



Melody unchained

THE BEAUTIFULLY-MADE AN300B MAX INTEGRATED VALVE AMPLIFIER FROM MELODY IN AUSTRALIA CERTAINLY SEEMS TO HAVE STRUCK THE RIGHT CHORD WITH CHRIS FRANKLAND

The Melody AN300B MAX amplifier came my way as a bit of an unexpected bonus: when I reviewed the Aretai Contra 100S speakers in the July-September issue of HIFICRITIC, the importer also dropped off the Melody to use with them if I wanted. And I am very glad he did.

You see, Australian brand Melody wasn't one that had been on my radar, so when this hefty, gorgeously finished valve integrated amp landed on my doorstep, I was intrigued.

So first some background: the company was set up in 1999 in Australia by Allen Wong, and – after many years of research and developing its product range – decided to invest heavily in building a factory in Shenzhen, China.

This 10,000m² factory is said to have a modern assembly line, its own transformer production line, a vacuum processing plant and even boasts its own self-built high-end testing equipment. Wong himself is said to have a strong history in electronic engineering and – as well as being CEO – also serves as chief designer, working closely with a team of skilled technicians.

The company has built up a network of distributors worldwide, selling to the USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and many other markets. VAL Hi-Fi is the UK importer – it also imports the Aretai speakers from Lithuania, which I reviewed in the last issue of HIFICRITIC.

The version of the Melody AN300B MAX I am testing here is a special edition, exclusive to the UK importer VAL Hi-Fi: it's supplied fitted with four

Western Electric 300B power output valves from the USA instead of the usual Chinese Psvane valves, which it rebrands as Melody.

The standard AN300B MAX sells for £5,495, while the 'WE' review model is priced at £10,750. And before you say that's one helluva price hike when the only difference is the four West Electric valves, I should point out that WE in the States has a matched pair of the 300Bs selling on its website at \$1,499, so that would be \$2998 for a matched quad set.

Of course, Western Electric produced the first 300B way back in 1938. Looking on the company's website it is what I would call somewhat tight-lipped about the technical aspects of the new 300B, but it does say it has "taken advantage of materials and assembly processes that were not available in the past". It adds that the 300B's filamentary cathode core material is derived from a 1963 melt from the WE Hawthorne Works in Chicago. It also says that modern turbo-molecular vacuum technology has resulted in longer tube life. Other than this, there is no further detail.

The Melody AN300B MAX also uses four XF184 valves for the preamplifier and a WE407 as a rectifier valve, and there's no faulting the build quality and finish of this amplifier, with the beauty going more