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Line Magnetic 219ia Integrated Tube Amp Review! 300B and 845 Tube Magic!

By Steve Huff

Following up to my 1st ever full-blown Audio Review on my Photo Blog which was [the review for my Sonus Faber Guarneri Evolution Speakers](#) I am now sitting down to write a full-blown review for what has become the best integrated amp I have ever owned in my life.

With that spoiler out-of-the-way let me first tell you the story of how I found this 24 watts per channel integrated tube SET amplifier to power my *not so sensitive speakers*. Or maybe, **HOW IT FOUND ME.**

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Over the past 15-20 years I have not only been a photography geek but also an Audio Geek. Some use the term "Audiophile" but I always say that I am just passionate about music and a beautiful reproduction of music. When I sit down to unwind and listen to music I want to be taken INTO the music, not just listen to some muffled sounds or heavy bass or ear-piercing treble. No..I want to listen and FEEL the music..CONNECT with the music...and soak it all in. FEEL as in feel a connection to it emotionally, not FEEL it as in "FEEL THE BASS" (though that has happened with this amp on a few occasions now).

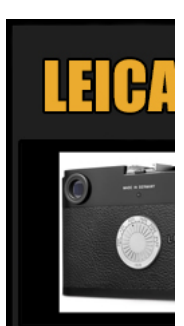


As I wrote in my Guarneri Evolution speaker review, when you have a music reproduction system that can deliver the full experience of the recording it can indeed be a magical thing. This is one reason that I have been hooked on having a 2 channel only music system in my home for the past 15 years that can do just that. Over the years it has went from small in size and price to medium to large and to what I now consider a bit over the top **for me**, but for some of you out there my system would be in the medium range as there are much more elaborate and expensive systems out there costing MUCH more than what I have here. I recently heard a "million dollar" 2 channel system. Was I impressed? Yes. Would I buy it? NO. Did I like it better than my system? NO, not really....I mean..it was HUGE and I would need a 1500 SQ Ft room just to install it.

I have used speakers of all kinds and types and sizes. Sensitive to power-hungry – bookshelf to huge tower – standard to dipole to horns. I have owned and used all kinds of amps and pre-amps from tube to solid state – low power tube to high power tube and low power solid state to high power megawatt solid state. Integrated amps to separates. Yes, I have owned all kinds from \$300 integrates to \$8000 integrated amps. \$1000 amps to \$10,000 amps. \$500 pre-amps to \$7000 pre-amps. \$100 CD players to \$5000 CD players. \$20 cables to \$4000 cables. I have done two channel and home theater systems yet I always prefer a nicely balanced 2 channel system that has great synergy.

Yes, I have tested a ton of audio "Hi-Fi" gear and today in 2014 I can safely say that the system I have now is the best I have ever owned. Others have come close but it is what I have now that continues to put a smile on my face every day and night when I power it on.

One of the reasons for this is due to the absolutely beautiful but beastly Line Magnetic 219ia amp.



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It all started when I went into my local dealer to check out the goodies he had on display and on demo. I saw this big hulking looking amp with a golden faceplate and was intrigued. I asked about it and a couple of weeks later I ended up borrowing it to test in my system. I knew from the first 5 minutes that I wanted this amp. I called to place an order, paid 50% down and waited. I assumed the wait would be a week, maybe 10 days but it was just before the X-Mas holidays so I really had no idea. Two weeks go by..nothing. Three weeks..nothing. Then I found out that the US distributor was out of stock. Instead of waiting what could have been months I decided to order the larger and more expensive 219ia as it was the one I was eyeballing online after getting a taste of the other LM amp.

Long story short, 6 weeks after placing the order for the 518ia the 219ia is now mine and now in my system.

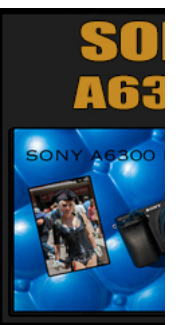
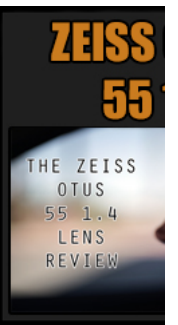
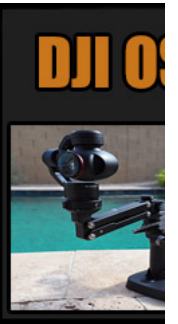
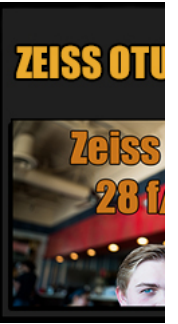
As I write this text the amp is powering my Sonus Faber Guarneri Evolution speakers in my listening room/office and using only .01 watts to give me enough volume to where I have to close my double doors completely as to not disturb others in the next room over! I am only listening this low as others are asleep in the house right now but the sound is very nice even at this low power being used.

My speakers are NOT sensitive or considered an easy load. At 86 db SPL (2.83V/1 m) one would think that a hefty 200-400 WPC amp would be required for them to “come alive” as many would say.

Normally that would be true as many amps just do not have the grunt needed regardless of wattage. For example I once owned a McIntosh 2275 tube amp powering the previous Guarneri Memento speakers and the sound was flat, dull, non exciting..no fleshiness..no reality and no emotion. It basically pumped sound through the speakers. It was a 75WPC tube amp but just did not have the raw power to properly drive those speakers (which were an easier load than the Evolutions). I also had a McIntosh 7000 Integrated at 200 WPC and it was good with the older Mementos but not even close to what the LM amps give me.

So the fact is that NORMALLY you would need a higher power amp for low efficiency speakers but I decided to go for a good old S.E.T. (single ended triode) amp to power my power-hungry speakers because after auditioning the 219ia's little brother, the 518ia..I knew this was something special. When I saw the price..I knew it was even MORE special.

But Yes, 1/10th of a watt at this moment. These 86Db speakers do not sound thin, small or brittle. They sound beautifully balanced and full. This is a remarkable feat.



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Tubes..S.E.T....it's a beautiful thing.

The Beautiful tank like 120-130lb 219ia integrated amp is a behemoth in size and weight. It had to be shipped via freight in a huge wooden crate on a pallet. Took a week to arrive after shipping and when I went to pick it up it required 2 of us to load the box into my car. ***Line Magnetic makes these amps in China but do not think for a moment that this is just another cheap chinese amp because A: It is not cheap and B: It's build rivals amps made in the U.S.A. that cost over \$20,000 and up. C: Once properly tubed up it will rival any amp I have ever heard at ANY price.***

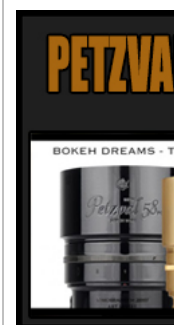
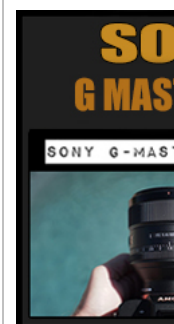
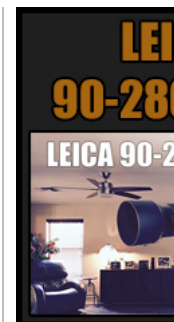
The amp uses the powerhouse 845 tube for its output and the magical vocal/midrange masterpiece 300B tube for the driver stage. Western Electric 310a replicas and 12AX7's fill out the rest of the tube compliment which I believe are part of the pre-amp stage.

After a few days of ownership I knew that this amp needed new tubes as the stock tubes were a little on the "soft" side (yes, better tubes make huge differences in sound). I quickly went all out and purchased the **PSVANE Western Electric 300B replicas** and a pair of **SHUGUANG 845 Natural Series tubes**. I had some NOS 12AX7 and purchased some NOS 310A tubes as well. Once powered on with these new tubes the sound took on a whole new signature. Gone was the softness and slight muffled sound that I encountered when I 1st powered up the amp. Now it was louder and seemed to have even more power..it had airy highs and a tighter yet fuller bass. The soundstage was HUMONGOUS..largest width I have ever experienced in my life – ***with certain recordings*** it could spread out from the speakers and fill the entire room making it hard to believe the sound was coming from the speakers. This was with FRESH tubes and I knew it could only get better from here.

The sound is typical 845 with a slight 300B midrange magic present. It was quite different from the 518ia I had in my system for 3-4 weeks (loaner from dealer). It was "bigger" and more "effortless" in its presentation. Yes, effortless with my hard to drive speakers! In fact, this amp replaced a Solid State amp that was giving my speakers 600 Watts per channel! Yes, before this amp I had a Musical Fidelity Tri Vista 300 which gave 600 watts into a 4 ohm load. It was a tad muffled sounding, a bit flat, a smaller soundstage width and height ..but it did go way loud and in fact, way too loud then I would ever need. But it did not make my speakers disappear like the 219ia does. Not even close. It just pumped out music through the speakers and was enjoyable but I knew it was not "IT" for my setup.

The 219ia lets the music flow and breathe through my speakers almost using them as a living being with the amp providing the voice.

Yes I know this sounds extreme for an audio review but there are nights (best time to listen) when I sit in amazement and disbelief (with certain recordings) as to what is coming out of these speakers with the 219ia powering the system. I no longer sit there and think "***what can I add or change to make it even better***". Different maybe. Better..no. This is the sound I have been hunting for 20 years and it came from a high quality Chinese made low powered SET tube amp that retails in the USA for \$7500. Expensive? Yes, but if this was a USA made amp it would cost \$25k as some other USA made amps do. The build is the best I have ever seen..anywhere, from any company, no matter the cost. The build beats my old McIntosh 2275 and 7000 Integrated amps, so that puts it in great company.



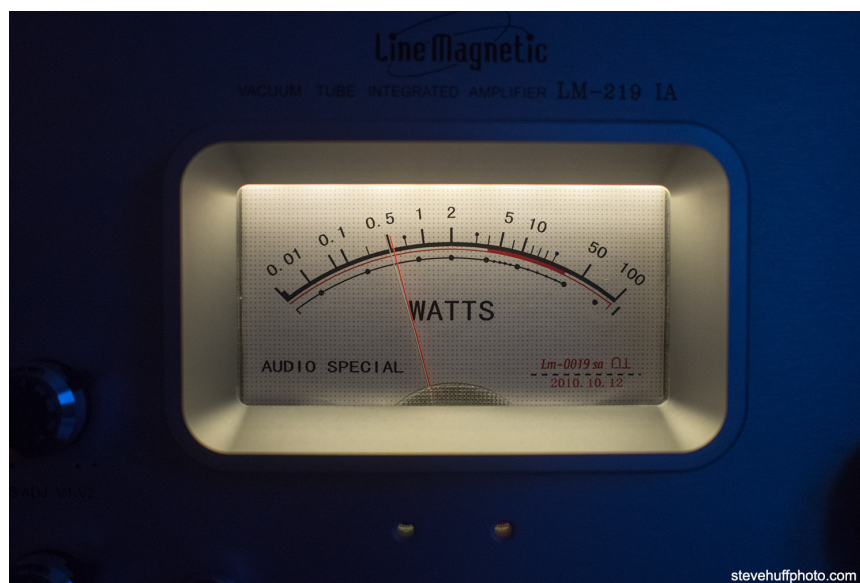


In fact, Line Magnetic is the ONLY Chinese amp company that I would buy an amp from (I have had a couple of others that were not so good at all). After using and owning this amp for a little while I can say that in all of my years I have never seen anything like it. I have owned Cary 805c amps many years ago that were equal to this one in build and sound but those amps cost me more money and I still needed to add a \$5k pre-amp to them. I like this one just as much as those legendary Cary amps and pre-amp but I paid \$7500 LESS than my Cary setup.

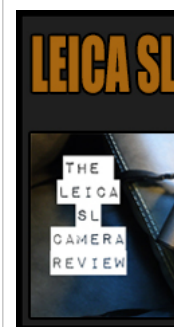
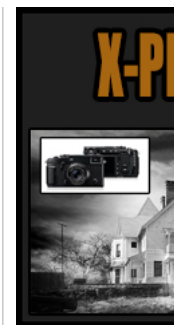
I have owned Wavelength Audio 300B mono blocks (more expensive just for amps) and I like this better in every way. I have owned USA made, German-made and UK made amps. None of them were any better than this Line Magnetic.

I have never seen any other push-pull tube amp, even when rated at 60-80 WPC come close to providing the power that this amp does at 24WPC. When I play my system "loud" it usually is pumping out between 1 – 20 WPC with loud peaks but it never strains or distorts. To test its limits I have even had it maxed out at the 100WPC mark on the built-in meter for 2-3 songs and never did it strain or give me a hint that it was in trouble. It was still going strong without strain or any audible distortion and my speakers were insanely loud! Crazy.

When listening in the evening the amp provides a full magical sound even when pumping only 0.5 watts..yes, a HALF OF A WATT to my power-hungry speakers. Drives them with ease. It is indeed that 1st watt that is the most special and when it is class A, even better and the 219ia is class A all the way.



This is the 1st **tube amp** that I have owned that could power just about any speaker. I can only imagine what it would do with high sensitivity speakers. I think this is due to the huge DUAL power transformers.



This is a dual mono design and it provides the voltage and grunt to deliver current to the speakers. An amp is always much more than just watts my friends, and this 219ia has all of the magic ingredients to make it work and work well.

The build and design

What can I say. As I already hinted at is that the build of this amp is top-notch. It is the best built amp I have ever owned. Ever. It is tank like with a hammertone finish that will last a lifetime. What I mean is, the amps innards may eventually rot and die but the carcas will never die. It will last forever. Everything about the build is top-notch from the dials, switches and even meters. Nothing was skimped on here. Everything about it of very high quality.

The amp is completely point to point hand wired which is something you rarely see these days. I much prefer a hand wired amp and most US companies today have went to circuit boards, even good old Cary Audio (in newer designs) whose amps I once admired but lately it seems they are producing average run of the mill stuff.

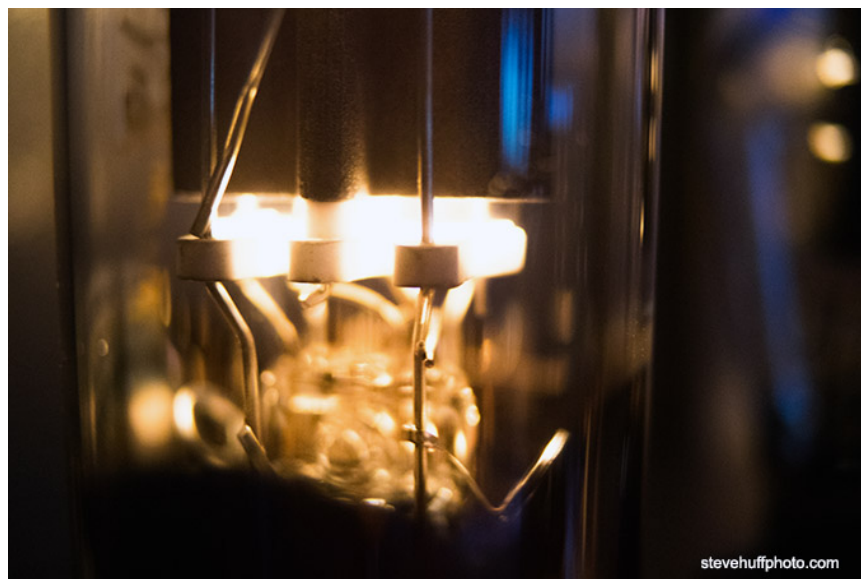
Before committing to Line Magnetic I also took a look at the VERY expensive Ayon Audio line since their showroom is local to me. They have \$15,000 dacs, \$45k amps, and \$15k CD players. I auditioned one of their starter integrated amps that came in at around \$3800 and it sounded nice and looked nice but then I found out that their starter items are all made in China and the sound was MUCH different than what the Line Magnetic gave me. Their push-pull 35WPC tube integrated probably would NOT have powered my speakers right, even the dealer had his doubts and tried to steer me to a CD player instead telling me the front end was the most important. It is different when a big name brand that prides itself of being made in Austria has \$3k items made in China as we have no idea where they are being made. For LM, they are a China based company, and one of the best in China at making audio products. I know where the LM comes from so I had no issues buying the LM amp.

Lien Magnetic is almost unknown, there is no USA advertising that I have seen and there are not many dealers even carrying them yet it is the best integrated amp I have ever heard or seen or owned... in build AND sound.

The amp came crated and was amazingly protected within two other boxes. Tubes were already installed and each one had a huge piece of protective foam over it. A tube cage was in place and there was even a silk sock over the amp and it was well packed in surrounded by foam and double boxed before being crated. Top notch.

The design of the amp is sort of a frankenstein but it took 3 days for me to really appreciate the beauty. Some will think it is ugly, some will think it is gorgeous. If it is anything it is an eye catcher and conversation starter. The great thing is that not only does it look the part, when powered up it sounds as good as it looks. There is even a switch to adjust the negative feedback and I prefer it set to MINIMUM. To me it sounds best in my setup.

Id give the build a 10/10. Design an 8/10 as it could have been a little cleaner up front with the switches and dials, but either way, I find it beautiful.



A real test...Low level listening

One test of a good amp or integrated amp is if it sounds good at low level volume listening. I listen at night quite a bit and I have a small house. I do not want to disturb others so I have to listen at low levels. Every solid state amp I have owned has been horrible at low level listening. The sound shrinks, gets flat and harsh and the bass suffers. With the 219ia (and 518ia) this is not the case. I can listen at low levels with my low sensitivity speakers and half a watt or 1 watt is enough to fill my room with some S.E.T. magic. It will sound much better turned up some but even at low level it is fantastic. These two 845 LM amps are the best I have owned for this type of listening. If I want to go loud it does so with ease and grace. Never harsh, never with fatigue. I can listen for hours while I work and never suffer ear fatigue.



Organic

The sound that comes from these two LM 845 tube amps can be something special. Anyone who has ever owned an 845 amp will know the sound but the 219ia is a little different. Its like **75% 845** and **15% 300B** and then **10% KT88** even though there are no KT88 tubes here.

I call the sound "Organic" because with the right recordings (*and there are many of them as I am not taking about "audiophile" recordings*) the sound is one that will suck you in, make you take notice and help you melt away with the music. Sip some wine, have some beer or even a glass of absinthe. Turn out the lights and watch the amp glow as the music just flows like air through the room. **With some songs instruments will appear to float in space before you and in front of the speakers and vocals will appear directly in the middle.** Of course speaker setup is required to reach this but that is quite simple and should take no longer than an hour tops.

Once everything is aligned and if your source is a good one with decent cables prepare yourself for a treat.

Also, make sure to Bias your tubes for best sound. My 219ia was perfectly biased out of the box but LM makes it super easy to adjust with built in Bias meters.



It's not cheap but it's a bargain

The 219ia is not in any way a cheap or even affordable amp. In fact, it costs about the same as a [Leica M 240 camera](#) (without lens) and Leica is known as the premo camera company with outrageous prices. But how much do we pay for our cars? Our homes? Our hobbies? This is an amp I will use just about every day. It will bring me many many years of enjoyment. How much is that worth? I will use it more than my \$27,000 car. I will use it more than if I bought an RV or boat or something else that costs much more.

We live once on this earth..enough said.

I see this integrated amp as something special and I call it a bargain if you are an Audio geek. Yes it is made in China but it is NOT your typical made in China tube amp. Line Magnetic takes pride in their creations and they are one of a small few producing stellar high quality amps and audio equipment in China right now. This amp is just as good as ANY American made amp, and to be brutally honest, better than most.



Tube Replacement Options

The tubes required to return this guy are not cheap. If you stay cheap you can re-tube it for about \$600. If you go exotic prepare to spend **up to \$2100**. The PSVANE 300B Western Electric replicas are highly recommended as are the PSVANE Western Electric 845 replicas but buying both of those sets will run you about \$1700 and you still have 12AX7 and 310A's to buy. I went with the premo 300b's as they should last me for years and years and my dealer had a pair in stock. I went with \$400 pair 845's and had some \$200 12AX7's. The 310a NOS cost me \$120 for the pair. I now have the stock tubes as backup in case one of these blows or wears out in a few years.



The HEAT

The one negative I have with this amp is the HEAT it puts out. In a closed small room it can raise the temperature by 10 to even 15 degrees when listening for 2-4 hours. I do not have any heat or AC on at this time of year and my office/listening stays toasty (it is winter in AZ as I write this, so 40 degrees at night, 70's day). It can put out some serious heat and if you accidentally touch one of those 845's you will indeed burn yourself badly. If you have pets or kids make sure they do NOT touch the tubes!

(UPDATE: The heat issue was so bad for me due to small closed up room that I had to sell this amp, but it is still the most magical sounding amp I have heard in my system even after auditioning many more after this. I do miss the LM!)

UPDATE2: I am now auditioning an Ayon Audio Orion III and CD07s in my system now, and it is a MUCH different sound than the LM amp..

UPDATE 3: I returned the Ayon as the sound was lacking in midrange with a dry and more analytical sound. Not my cup of tea and the 60 WPC Pentode did not power my speakers NEARLY as well as the LM 24 WPC. Must be those huge power transformers on the LM.

The amp does come with a tube cage to protect and cover the tubes, but it is quite ugly when on.



219ia vs 518ia

The Line Magnetic 219ia is not the only 845 SET amp they make. In fact, they make a few SET amps. One other fantastic amp is the 518ia which consists of two 845 tubes, two 6L6 tubes and two 12AX7 with a tube Rectifier thrown in as well. The sound from the 518ia is very similar to the 219ia but a bit less refined and a *teeny bit* smaller of a soundstage (not much though) while being a **bit more fat** in the mids. But all in all, the 518ia would have been the amp I went for if it was in stock without a few months wait. The 518ia is \$4500 US and is also highly recommended. It comes in at 22 WPC so a whopping 2 watts less but it does not have quite the build and heft of the 219ia nor the dual mono design.

As a side note the 219ia is DEAD SILENT when on. No buzz, no hum, nothing. With my ear up against the transformers I hear nothing. On the other hand the 518ia had a slight buzz/hum when powered on but it could have been the demo model I was using. Both sounded glorious with the S.E.T. sound you would expect from megabuck amps. I'd say the 518ia is a little on the warmer side with a fatter mid-bass. The 219ia is more balanced. I could live with either long term. In other words, if I sold the 219ia I could be happy "downgrading" to the 518ia.

The 518ia comes with a gold faceplate and is \$4500 US.



LM 219ia vs McIntosh

There is a huge myth out there that McIntosh amps and pre-amps are great or a perfect match with Sonus Faber speakers. I visit forums where people are spending \$20k for their SF speakers and then spending \$15-\$40k on McIntosh equipment to power them. If you have read [my speaker review here](#) then you will know my history with Sonus Faber. I love them. I want nothing but the best match for them and it just seems very hard to find the perfect match for the sound I like. After owning SEVERAL McIntosh amps, pre-amps and CD players over the years I can say that McIntosh is **not** the best match for SF Speakers UNLESS you want that small, direct and fat McIntosh sound.

I had the 2275 Tube Integrated. It was a fail for my Guarneri's. Muffled, slow, direct, no magic whatsoever and pretty damn weak. I had the MA7000 which was MUCH better but again, while playing with more "oomph" it lacked all of the things that I look for in my music reproduction including air, soundstage and the feeling of BEING THERE. It sounded nice and was made AMAZINGLY well but the sound lacked compared to other amps, especially those in the McIntosh price range.

I have used and tested the 2275, 7000, 352 Amp, 602 Amp, 501 Mono amps and a couple of pre-amps and the SCD500 CD player. ALL of it was made to a high standard and beautiful to look at but sound quality wise it was all below average in my opinion. It just did not cut it. I think those who buy McIntosh do so for the name and the reputation and because many rave about the brand. Many use them and never hear anything else because they want a BIG MAC. McIntosh is nice buy their MA7000 Integrated is the same price as the LM 219ia and the LM is leagues better in sound quality and equal or better in build. The McIntosh house sound is a recessed treble, fat mid bass, and a direct sound. With MAC amps my speakers never disappeared like they do with other fine amps in the same price range (and under). In fact, a \$2500 pair of Cary Audio AES Six Pacs beat the hell out of my McIntosh MA7000 with my older mementos.

So McIntosh is not for me. Nice quality product with great resale and reliability but sound quality is not their claim to fame.

BTW, McIntosh has been sold and purchased by Fine Sounds, who are NOT in the USA but they are still made here in the USA.

The Line Magnetic 219ia as a power amp

A cool feature of this powerhouse integrated is that it can also be used as a power amp MINUS the built in pre-amp. Since built in pre-amps are usually the weak spot in an integrated LM gives you the option to add any pre-amp that you desire and this will indeed change the sound. For the better? Maybe. For the worse? Maybe. I have not yet experimented and may not do so as I am very happy with it as is. If I ever borrow or try out any pre-amps hooked up to the 219ia I will update this section here.

My conclusion on the 219ia

The Line Magnetic 219ia is a very special amp. While waiting for it to arrive I felt guilty about spending so much on it and started to have some buyers remorse (as I do not spend that kind of money lightly) but as soon as it was in my system all of that remorse went away and I am now 100% thrilled and happy with my choice. The 219ia is one of those "heirloom" type of pieces that could be handed down to your kids. The build will last forever, it is something special to look at and see in operation and the sound in a system that is matched up with it will be very hard to improve upon. As I said earlier you can get "different" but I do not think it can get much better. FOR ME IN MY SYSTEM AND MY TASTES than this amp does. Your results may vary as all of this Hi-Fi business is trial and error and it can take some work to find components to match together. Speakers are #1, amp/pre is the next, cables are next and then the source. Speaking of source I use a Cambridge Audio 851C CD player and DAC and mostly use it as my DAC. \$1600 or so and it sounds amazingly good. I did wonder what would happen if I tried a \$5k player/DAC but decided to leave it as is for now. Why fix what is not broken?

The 219ia. It's a beast of an amp that will drive even difficult loads with ease. It may not deliver the SPL of a 600 watt megamp but it will deliver sound that is much more refined and special than any SS amp. All of the things you want are here. Soundstage width and depth, imaging and a sweet magical presentation. Vocals are to die for and when you play a nice vocal track the performer will appear as he or she is in the room, right in front of you singing. Close your eyes and imagine you are getting a personal private performance and you may just believe it.

To get to this point requires proper speaker set up and very good sources. Speaker set up is an art in itself but a sweet spot must be created to enjoy the music like I am describing it. Room acoustics play a part as well. But I am in a nightmare 12X12 square room and getting the sweetest sound I have ever gotten from any room/system I have had in the past.

The two negatives of the 219ia are the HEAT output (those 845's!) and the fact that it could use better tubes that may costs some cash-ola to sound its best. Stock it sounds great. With premium tubes it gets way better.

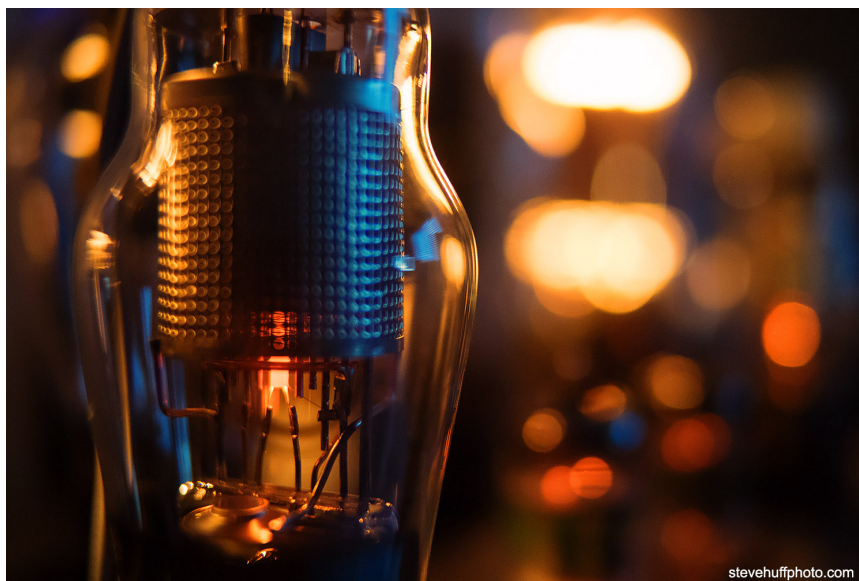
In my 15-20 years of this hobby I have never owned a better amp or integrated than this and I have owned many that cost more than this one does. *To those worrying about the made in China thing I urge you to NOT worry.* It is made better than most USA built amps and Austrian amps using premium parts and hand point to point wiring. You can take a look at the [Line Magnetic Factory tour HERE](#). **It appears they take pride in what they do and when you mix that with a passion for quality products it is always a win/win.**

To sum it up: The 219ia is not only a beauty but in the Audiophile world, it is a bargain.

UPDATE 03/14: *I ended up having to sell my 219ia and it sold within 1 hour of listing it. Amazing. I sold it ONLY due to the heat issues with the amp which made my 75 degree office turn into my 88, 90, 93 degree office. Using this amp in a small 12X13 room with doors closed for more than 2-3 hours is brutal. If you have a larger room or an AC vent blowing non stop you will be ok, but for me when I turned on the AC it made the rest of the house too cold. Uggg. I am now trying out an Ayon Audio Orion III and CD 07s which I am using as a DAC as well. MUCH MUCH different sound than the LM amp. Where the LM has a nice fat full sound with a HUGE soundstage the Ayon gear has more clarity, snap, focus and detail but is on the dry/lean side in the mids. Two different sounds. The LM 219ia wowed me from the get go but the Ayon is just not cutting it and is going back via the 15 day home trial offer. On to the next...*

Where to buy or listen to the Line Magnetic amps?

I bought my 219ia from [Arizona Hi-Fi](#). The best shop in AZ IMO for tube gear, cables, speakers, and turntables. If you are ever in the Phoenix area be sure to stop in and audition any of their amazing amps, especially the Line Magnetic offerings they have on hand for demo in their store. My amp and cables (Nordost) are all from AZ HiFi. Great shop, great service! There are other dealers that sell LM products. The best way to find them is to google them. Have fun!



Recommended Tunes to play to see how your sound quality stacks up

As I sit in my sweet spot I am listening to a James Blake song called "The Wilhelm Scream" – the sound is beyond my speakers by 1-2 feet and it sounds like I am inside of a bubble with James Blake himself. This song has a huge soundstage and huge sound overall. Very detailed and with some very cool effects that will make you look to your left or right from time to time. Another James Black song that gives massive space is "Overgrown". Make sure you give it a full listen.

Another song I use to test my setup is from Martin Gore from his Counterfeit 2 CD. "In my other world" will bring Martin into the room while the hypnotic sounds surround you with every layer of sound being audible and distinguishable.

Want to hear something really beautiful and sweet sounding? If your system is decent this song will sound HUGE and crystal clear at the same time while being full, fat and full of detail. "Not Remotely Blue" by Adrian Legg. It is an instrumental guitar track that fills my entire room with energy, sound and

beautiful music. One more track from Adrian is called Mdrundgum. Will blow your mind if your speakers, amp and system can handle all of the details and layers here. This one always blows me away.

One of my favorites is Madeleine Peyroux and her song "Born to Lose" really delivers with the vocals in my setup. The 845 and 300B combo make her voice so real, so palpable, so sweet and so in my room I can close my eyes and imagine she is in the room singing. The instruments all have their own space and the soundstage is deep and wide.

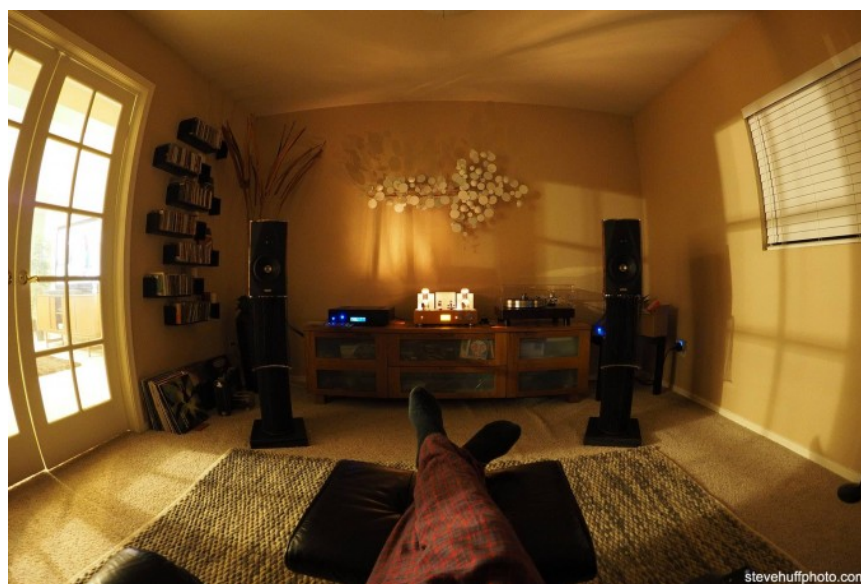
Another one that is beautiful and haunting is from Enya called "Sumiregusa". Turn it up and listen as Enyas quiet and sensitive vocals come direct to your ears before the sound gets huge and louder for the chorus.

Want to Rock and Roll? While many "Audiophile" systems suck with rock or metal, mine can do them just fine and I attribute that to the speakers and the SET amp. KISS's God Of Thunder from their Destroyer Resurrected CD had me freaking out as I have heard this song probably 1000 times in my life, but never ever like this. Same goes for some ZZ Top, Van Halen or Megadeth. This amp seems to make old unlistenable CD's sound pretty amazing. Is it the amp? The Speakers? The Cables? I think it is all of them.

Want even more magical songs to test?

Sarah Brightmans live version of Pie Jesu, Neil Young's "Peaceful Valley Boulevard" will haunt you and deliver amazing sound and textures at the same time. Michael Jackson's "BEN" from his Immortal CD, "Love in Vein" from Madeleine Peyroux..."EXILE" from Enya..."Song of Los" from Apparad and I can go on and on but will stop now otherwise I just might!

Me in my listening spot while auditioning the LM 518ia (YES. I am in my Pajamas ;))



Share this Post:



Posted by Steve Huff at 2:50 pm

45 Responses to "Line Magnetic 219ia Integrated Tube Amp Review. 300B and 845 Tube Magic!"

1. **Cellerino Bernardino** says:
November 16, 2016 at 9:56 am



I use a modified (upgraded caps and resistors) Pathos TT RR with Merlin VSM's and they are magic together. I have also heard and read that the single ended, high current Pathos TT was magic with the Guarneri. Have you heard them together?

[Reply](#)

2. **Francisco** says:

July 10, 2016 at 4:47 pm



Hello Steve, I am now thinking of buying a 1m 518ia, and decided to ask about it .
-About the buzz from the transformer , from what i read it happened in more than one sample of the amp, and with several people,...is that really an issue with this 518ia model, or do you think it was an isolated problem with some of their units? my room is on the small side, so it will be easy to distract me from the music if the humm is really that loud,. best regards, Francisco from the netherlands

[Reply](#)**Steve Huff** says:

July 10, 2016 at 7:36 pm



Not sure. I do know a guy who had his repaired and now has no buzz. But I would buy from a good US dealer so if there is an issue, it could be taken care of.

[Reply](#)**Francisco** says:

July 11, 2016 at 8:44 am



Thank you Steve, I will do that , i am almost decided to buy the 518ia , never had a single ended amplifier at home, only push pull kt88 ones, but since i heard a couple of single ended amps, i was sold. I cannot buy it from the states because i am writing you from the Netherlands,. but it also sold here.

The 1m 518ia costs here in the Netherlands about 2900 euros, so that will be about 3200 dollars , (depending on the current currency exchange).

[Reply](#)3. **Stephen** says:

November 25, 2015 at 12:28 pm



Hi Steve- great review, and sorry to hear you'd sold the amp. have you ever listened to Icon Audio (UK)? i have a KT88 based integrated on order, it's a much different price point, but they do make an 845 based integrated:

<http://www.iconaudio.com/main-products/stereo-845-pp/>

music direct sells it i believe.

[Reply](#)4. **mark** says:

May 31, 2015 at 9:49 am



These amps beg to be used with a good pair of high sensitivity speakers, a la ANE, Horning, Tannoy. Open baffles are a good way to go too. Then you REALLY will hear the beauty of a good SE design. I would say an upgrade to your DAC would really make a huge difference – Amps like these are an open window to the preceding equipment.

[Reply](#)**Steve Huff** says:

May 31, 2015 at 10:21 am



I have had high sensitivity speakers here with it, nice ones. I prefer the Guarneri Evo's with this amp 100%. DON't knock it until you try it. It is gorgeous, best amp I have heard with the EVO's and I have heard them with everything from 10 WPC to 1000 WPC and everything in between. \$1k amp to a \$20k amp. This amp was the best match for my tastes with those speakers.

[Reply](#)5. **Tony Biancardi** says:

May 7, 2015 at 4:56 pm



You mentioned the sight buzz or hum with the 518 amp. I tried TWO samples of the 518 and found the transformer hum level to be unacceptable in my room/system. And I've had many tube amps in this room that were dead quiet or had what I would consider a "slight" hum. The 518 was over the top in this regard.

[Reply](#)

6. **Dave Cancerian** says:
March 7, 2015 at 10:40 pm



Yes, LM 219i from line magnetic audio can dive magpies (Magnepan). It was fantastic!

[Reply](#)

7. **Quang** says:
January 3, 2015 at 2:04 am



Hello,

Nice review. Can it drive the Magnepan 3.7i (4ohm) speakers that have only 86dB input sensitivity without any distortion or issues per say at volume setting at 1/3?

Thanks

[Reply](#)

8. **Ralph Smith** says:
December 26, 2014 at 10:30 pm



Hi Steve, Looking for an amp myself. My 300 B mono blocks broke and are not repairable. I have read very good reviews of the Ayon Crossfire iii, \$10,000, it uses the AA 62b tube and the Spark iii which uses a 6C33 Russian tube at about \$5500. After speaking with the importer I think either one of these would be a good match for your system. Ask him what he thinks ... he does not live far from you so you should be able to switch them out and give them a listen. I have >100 db/watt horn speakers. I think i may try a 2a3 amp or the 6C33 amp. I roll in 2 subs for bass.

Always like like all your reviews. Best of luck.

Thanks Ralph

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:
December 27, 2014 at 8:39 am



I'd stay away from Ayon. I tried three amps from their starter \$5k amp up to a \$13k model and all were thin, sterile, and cold. Had DEEP bass and harsh top end with a sucked in midrange. My system has been set for many months now with a Devialet 200 (best piece of HiFi I have ever owned, touched, used or listened to, it is staying). The Ayon stuff was awful and I was pretty vocal about it with the USA Distributor. It's also cheaply made inside and I know of quite a few who have issues with these amps from heat to tubes blowing to just the amp blowing up. I'd stay far away from Ayon.

[Reply](#)

Steve Weis says:
June 3, 2015 at 2:30 pm



Ayon in my experience is the finest tube gear I have ever owned and I have owned heavy hitting tube gear. Steve, your way off on this one. I was at The Show Newport 2015, just returned, Ayon won best sound. My Ayon gear has been super reliable as well.
Steve

[Reply](#)

R Brand says:
September 19, 2016 at 5:53 am



I am using the Ayon Crossfire ii – it is a 30Wpc SET amp that uses AA62B tubes (it is Ayon's own variation of 300B). It was expensive (around 10 000 Dollar) but it sounds magic!!! I am using it on Vivid Audio B1 speakers (with 89db sensitivity), and it drives them with ease. I get a wide and deep soundstage and vocals that are so palpable that I am often left astonished. It is a slightly warm (but not dark) sounding amp and it is completely non-fatiguing. With my previous 200Wpc AVM pre-amp and monoblocks, the sound was impressive, but I kept jumping tracks and changing CDs. Now I just listen through whole CDs. I also find that the Ayon Crossfire II sounds equally good and spacious on low and on high volumes. The bass is simply astonishing for a SET amp. It is rich, full of timbre and organic sounding. I am also using an Ayon CD5s CD player. I have been using this system for a few years now and it has stopped my urge to continuously upgrade like in the past.

[Reply](#)9. **Rita Fernwood** says:

October 28, 2014 at 3:16 am



What do you mean by premium tubes costing UP TO \$2,000? Are you a cheapskate or just misinformed?? The Elog 845's will cost about \$2,000 for a pair, with their matching 300B's being over \$1,000 per pair ... add in the best versions of the other tubes and we are WELL over the "UP TO \$2,000" mark – dweeb!!

[Reply](#)

Jeffery Wood says:

January 16, 2015 at 2:31 am



Put that strap on back in the drawer, girl. This is a civil room.

[Reply](#)10. **Stump** says:

September 14, 2014 at 9:03 pm



The Heat issue and the look of Line Magnetic 219ia will be my introduction to Tube Amps .I have no heater in the music room so this will be my winter Amp!!
Stump

[Reply](#)11. **Eric Henry** says:

September 2, 2014 at 12:13 am



Nice review ... I had been following your photography posts and just came back here and noticed your are into good audio as well !

Try the Mastersound Evolution 845, not as good looking as the LM, but excellent sound for your Sonus Faber. Not the cloying syrupy sweet type like Unison Research, but a more neutral balance, like a Kondo, but more powerful and meatier.

Too big ? Then they also have the Mastersound Compact 845, or Mastersound 300B Evolution. Check it out.

[Reply](#)12. **David** says:

August 25, 2014 at 7:54 am



I really enjoyed your review and hearing about the personal path you took to get to your current system. I am a serious photo enthusiast, and also do photography as part of my design practice, though I am not a professional. I have also loved high end audio since I was young, and like the same music you referenced in your review. For the past year, my next big upgrade has been to get an Audio Research SP-20 pre-amp (I want the phono) and a Reference 75 power amp.- a different path from the SET route. Since you have heard many systems, do you have a personal opinion on ARC, and how it might compare to the Line Magnetic 219?

[Reply](#)13. **Doron** says:

August 11, 2014 at 11:18 pm



Hi Steve,

I have tried many amps, both tube and solid state, push pull and SET, high power, low power, you name it, including: Conrad Johnson, Canary, Macintosh (never liked them), Audio Research, Audiomat (very sweet and can drive anything!), Meridian, Sim Audio, Bryston, Musical Paradise (amazing value!!!), Naim Audio, McAlister Audio, Audio Note, JAS Array 300B/805 SET.

Non came close to my Joule Electra VZN-80 OTL.

I would have recommended it although your 4 ohm Guarneri may not be the best candidate (have to try to be sure) as to me it has all the attributes of SET without the SET limitations such as: big, layered midrange at the expense of the frequency extremes, slight slower, more syrupy sound, a tendency to mesh things together in complex music rather than separate which makes it ideal for smooth jazz but not so much something like Hugh Masakella...OTL (output transformer less) are the fringe of the audio world. They are large and produce heat, they require more fussing like biasing every tube, variac instead of power switch and occasional adjustments. But, nothing I've heard remotely comes close. They are the most natural, dynamic, transparent and effortless amps I've heard, bar non. The closest thing to a wire with a gain. Their rise time is magnitude better than solid state or standard tube amps. They are the epitome of "less is more" and "the best transformer is no

transformer". The thing is they run as hot as SET's and are large. Here is a write up of a guy who heard them with SF Amati, it speaks for itself:

"audio shows take the romantic sheen of cute packaging and sales literature very quickly. Once fatigue and impatience set in, you discover how much mediocrity is being promoted, and how few designs rise above the fray. The Joule amps exceeded my expectations. The second I heard them, I immediately knew what was missing from nearly every other amplifier on the market. This was the only amplifier I heard that could keep all the harmonic information together in one coherent image. It sounded like other designs were suffocating the harmonics, but hiding the damage behind oversharps highs or thumpy bass. The Joule is technically underdamped, but the bass has the rare quality of being toneful, rather than punchy or visceral. This ability to be true to tone is the great distinguishing quality of Joule. The complexity of piano strings is fully revealed instead of glary banging. Large stringed instruments have "cavity", as if you can hear whats happening internally in the instrument. If classical music or acoustic music of any stripe is you favored listening, Joule will absolutely ruin you for any other amp. It is the most civilized tube design in the world, if not the coolest running or easiest to live with. This isn't a toy, and it isn't ultra-convenient. You won't want this for ear-crushing boozy gatherings or adolescent angst sessions. It is an adult experience in the best sense of the word."

[Reply](#)

14. **dynaudio** says:

July 8, 2014 at 9:01 pm



Just to check – how will LM-518ia drive Dynaudio Focus -140 (4 Ohms, 86 dB)?

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

July 8, 2014 at 9:58 pm



Yes, and it will sound amazing doing it. No issues.

[Reply](#)

15. **Shirox** says:

July 5, 2014 at 8:31 am



I'm also a satisfied user of LM, using the 518 for about 2 months now. Early part was ok, very open, good mid range. And by the way, i'm using 90db speakers from Piega. <http://www.piega.ch>

What bugged me was the buzzing in the middle power supply. Its random. And the buzz was so loud I can hear it from 1.8 meters away as that's my seated distance. My set up consist of a Rega P25, Accuphase DP70. Went back to my local dealer, tried a few methods, still not too sure why it happened. Apparently some sets in China had the same issue as well.

The dealer was nice enough to let me ugrade to the 219ia, which will be delivered in a weeks time. Can't wait to hear the difference.

[Reply](#)

16. **Kartik** says:

June 5, 2014 at 7:11 pm



I may not share your feelings about the McIntosh product lines but have you considered using lowfi Klipschorns instead. Using a MC275 into K-horns fed with USB out to a C-50 preamp, even iTunes sounds fun. May not be high fidelity but very enjoyable.

[Reply](#)

hlbaadmin says:

June 16, 2014 at 12:56 pm



I use a PrimaLuna Dialogue Premium Integrated with a pair of Klipsch RF7-II's, and the sound is sublime. I also have a pair of khorns upstairs, and the sound was very similar (the khorns have a bit more soundstage, mainly because they are set so far apart (about 18')).

If you haven't auditioned the PrimaLuna, it's a great find. About \$3300 with stock EL-34's, although I have tried Psvane KT-88's, Tung-Sol KT120's and 150's and they all sound great. Currently running the KT-150's, and the sound is gigantic, even at low levels. Warning: took a long time to burn in those tubes.

Heat is not a big issue, even the four KT-150's don't generate too much for me (I live in Austin, TX and it is summertime here!).

I'll see if I can audition the LineMagnetic at RMAF this year, as well as the Sonus Faber's. Sounds amazing.

And thanks for the audio tracks! I enjoy new music even more than new gear. Really liking the Neil Young.

Here are a couple of my favorite tunes for auditioning hi-fi gear:

"Woman Left Lonely" – Cat Power
 "It Doesn't Matter" – Alison Krauss
 "Klezmer Dances for Clarinet and Strings" – Martin Fröst
 "No Way Out" – Peter Gabriel
 "Mercy of the Wheels" – John Gorka
 "Song of the Stars" – Dead Can Dance
 "Urge for Going (Remastered)" – Tom Rush

and just a fun one for testing the mid-bass:

"Fit Song" – Cornelius

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

June 16, 2014 at 1:01 pm



Oh I have had Prima Luna as well ;) I remember when they started and they have only gotten better as time went on, today they are at their best. They sound different than the 219 due to the 219ia being a SET amp, so different signature.

I have been curious about KT150's myself as i now have a Audio Research amp that supposedly can take the 150's..may have to give them a shot.

Yea, I hear ya on the music! Thanks for the recommendations.

[Reply](#)

17. **Dave Sturdevant** says:

April 25, 2014 at 11:46 pm



I would think you should look at the Ayon Crossfire SET integrated amp, about \$14K, uses their proprietary 62B output tubes. The same tubes are in their top SET offering, the Vulcan monoblocks, which The Absolute Sound rave reviewed, calling them the Bugatti of audio. But those are over \$30K. The Crossfire certainly is on my dream list. Thanks for the great review of the Line Magnetic products! I'm in Alaska...the heat is welcome!

[Reply](#)

18. **Tom Kelly** says:

April 10, 2014 at 6:16 pm



I have the 518ia I bought from the same guys in Phx,Az.

The 518ia is DEAD QUIET!

It easily powers my WB Curves with the magic only found in a SET amp.It will flat out perform any amp I have heard at double the price....

Regards, Tom

[Reply](#)

19. **yy** says:

March 12, 2014 at 8:38 am



Hi Steve

Thanks for your review, I find it extremely informative. My question to you is how do you compare the heat from the 518 vs 219, is one hotter than the other? Based on specs 518 should gives out more heat, if so is 518 significantly cooler?

[Reply](#)

yy says:

March 12, 2014 at 8:39 am



ops, sorry didn't realize someone asked the same question

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

March 12, 2014 at 8:47 am



Yep, someone asked this but they put out the same heat really. In a small closed room it will raise the temp by 10 degrees at least. Not bad in a cool environment as it doubles as a heater :)

[Reply](#)

Tan Ying says:

March 20, 2014 at 6:38 pm



Too bad you have to let this amp go. Heard it at a friends place and indeed the 219 is truly special. Keep us posted about your quest, good luck.

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

March 20, 2014 at 6:39 pm



Yea, I miss it but do not miss the heat. When I move (in the next year) I may end up buying it again.

[Reply](#)

20. **Shahed** says:

March 11, 2014 at 7:22 pm



Great Review! Can you please tell us how much heat is generated through 519IA compare to 219IA?

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

March 11, 2014 at 7:48 pm



They both generate the same amount of heat. It is the 845's. It is an issue for me as I have a small, closed room. If I had a larger open room it would not be an issue.

[Reply](#)

21. **Tommy Bui** says:

February 8, 2014 at 5:22 pm



I've had my Evolutions for a week now and am looking to add a tube integrated in my system. I have always been intrigued by SET and would love to try the 518 but am really worried it won't have enough power for the Evolutions. Based on your review it seems the 518 will be fine. One area of concertos your comment that the 518 is fatter in the midrange. I know it's hard to quantify but can you expand on this comment? Is it syrupy sounding?

[Reply](#)

Tommy Bui says:

February 8, 2014 at 7:58 pm



By the way, how did you get your amp to output 100w? I thought max output was 24w? Am I missing something?

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

February 8, 2014 at 10:50 pm



Hey Tommy,

Congrats on the speakers. What are you using to power them now? The 518 and 219 power them equally as well. The 518 seemed to be richer in the mid bass area but everything comes into play in the system from source, to cables.

I am testing a Young DAC now and the sound is MUCH less full and fat, so depending on source it does make a difference.

I do know that the 518 and 219 power my speakers with enough volume, much more than

I need in my room.

If I keep turning it up the meter on the front of the 219ia shows it is putting out 100WPC but not sure that it really is. It seems to be capable of peaks at higher wattage but excels at low to mid level listening for me.

Id say go for the 518, change the 845's and driver tubes and you will be good to go. You do not have to change the tubes but if you find it a little fat sounding a change in tubes will sharpen it up a bit.

I love these amps but one warning!! THEY PUT HEAT into my room in a big way. Living in AZ not sure I will be able to handle it in the summer. if not I will have to get a 2nd amp for summer use! lol.

[Reply](#)

Tommy Bui says:

February 11, 2014 at 8:29 pm



Thank you for the reply. Right now I am powering the Evolutions with an Accoustic Arts Power 1 integrated (SS) amp. No real complaints with these amps. I wasn't really thinking about upgrading until I read your review. I've always been interested in SET but didn't think it was possible given the low sensitivity of the Sonus Faber speakers.

Thanks for the heads up on heat. I used to own the Pass Labs XA 160 monoblock which operated on pure class A so it was hot! But I live in SoCal so the weather is no too bad.

My issue now is to find a dealer that will allow me to do an in home demo. The one local to me won't do it. Ugh!

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

February 11, 2014 at 8:36 pm



I have heard good things about the Accoustic Arts line...I may have to buy a "summer amp" that runs cooler for June-Sep!

22. **byunghyun.chung@gmail.com** says:

January 27, 2014 at 3:13 pm



I was very surprised to find your LM219ia review in internet. I always enjoyed reading your reviews on Leica and bought some accessories based on your recommendations (happy with them). I didn't know that you were an audiophile and, furthermore, another enthusiastic lover of LM 219ia. I play my LM219ia with Harbeth 7ES3 (another not so sensitive speakers at 86db) and very very happy with it. The amp I had before LM was Leben cs600 but the difference between SET vs. Push Pull (Leben) was very clear. I think your term 'Organic' describes the LM's sound the best. I am curious about more efficient speakers like Devore Orangutan but since I enjoy listening to music at low volume as well I am just happy with Harbeth right now. The reason I am writing is to share my experience with tube rolling. I had great fun with rolling tubes. So far, I tried PSVANE 12AX7 (didn't like it), Mullard NOS 12AX7, KR 300B and Elrog 845. With each upgrade, I got some moderate improvement but the Elrog gave me the greatest success. It's pricy (\$1200) but made the sound very seductive. Surprisingly, KR 300b was bit disappointing but did make the background more quieter. I didn't try PSVANE's WE replica after I disappointed with 12AX7 but I read good review on them in other sites.

[Reply](#)

Steve Huff says:

January 27, 2014 at 6:55 pm



Thanks!

[Reply](#)


23. **Eric** says:

January 27, 2014 at 1:18 am



Love the last image :D I'm more of a headphone type of a guy but I enjoy your Hi-Fi reviews tremendously.


[Reply](#)

24. **Saulius** says:
 January 27, 2014 at 12:44 am 

"Another song I use to test my setup is from Martin Gore from his Counterfeit 2 CD. "In my other world" will bring Martin into the room while the hypnotic sounds surround you with every layer of sound being audible and distinguishable."

Thumb up :)

[Reply](#)

25. **Rick** says:
 January 26, 2014 at 7:58 pm 

such a sweet set up. "I can only imagine what it would do with high sensitivity speakers..." hit up those Zu guys in Utah for something fun to play with.

[Reply](#)

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