

toneAudio.

ISSUE 22. 2009

Anniversary Classics from McIntosh

By Jeff Dorgay

It is amazing how things come full circle. The first true high-end system to which I was exposed as a 14 year old was right down the street at my pal Garth Rivera's house. His dad was an ex-military officer and while many servicemen were bringing home Japanese gear to start their systems, Garth's dad was pro-American. He had a tricked-out McIntosh system built right into the wall in their living room featuring a C22 preamp front and center along with a McIntosh tuner and Thorens turntable with SME arm and Shure M91ED cartridge. A pair of Dynaco Mark III amplifiers were placed under the floor boards feeding the Jantzen floorstanding speakers with electrostatic tweeters and 15-inch woofers.

It was one of the tidiest HiFi installations I would see for years to come. But that summer was the year that I discovered Miles Davis, Robin Trower and Pink Floyd, usually at fairly high volume, as his dad really liked to rock out. Whenever I heard that system blasting, I would hop on my bike and zoom down the street. There was always something great playing on the turntable. Now with McIntosh's 60th anniversary

C22 and matching MC75 mono-block power amplifiers, you can go home again.





A Remake That is an Honor to the Original

In celebration of McIntosh's 60th anniversary, they have decided to release an updated version of that legendary preamplifier. Unlike the Commemorative Version that was sold in 1995, with a different tube complement from the original design, the new version is back to the original's configuration of six 12AX7 tubes. There is also a matching pair of MC75 tube power amplifiers that feature triple-plated gold-colored titanium stainless steel. The 60th Anniversary McIntosh amplifiers and preamplifier are only sold as a set for \$15,000, which is not a bad price for a great vacuum-tube preamp with MM and MC capability and a pair of 75-watt tube mono-blocks, especially with this level of exclusivity.

There are only going to be 120 sets built for North America (60 for the US and 60 for Canada), along with 60 sets each for worldwide territories. When I visited the McIntosh factory in March, I was able to see the final units being built and shipped all over the world. The various McIntosh dealers had already purchased all 60 sets for the US market, but as CEO Charlie Randall told me, "All of the dealer units haven't been sold to customers yet, so we should get the word out on how great this set is."

(continued)

"All of the dealer units haven't been sold to customers yet, so we should get the word out on how great this set is."



I think McIntosh has achieved aesthetic perfection with the current issue C22 as well: it's just the right balance of classic Mac with subtle updates.

And great they are, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

If you are a car enthusiast, you know that a few classics have been brought back with mixed success. The new Dodge Challenger is by far my favorite current classic because it combines all of the styling cues we remember, it gives a slightly modern aesthetic, and it offers more performance than the original. The owner of the original can look at the current version and not want to take a hammer to it, while owners of the new model can look back on the original and still feel pride of ownership.

I think McIntosh has achieved aesthetic perfection with the current issue C22 as well: it's just the right balance of classic Mac with subtle updates. The MC 75's are awesome too, but the gold finish will either be for you or not. It's a little too much for me. I'm a big fan of the standard chrome finish of the MC275 and McIntosh tube power amplifiers past. Who knows, maybe the folks at McIntosh will release a "standard" version of the MC 75's in chrome next year?

Other upgrades to the basic C22 design is a set of balanced inputs and outputs and a moving coil phono stage in addition to the moving magnet version available on the first C22. MM capacitance and MC loading are adjustable on the front panel. Gain is fixed for the MM stage at 40db and the MC stage at 60db, just like the C2300 preamplifier.

While it does not have as many balanced inputs and outputs as the C2300, a quick call to Roger Stockholm at McIntosh revealed that the 60th anniversary C22 and the C2300 share a lot of DNA, and their core circuitry is virtually identical. "We wanted to put the cartridge loading right on the front panel, just like the original though, and the C22 does not have the microprocessor control of the C2300, but it is lit with LEDs so it should last for a very long time." *(continued)*



Modern Sound

Though these components look vintage, the sound is of this century. Ron Cornelius of McIntosh put it best when he said, “These are not museum pieces to put on a mantle. They are to be used and enjoyed as a state of the art tube McIntosh audio system.”

While styling is always very personal, having lived with the C2300 and the C22, I like the simple elegance of the C22. But maybe it’s the nostalgia gland in my brain. Cornelius also told me that the MC75 monoblocks are “more like baby MC2301’s than just an MC275 split onto two separate chassis.” Roger Stockholm confirmed that the output transformers on the MC75 are completely different than the ones used in the MC275, though each monoblock uses an MC275 power transformer. This keeps the MC275’s running extremely cool and a substantial power reserve is always on tap, thanks to what is essentially, twice the power supply of an MC275.

These are special amplifiers, and thanks to the 2-ohm output taps, I was able to drive the MartinLogan CLX’s much easier than could my MC275, which only has a 4-ohm tap. However, I found nirvana with the 60th anniversary gear connected to the Verity Audio Sarastro II’s. These full-range floor-standing speakers that are very efficient, so the MC75’s always had power to spare. This was a system that I could live with happily ever after! *(continued)*

“These are not museum pieces to put on a mantle. They are to be used and enjoyed as a state of the art tube McIntosh audio system.”



I'll go on record as saying this is the best remote control I've had the pleasure to use.

When comparing the MC75's to a good friend's early vintage MC275 with NOS tubes, you can really see how McIntosh has refined their design over the years. The MC75's still have a healthy dose of the midrange magic that's made them famous, but they have much more grip and authority in the lower registers and more resolution in the upper mids and treble. Even compared to the current MC275, the MC75s push the soundstage wider and are more transparent overall. I suspect that a certain amount of this is due to splitting up the amplifiers on separate chassis with their own power supplies, but the difference is not subtle, especially when listening to texturally complex music at high volume.

Modern Features

If you are a current McIntosh owner, you are familiar with the standard issue remote control, with about 100 small backlit buttons. It has a nice feel, but if you are older than 35, it will have you reaching for the reading glasses. The new HR22 remote that comes with the C22 is a model of elegance and functionality. I'll go on record as saying this is the best remote control I've had the pleasure to use. The power button is located at the top left, with volume up/down located beneath. Should you be using your C22 with one of McIntosh's CD players (I used the MCD500); a data cord between the preamp and CD player will allow that remote to control your CD player as well.

The big bonus with the MC75 mono-blocks is that they feature remote turn on. This has always been my sole complaint with the MC275 stereo amplifier. I know a lot of McIntosh owners have "all Mac" systems, so the ability to turn the whole system on from this one remote is very cool indeed. McIntosh makes a shielded cable specifically for this purpose in a six-foot length that you can purchase at your dealer. Or the nearest Radio Shack will do, especially if you need to run longer lengths.

(continued)



Control Flexibility

As someone who has always had multiple sources, I've always appreciated the way McIntosh always gives you a ton of inputs. They used to call their preamplifiers "control centers," and that is a perfect description. The back panel features two sets of (switchable) RCA outputs and a set of balanced XLR outputs along with a set of fixed output RCA jacks for any recording device you might have. It worked perfectly with my KORG MR-1000 portable digital recorder and Nakamich ZX-7 tape deck.

There are six sets of RCA high-level inputs, two sets of balanced XLR inputs along with separate MM and MC phono inputs. MC loading is adjusted on the front panel and has a range of 10, 25, 50, 100, 200, 50 and 1,000 ohms, while MM capacitance is adjustable from 30-350pf in 50 pf increments with the standard 47k loading.

Quiet!

The first thing you will notice about the 60th anniversary pair is how quiet these pieces are together. Even with the phono inputs, you can turn the volume control up to maximum with no hiss coming from the speakers. It's very impressive how much attention to detail the McIntosh engineers have paid to the subtleties in this preamplifier.

Again, the phono stage is the same one from the C2300. You could probably swap the tubes for some older vintage models and get a different sound, but I was impressed enough with the stock tubes when I had the 2300 that I did not bother to roll any tubes in the C22. I did really appreciate having the ability to connect two turntables to the C22, and used my modded Technics SL-1200 with Clearaudio Maestro Wood through the MM input and the Rega P-9 with Lyra Dorian through the MC input. *(continued)*

As someone who has always had multiple sources, I've always appreciated the way McIntosh always gives you a ton of inputs.



I had equally good luck with other cartridges I tried with varying outputs. Even with the relatively low-output Dynavector 17D3 (.23mv), I still had enough gain so that noise did not creep into the presentation. Sonically, I'd put the internal phono stage on par with what you might find in the \$1,500 range in an external phono preamplifier, but it is one of the quietest tube phono preamplifiers I've heard at any price. Personally, I like it all on one chassis – fewer interconnects and power cords to complicate the system.

Fantastic Balance

The hallmark of the 60th anniversary McIntosh system is its overall balance. I commend McIntosh on pricing these fairly; considering the dedication of McIntosh lovers worldwide, they probably could have doubled the price and sold every set they could build.

For \$15,000, you get a fantastic tube preamplifier with considerable flexibility, great sound and two phono inputs along with a very powerful pair of monoblock amplifiers that should be able to drive all but the most inefficient speakers. I predict that the people who manage to get their hands on these will have something very special indeed. This is a system I could retire with.

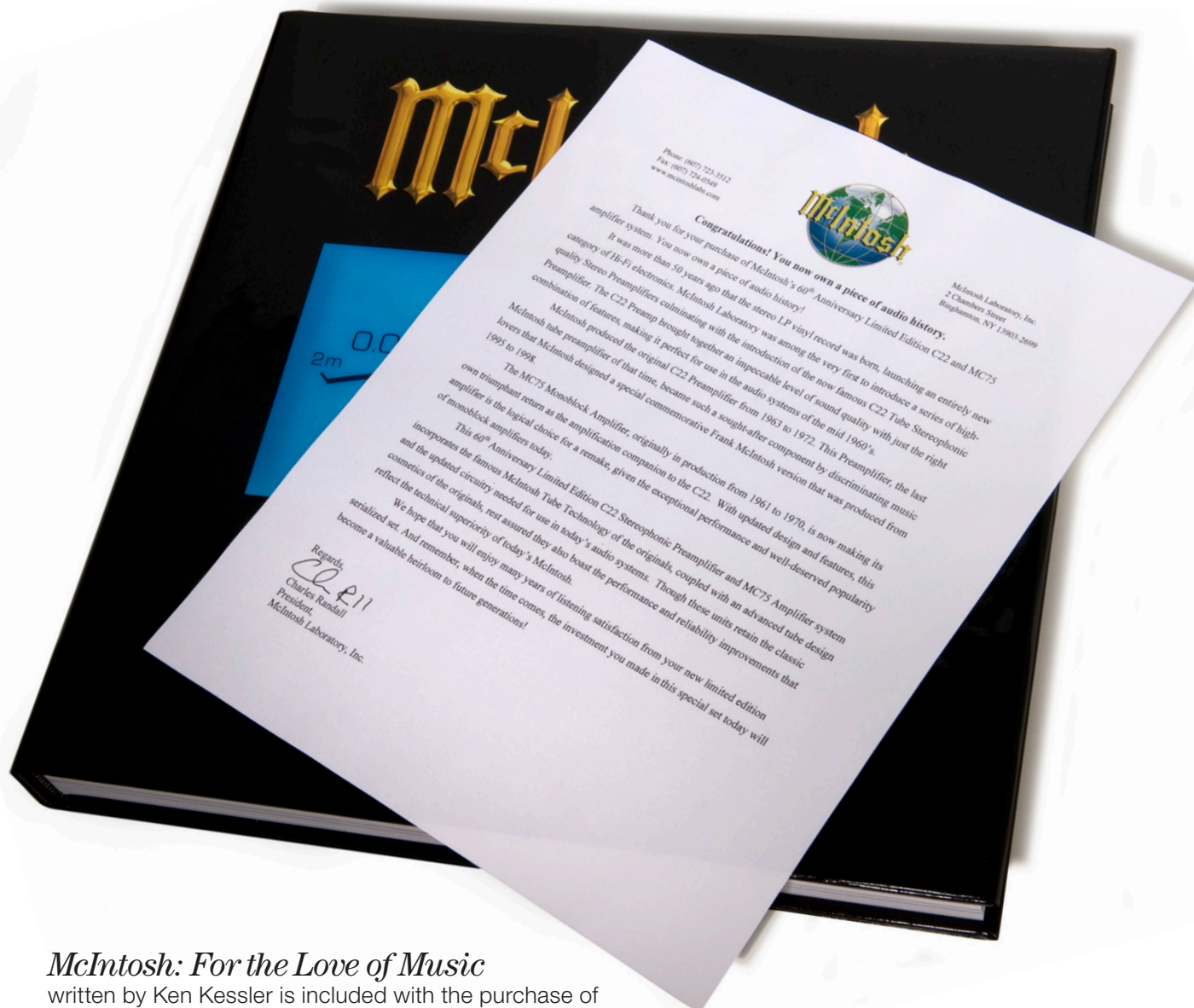
Do you want originals or the updated classic?

If you still love the Porsche 356, go find a mint early vintage C22 and send it to Audio Classics for a full checkup. According to their president, Steve Rowell, a mint C22 can fetch as high as \$4,000 and a mint pair of original MC75's often sell in the \$4,000 - \$6,000 per pair range. Considering that the C22 sold for \$279 and the MC75's sold for \$229 when new, that's pretty substantial appreciation for HiFi gear that is almost 50 years old!

If you would rather have the new Porsche 997, the 60th anniversary C22 and MC75's are your ticket to ride. All of the old volume controls and switches have been replaced by microprocessor controls and those hard to replace lightbulbs that illuminate the front panel are gone in favor of LED's that might outlast you.

And just for old times sake, spin a copy of *Bridge of Sighs*. I know you'll dig it. ●

I predict that the people who manage to get their hands on these will have something very special indeed. This is a system I could retire with.



McIntosh: For the Love of Music

written by Ken Kessler is included with the purchase of the McIntosh Anniversary Collection along with a letter of authenticity signed by CEO Charlie Randall.

The McIntosh Anniversary Collection

C22 preamplifier and
(2) MC75 monoblock power amplifiers

MSRP: \$15,000

McIntosh Laboratories

2 Chambers Street
Binghamton, NY 13903
607-723-3512
www.mcintoshlabs.com

PERIPHERALS

Digital Sources McIntosh MCD500
SACD player, MS300 music server

Analog Sources Rega P9 w/Lyra Dorian,
Sound HiFi Technics SL1200 w/SME 309
and Sumiko Blackbird

Speakers Harbeth Monitor 40.1,
MartinLogan CLX, Verity Audio Sarastro II

Cable Shunyata Aurora Interconnects,
Stratos SP Speaker cable, Anaconda
power cords

Power Conditioning

Running Springs Jaco