

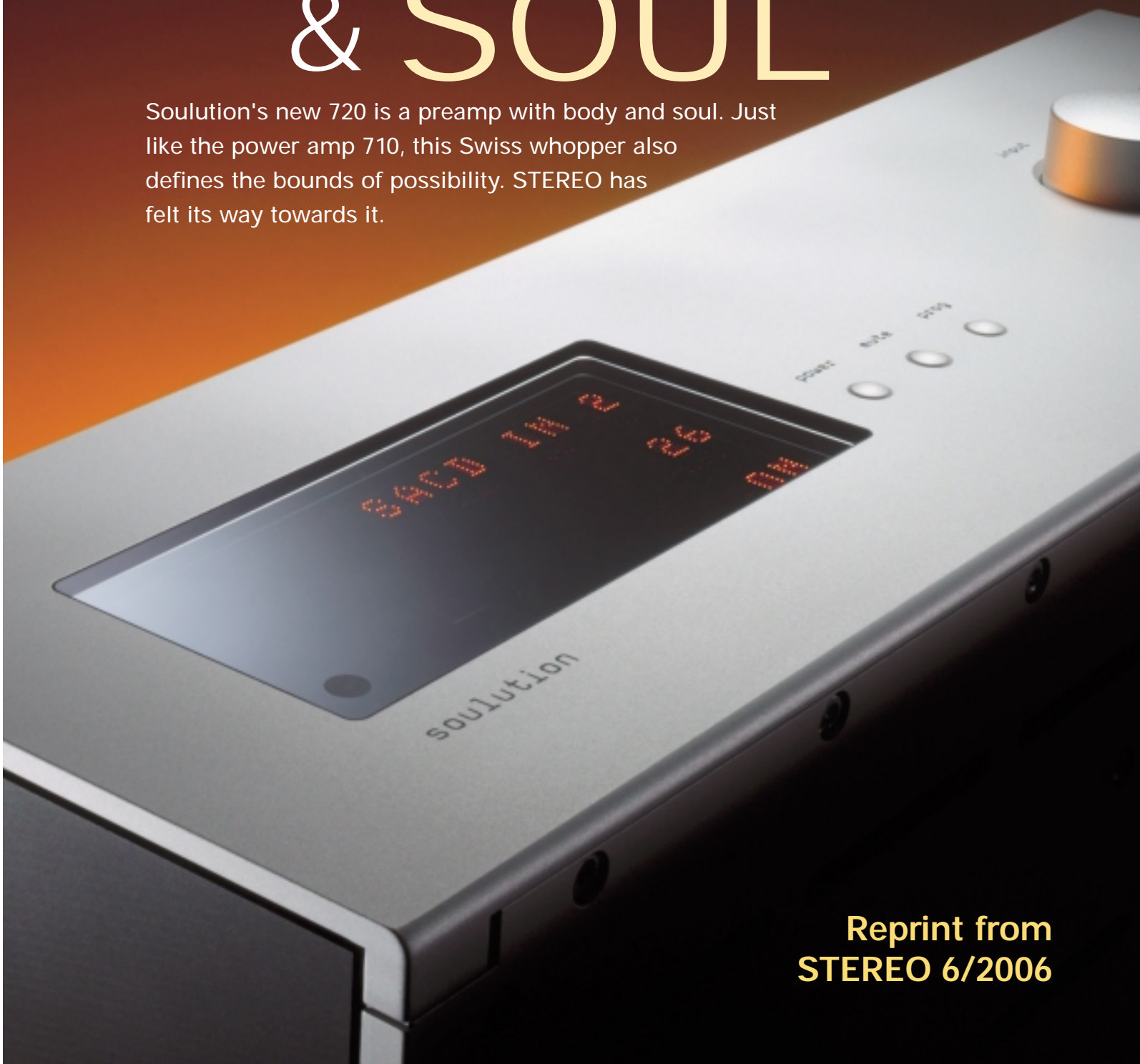
STEREO

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MAGAZINE FOR HIFI • HIGH END • MUSIC

BODY & SOUL

Solution's new 720 is a preamp with body and soul. Just like the power amp 710, this Swiss whopper also defines the bounds of possibility. STEREO has felt its way towards it.



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by Matthias Böde

Well, not in the sense of groping. The front panel of the 30 kg super heavyweight pre offers not much for your fingertips. It's almost as bare as the Eiger's north face. However, the 720 from the Swiss manufacturer - who recently added to our top references with the power amp 710 (see box) - is not made for playful characters anyway, but for music lovers who enjoy the exceptional and dispose of the wherewithal. Dear hifi fans, here comes an extremely lavish super preamplifier that needn't fear any comparison.

Close your eyes and experience a greatness, a plasticity and brilliance that even the Mark Levinson No. 326 S, which is beyond any shadow of a doubt, can hardly match. Soulution's 720 makes no secret of its ambition. This becomes clear from the very first note, feeding itself - typically Swiss - more by relaxed sovereignty rather than superficial ostentation or even muscleman attitude.

There's more to it than meets the eye, also in terms of comfort. The 720 is by far not as puristic as it pretends to be at first sight. Pressing the program button will open an ample menu which allows e.g. pre-levelling each of the six freely assignable inputs two of which feature a balanced design.

Of course, the channel balance is adjustable as is the brightness of the generous display which still reads well from some metres. That way the maximum volume, the switching of the tape monitor recording output

and the bandwidth of each input can be set, the latter being a special feature if major high-frequency interference from individual devices - such as a CD or SACD player - should cause acoustic or even electrical problems. In the 'High' position, the 720 delivers the full

bandwidth up to approx. 1.8 MHz. 'Mid' will limit the frequency response to 200 kHz and 'Low' even down to 20 kHz (-3dB each), thereby suppressing HF interference reliably. While the 720 loses only a tadbit of its superb openness and transparency in the middle position, 'Low' must be regarded as a mere emergency brake, for now the spatial impression is drastically narrowed, the reproduction appears more compact and especially in the treble range like furred. In this mode it simply lacks the air and the effervescent temperament.

The Swiss pre is available in two versions. We got that one with an integrated phono MC amp which can be tailored to the connected pickup system using blocklike multipin resistors. Two practical gain factors (54 and 60 decibels) can be chosen from. There is also a subsonic filter against annoying rumble. Not bad, but one

The power block

The 720 is heavy? Just lift up the power amp

No, the 710 hasn't got to be screwed to the floor if it can't be moved. A hefty 70 kg withstand the trial. With a continuous output power of 120 and 240 watts at eight and four ohms, the amp is not ultimately strong, yet incredibly stable: half impedance really equals double power here. Of course, the 710 is in no way inferior in terms of craftsmanship and sound. Since October 2005 it has raised its "weighty" voice in every sense among our top references.



should do without it whenever possible, because at the same time it produces slight midrange colourations. This is no disgrace. Actually, we've never come across a subsonic filter with an absolutely neutral tonal performance.

CUE

HF "dirt" may come from components, out of the air or through the mains supply and can cause substantial sound losses. It is also technically hazardous.

People who don't need a phono input can buy the 721; it has one additional line input, but no recording out and costs 3,000 less. However, all those who do own a very good

turntable should order the MC module, because this is also a low-hum, top-sounding cream puff.

True, the remote control included with both versions is made of plastic, but it rests neatly in your palm and gives access to all functions. Logical consistency also with the RCA connectors: Soulution's 710 and 720 are the first units where we find WBT's new zero-eddy-current Next-



The back panel also shows finest craftsmanship. Next to the usual inputs and outputs we find control connectors for the link system.

Quite a new type of remote control included with Soulution's 720. It rests neatly in your palm and gives access to almost all functions.

gen sockets. With the corresponding plugs on your cinch cable, you can use their benefits to the full. By the way, STEREO is checking out the Nextgen sockets and will soon report about them. Just one word here: obviously they show an audible effect, too.

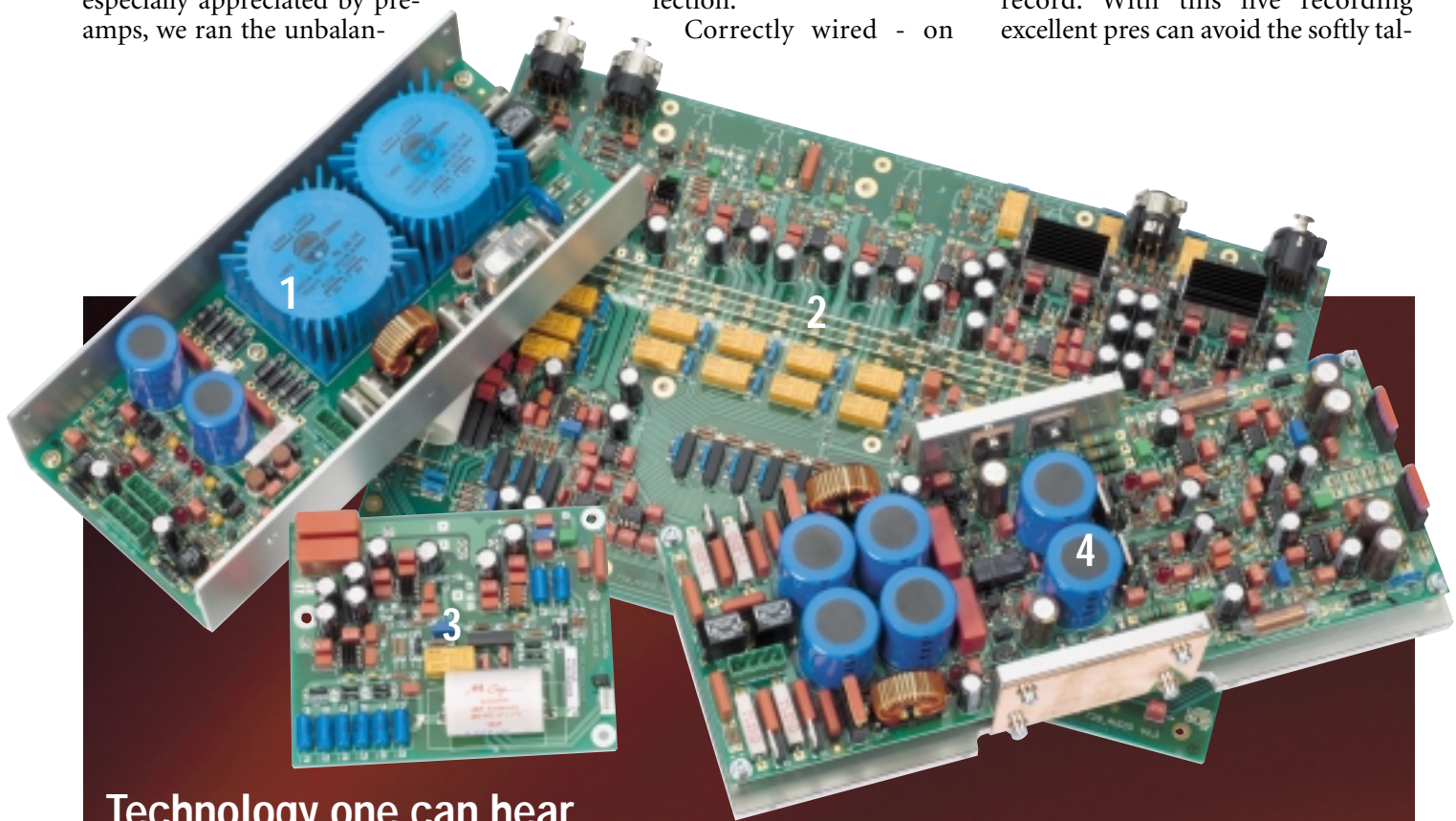
In the listening test preceded by a long warm-up phase which is especially appreciated by pre-amps, we ran the unbalan-



ced design 720 via both input options. Of course, the correct mains phase was also determined. For their products Soulution claims a relative sonic insensitivity to the mains plug's position in the power outlet, but - forget it! - in the wrong position the pre loses quite a bit of its finesse and perfection.

Correctly wired - on

our test unit the phase side was on the left towards the outer edge - the 720 can deliver any imaginable amount of it. Naturally it boasts a superfine resolution and can produce such a precise, tight and dry bass that one might be afraid the speaker cones could crumble any second. But other competitors can do this as well. The point where the Soulution is really outstanding is its extreme clarity and stability. Just listen to "Saturday Night" by the Red Norvo Group on Keith Johnson's old 45 rpm "Soundshow" record. With this live recording excellent pres can avoid the softly tal-



Technology one can hear

The Soulution 720 offers loads of clever ideas and extravagance

True, a preamp doesn't need to produce real "power", but for the best sound a strong, low-noise mains supply circuit (1) is indispensable. The 720 has no less than two of them and these are even mounted on vibration dampers. Hence the audio groups are strictly separated from the digital sections. Optoelectronic couplers provide total separation. The supply voltages are regulated in several stages. Soulution states residual ripple is below 0.01 microvolts.

The entire audio section (2) including the phono pre (3) feature a dual-mono circuit layout for optimum channel separation and three-dimensionality. And the

effect of this approach was obvious at once, in the listening room as well as in the lab. By the way, the delivery of the 720 was delayed by almost half a year because of the ultra-precise Vishay resistors in the volume control which allow a level regulation in 1 dB steps over an 80 dB range. A special feature are the massive copper rails carrying the signal to the output stage. We've seen such an explicitly low-impedance design only in power amplifiers. The inputs are switched via relays which also open the ground contact. Therefore a connected device in off-mode is completely separated from the preamp. Taking a look at the powerful output stage (4) you'll understand its low impedance of about two ohms. In theory it would be

capable of supplying a maximum current of three amperes which is limited to one ampere here. This is still a very high value which shall reduce cable influences and preserve the sound quality up to the power amp's input. No wonder the corresponding module looks like a power amp.

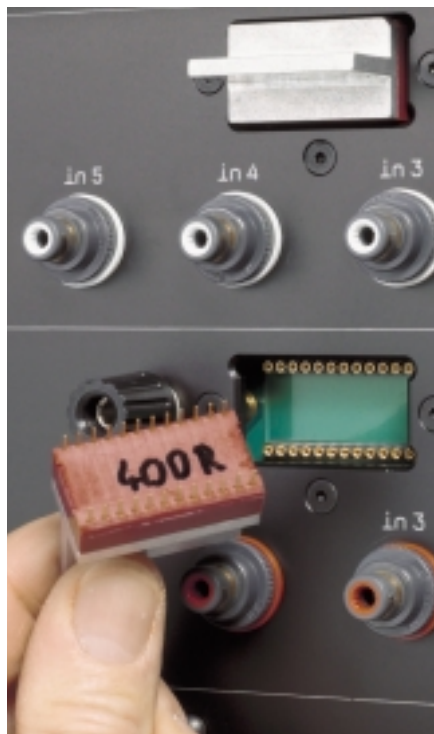
A smart thing is the detector circuit which protects the 720 and above all the subsequent electronics plus the woofers from DC. As soon as DC is detected coming from a source device, a capacitor is automatically switched into the signal path and a symbol appears on the display. After 15 seconds without offset it is decoupled again. It takes trained ears to notice that. Because: top technology - top sound.

king audience in the background from getting lost. But the 720 even keeps its distance to the band constant anytime, no matter if the music is loud or soft. Never before I have perceived this in such a way.

Yes, this preamp is a master of all dimensions: width, height, depth - everything is laid out opulently and yet meticulously organized and structured in itself. Indeed, at the famous Belafonte concert the giant Carnegie Hall is lying at your feet. One can almost "see" where the musicians are standing and how Belafonte is moving on the imaginary stage. The inner order of the performance is phantastic. If you close your eyes so that the optical will no longer disturb the acoustical impressions, you'll realize a stunningly moulded three-dimensional depth relief also with other recordings. That's high end!

Against this performance the sonic image of the no less spatioously and

The cinch section of the Soulution pre is equipped with the latest Nextgen sockets by WBT. Large R/C elements provide phono MC impedance matching.



precisely reproducing No. 326S seems to be slightly smaller, more dense and lower. But the comparison to the superb, analytic Mark Levinson standing next to the massive Soulution like David beside Goliath was by no means one-sided.

TEST-CHAIN

TURNTABLE: Acoustic Solid Solid Machine

SACD-PLAYER: Denon DCD-SA1, Lindemann 820

PREAMP: Mark Levinson No.326S

POWER AMP: Accuphase P-7000, Mark Levinson No.434, Soulution 710

LOUDSPEAKERS: Dynaudio Evidence Temptation, Wilson Benesch Chimera

CABLES: HMS G. F. Jubilee

While the Swiss lady sounds straight in a close-to-sober way, the music emanating from the No. 326S was smoother by nuances, with a little more fundamentals and thus at times more forthcoming. In the tonal domain the 720 is somewhat slimmer and more brilliant. The fact that it never sounds thin or even emaciated is based on the pure energy radiating from its acoustic

image. Everything within is solid and robust, yet by no means pale or glassy.

We have switched umpteen times between both competitors that are roughly equal in price. Not to disclose the differences - these are instantly heard -, but to evaluate them. Not an easy task on this journey to the edge of the hifi cosmos. In the end, none of the two ultra pres can really outperform the other. It's all a matter of character qualities.

However, we stick to it: so far, no other preamp has played before us in such a radically open, transparent, palpable and distinctive way. This makes it a perfect complement for the likewise incorruptible and sovereign 70 kg model 710 power amp, which is admittedly a wonderful match for the Mark Levinson, too. Teamed with the 720, you'll get about 100 kg of finest amp technology.

So the body has been satisfied. But what about the soul? Does the combination really have the soul conjured up in its name? Yes, it does, because apart from all objective qualities, it gives a spontaneous impression of supreme maturity, commitment and balance. The a-ha effect, where you recognize at the first note that something extraordinary is happening, is there. Can there be anything better for the musical soul?

SOULUTION 720



ca. €13 900 (incl. Phono-MC)
 Dimensions: 48 x 16,7 x 46,7 cm /
 18.9x6,6x18x4 (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 5 years
 Distributor: Spemot AG,
 Tel.: 0041/622853040
 www.soulution-audio.com

Soulution repeats their coup. Like the power amp, the sophisticated pre with its exceptional sound and specs conquers a seat among the very few contenders in the top reference class. A device to dream of!

LABORATORY

The peak output voltage is a hefty 7.82 volts (1 percent dist.). At a more practical 0.3 and 0.03 volts the 720 produces virtually no distortion: the readings show 0.0001 to 0.001 percent which is close to our measuring limit. Intermodulation distortions (0.009 to 0.0025 percent) are marginally higher. The S/N ratios of 105 and 86 decibels (0.3/0.03 V) and 88 dB for the phono MC module are equally outstanding. With 117 dB the ultimate channel separation takes the biscuit. Unbelievable! The channel deviation of the volume (set via resistor banks) could not be measured at all; it is below 0.1 dB. With only 2.2 ohms this super preamp features an extremely low output impedance. Instabilities e.g. due to long cables are therefore no matter for discussion. Power consumption is 10 watts in standby and 54 watts in no-load mode.

FEATURES

Six inputs incl. phono MC. Two balanced line-level inputs plus one balanced output, impedance matching on phono section, remote control, comprehensive menu incl. pre-levelling and bandwidth limitation. "Nextgen" RCA sockets by WBT.

STEREO-TEST
SOUND QUALITY
100%
PRICE/QUALITY
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
Very Good