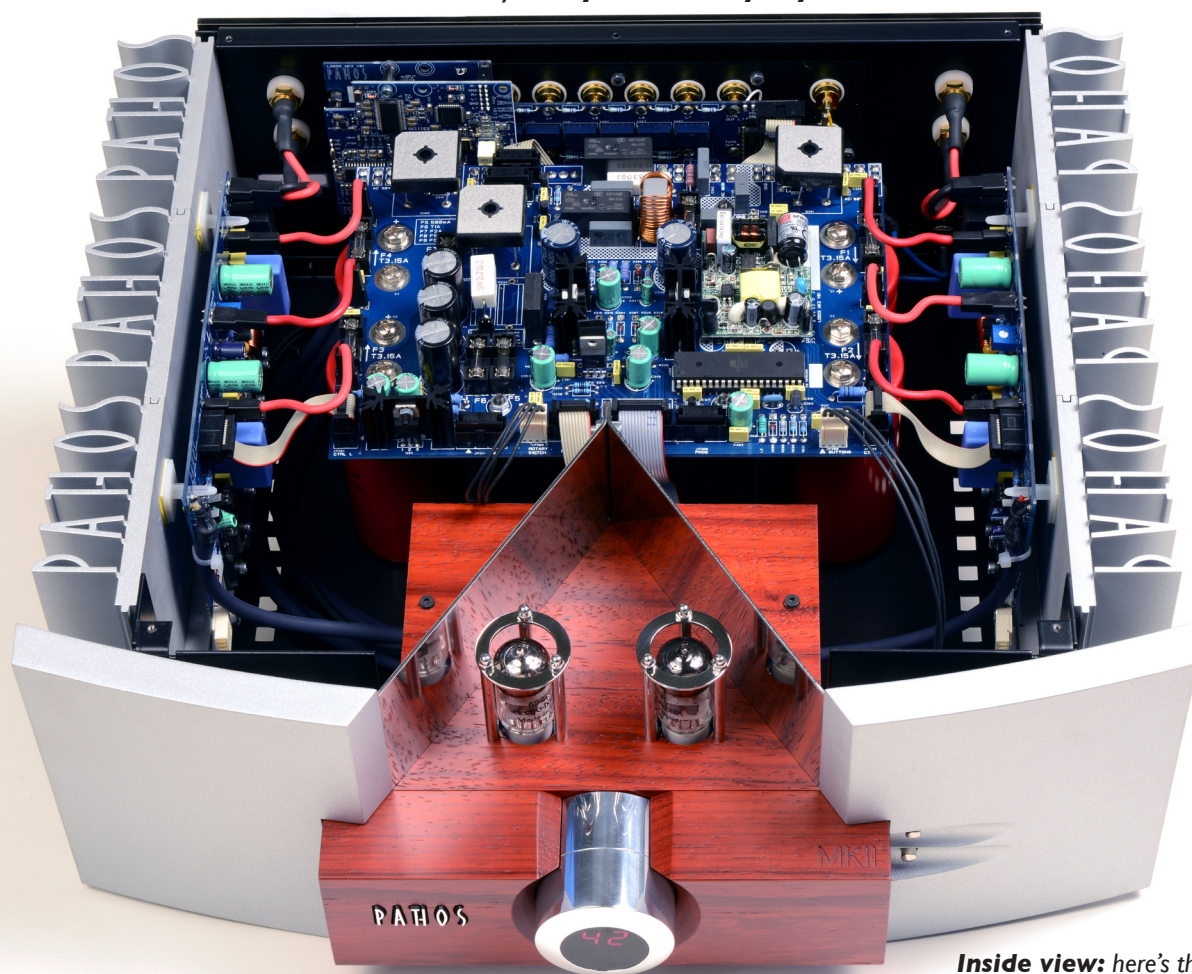


Pathos Acoustics Logos Mk II

reviewed by **Toby McCauley-Pyke**



Inside view: here's the Mk II with top cover removed

For a decade, it's been one of the Italian company's most successful amplifiers. Now an internal makeover makes the Logos better than ever

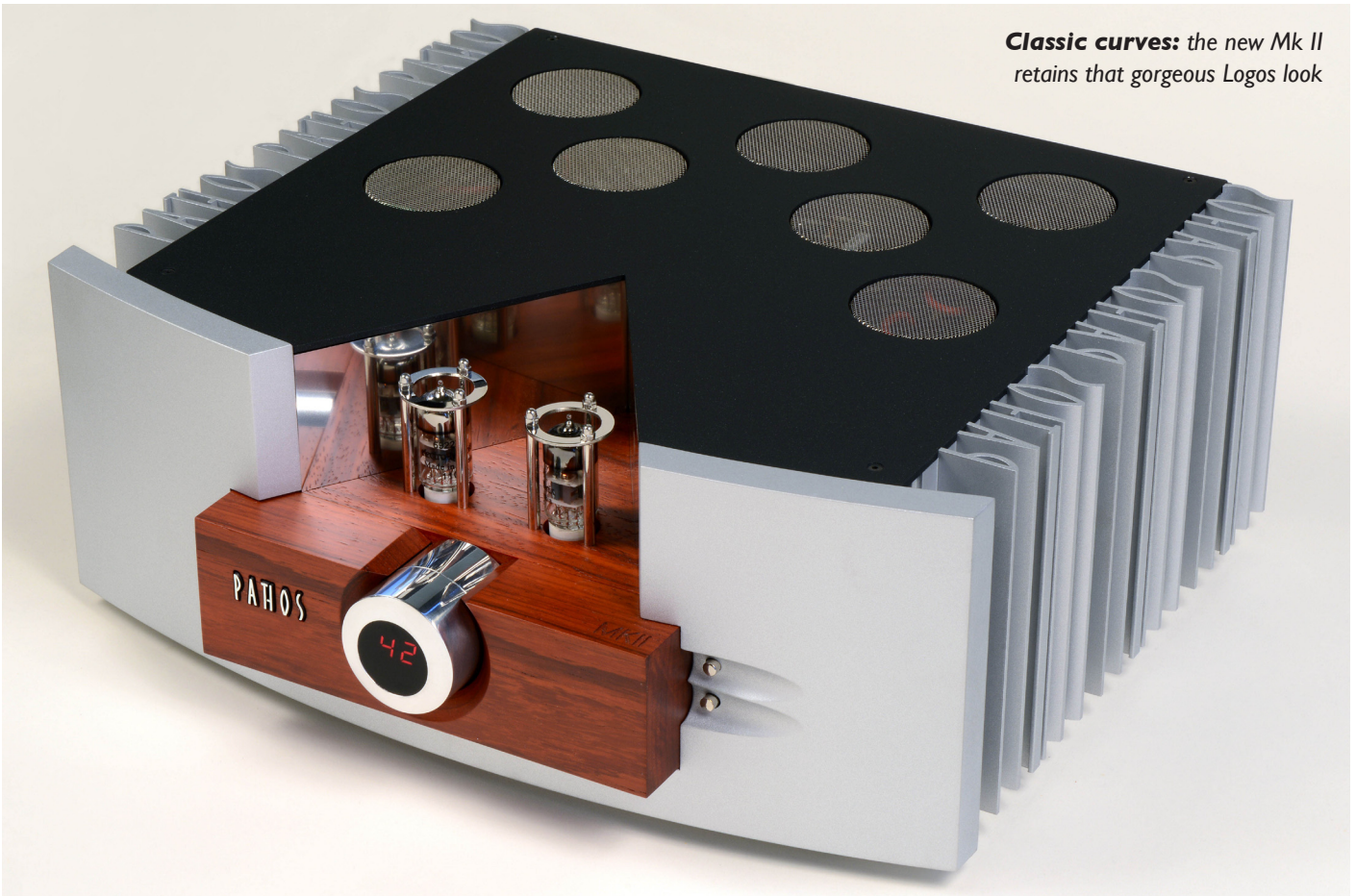
Known historically for Palladio's architecture and in modern times for jewellery, the city of Vicenza in northern Italy has always been a centre of creativity. And when three partners set up Pathos Acoustics there in 1994, their slogan 'The unorthodox approach' was no empty boast.

From the start, Pathos products have combined uniquely adventurous styling with a great deal of genuine technical innovation. In particular, Pathos is really one of the very few companies to have been

consistently successful with hybrid amplifier designs, which make use of both tubes and transistors.

The story began when Gianni Borinato came up with a new idea for an amplifier circuit, and showed it to his friends Gaetano Zanini and Paolo Andriolo, who helped him construct a prototype. Since Zanini was the owner of a high-end audio store, there was every opportunity to see how it fared against the established competition. In the end, it fared so well that that the three friends decided it

Classic curves: the new Mk II retains that gorgeous Logos look



had to be put into production, and Pathos Acoustics was born. While Borinato's INPOL amplifier circuit was patented worldwide, Andriolo created the first example of the stunning industrial design that has been the hallmark of Pathos products ever since.

INPOL stands for 'Inseguitore a Pompa Lineare' which translates as 'Linear Pump Tracker', and this unusual power amplifier concept, using both chokes and capacitors to control the MOSFET devices, has frequently been mentioned in the same breath as Quad's Current Dumping or Nelson Pass's Threshold Stasis. But INPOL technology is necessarily only applicable to very high-end products, as it is very costly to execute.

So in the early 2000s, Pathos came up with Logos, a stunning-looking and superbly-built integrated amplifier that would come 'as close as possible to the peerless quality provided by our proprietary INPOL technology' yet could be offered at a somewhat less elevated price point. In the Logos, Pathos remained true to its hybrid concept, still combining tubed input stages with a solid-state output stage using power MOSFETs.

For the preamp stage, there were two ECC88 (6922) double triode tubes, while the 'digital' volume control was a 100-step device using laser-trimmed resistors for perfect channel balance. The MOSFET power output stage was laid out in true dual-mono,

with massive power transformers supplying plenty of current for low-impedance loads.

In fact, the Logos amplifier was to prove one of Pathos Acoustics' most successful products. Even after ten years in production, it still set a very high standard of performance at its price point. But during those years, of course, there had been huge changes in the music industry, as music downloading overtook the compact disc and the computer became the primary music source for most consumers.

Which brings us to Logos Mk II. From the front, it looks the same as the original Logos, except for the discreet 'Mk II' legend engraved in the top of the wood fascia trim piece. On the back, it offers the same generous array of two balanced and five unbalanced analogue inputs, but additionally sports two coaxial S/PDIF digital inputs plus a USB socket.

These digital inputs will be operative if you've selected the optional inclusion of a built-in 24-bit/192kHz Pathos HiDAC digital-to-analogue converter. Aside from this, the Logos Mk II also has a new-and-improved preamplifier section, said to give a bigger soundstage and greater detail. Power output is rated at 110 watts into 8 ohms, doubling to 220 watts per channel into 4 ohms.

Part of the Logos aesthetic is its extremely simple control layout, devoid of any unnecessary lettering or legends. The central volume knob doesn't rotate

endlessly like most, but can be moved about 30 degrees in either direction. A slight turn to the right will start increasing the level and a turn to the left brings it down, while the setting is shown numerically in the two-digit display.

Apart from this, there are just two unlabelled buttons in neat recesses to the right of the wood trim. It has to be said that you will need to look at the instruction manual before using this amplifier! The lower one is for on/off or standby, while the upper one is a selector which when pressed repeatedly will cycle through the inputs, which are then indicated temporarily by the display.

Naturally, the Logos Mk II comes with the distinctive Pathos remote control, a delightfully simple wood 'stick' that carries just six plain metal buttons. These cover volume up and down and input selection, as well as mute, display brightness and switching from on to standby.

Auditioning the Logos Mk II, it was immediately clear that this was a thoroughbred design that built on the well-established Pathos tradition. Listening on a variety of speakers, it always brought to the system a well-balanced combination of virtues that made music memorable and enjoyable.

It could give big and spacious audio images, but it could still sound punchy and dynamic. It gave a fine rendition of detail but it still had that vital trace of warmth that can make reproduced music involving and intimate, rather than electronic or mechanical. Bass was not overstated, but it was always deep and firm.

Listening initially to the amplifier in its conventional analogue-input mode, the Logos Mk II was very impressive on the classic jazz album *Kind Of Blue*. When playing the same album but using the CD player's coaxial digital output connected to the Logos amplifier's digital input, it was clear that Pathos has provided a built-in DAC here that would



Rear panel: optional built-in DAC gives digital input connectivity

be a match for all but the very best CD players. Here was a sound with a deep, bass quality that was resonant in the best sense of the word, while the midrange had a quality of unstrained naturalness. On 'Blue In Green' it brought out the plaintive quality of the muted trumpet, and seemed to give a wonderfully intimate realism to the piano as its notes hung poignantly in the air.

On a heavy rock number like Huey And The New Yorkers' 'Stick It To The Man', the Logos gave you a weighty, gutsy sound but without ever getting coarse or harsh. On another great track, 'Get Your Lies Straight' by blues singer Terry Evans, Ry Cooder's searing bottleneck guitar seemed to be right there in the room.

Orchestral music was great on the Logos Mk II too, with orchestral textures well conveyed and, when present on the recording, a big and convincing space around the players. All in all, the Logos Mk II is indeed classic Pathos and, as its Aristotelian name implies, it could be a logical choice for many systems.

Never content to rest on its laurels, Pathos has recently launched another, visually very different, amplifier called Ethos, more simply constructed and designed to suit modern, minimalist decor, and again offering the option of built-in D/A conversion.

But the Logos Mk II has a very worthy place in the range of this outstanding manufacturer, offering fabulous sound, ample power and all the flexibility and versatility you could want. And, it almost goes without saying, it looks amazing too. ■

Product details:

PATHOS LOGOS Mk II
integrated amplifier; £3450
PATHOS LOGOS Mk II integrated
amplifier with digital source
connectivity via built-in HiDAC
converter; £3950



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