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Yaqin Tube Buffer

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Inexpensive "Tube Warmth" for Your AV System

Written: Jan 28 '07 (Updated Jun 23 '07)

Product Rating: ★★★★★ **Pros:** More warmth, price, swappable tubes and power cords.

Cons: Slightly less shimmer and presence than the Musical Fidelity in stock form.

The Bottom Line: Great sound equal to or better than the Musical Fidelity x-10v3 at less than half the price. It produces a huge positive difference whether you own a receiver or separates.

slbenz's Full Review: Yaqin Tube Buffer

In my never ending search for quality sound out of my AV system, I stumbled upon various internet audio forums that mention the use of a line-stage tube buffer. You are probably wondering what is a line-stage tube buffer to begin with. What it does, it can help your solid state system simulate the sound of a high-end tube amplified system without the need of spending large amounts of money to achieve this goal. It can be placed in-line with a DVD, CD, tape loop or between a preamp and power amplifier so that all sources can benefit from the tube buffer. This especially so with a solid state separates system like mine. In the other audio forums, the best of both worlds is to have a tube preamp and solid state power amp to capture the strengths that both can bring to the sound. Unfortunately, tube preamps can easily cost more than \$3000 and I wanted to find a cost-effective alternative. My evaluation of the Yaqin tube buffer will be with my

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own system and using it in a more modest system that my brother-in-law owns. I will also compare the Yaqin to the benchmark standard, the Musical Fidelity x-10v3 tube buffer, a Stereophile Class A component, highly regarded in various audio circles.

Build Quality:

The Yaqin has a more industrial, less refined look than the Musical Fidelity with its brushed aluminum finish. It is a bit more compact and has a feel of weightiness to it that the Musical Fidelity lacks. This can be explained because the Yaqin has a built-in power supply that I found out later is the same one used by other tube preamp manufacturers selling these units greater than \$2000. The Musical Fidelity uses a separate power supply commonly known as know as a wall wart.

Features:

The Yaqin has a number of features that I wish the Musical Fidelity could copy. First, the Yaqin uses one 6N1 tube that is supplied. It is user replaceable with several other common tubes which include the 6DJ8, 6922, and 6N1 so that you can tailor the sound of the Yaqin to your taste. With the Musical Fidelity, the 6112 tube that is supplied, is built-in and once it goes out, you need to send the unit back to the factory for replacement. Second, the Yaqin, with its built-in power supply uses an IEC connector where you can replace the stock 18AWG power cord with your choice of aftermarket power cord. Third, the Yaqin has a power switch on the left side of it's body and once turned on, a blue lit Yaqin logo appears. Very nice touch. Also, once the 6N1 tube is warmed up, it emits a nice warm glow. Unfortunately, the Musical Fidelity's 6112 tube is encased and cannot be seen. Lastly, the RCA connectors on the Yaqin are gold-plated.

Warranty:

30-day money back guarantee if you don't like the product and 90-day guarantee for defects.

Specifications:

From the Manufacturer's Web Site-

Input Power: 110V 60Hz

Tube: 6DJ8 / 6N11 / 6N1

Input signal: 0.55V

Frequency: 5Hz- 500KHz(-1dB)

Harmonic Distortion :0. 15%(1KHz)

Signal to Noise Ratio 90dB (A)

Input Jack: 1 group

Output Jack: 1 group

Weight: 3.5kg

Size Dimension: Width 250mm Height 185mm Depth

210mm

Color: Black Only

Sound:

Tube buffers are known to increase the shimmer, presence, detail, widening of the soundstage and reduce or eliminate the digital harshness in CD recordings. So I used recordings to test these various aspects. First, I used the CD recording of Norah Jones, "Feels Like Home". On the first track, "Sunrise", Norah Jones' voice became much richer without any digital harshness with the Yaqin in place. As expected, the soundstage widened greatly, while strings, drum kicks and piano notes were played with a much greater sense of realism to the presentation. The Yaqin also did a better job of fleshing out the positions of the players and singers in relation to each other vs. the Musical Fidelity. While the Musical Fidelity had a slight edge in shimmer with the cymbals being played on this track, the Yaqin clearly was superior in mid to low bass reproduction and midrange warmth. The next track, "What Am I to You", also confirmed what I thought about the Yaqin compared to the Musical Fidelity. The Yaqin, presents a greater sense of mid to low bass with a greater sense of midrange warmth with a touch less shimmer than the Musical Fidelity. In terms of presence for Norah Jones' voice for these two tracks, think front row for the Musical Fidelity and second row for the Yaqin. On my brother-in-law's receiver based system, the shimmer were equal but the spatial detail, midrange and mid to low bass were still in favor of the Yaqin.

Next, I tried my SACD recording of Hiroshima, "The Bridge", and listened to the second track called, "Caravan of Love". This track has complex instrumentation with a male vocal lead. The Yaqin made the male lead sound much more present in your room while increasing the level of detail and presence that I have heard out of my system. The resolution that the Yaqin brought to this track help me to hear additional instruments in the background of this recording that I never heard before with pinpoint placement. The overall additions that the Yaqin brought to this recording

was as if 2-3 layers of curtains were unveiled to the recording. Same with receiver based system. The difference is quite dramatic.

Last, I tried my DVD-A recording of B.B. King and Eric Clapton's, "Riding With The King". The first track, "Riding With The King", tests my system for spatial placement of both men singing on this track. The Yaqin helped to widen and again pinpoint exactly where each singer is in relation to each other much more easily. Their electric guitar play sounds very life-like and again in the room. Similar in sound to the Musical Fidelity. Seems that the higher the resolution recording, the difference in shimmer with the Yaqin and Musical Fidelity become much smaller. At times, I couldn't hear a difference in shimmer and presence. Again, the real audible difference is again with mid to low bass presence. The Yaqin still beats the Musical Fidelity handily no matter if it was a CD, SACD or DVD-A recording.

Next, I tried the Yaqin while watching various DVD movies. First, I tried Carlos Santana's, "Supernatural" DVD concert. Overall, the Yaqin brought a much more engaging presentation and I real felt that I was more a participant rather than a person watching a performance on my HDTV. There was a greater ease to listening with each track on this DVD that I never experienced before. The Yaqin must have been taming all of the digital harshness that I didn't realize was there before. Once I disconnected the Yaqin, the digital harshness showed it's ugly head and made the performance harsher to listen to. Also again, without the Yaqin, the sound tracks sounded harsher, much more collapsed and less engaging.

Recently, I rented Mission Impossible III, to see what the Yaqin can do for this movie. As you can imagine, the Yaqin helps bring out dialog out of the movie much better than without. Action sounds are presented with much more authority, bass is cleaner, and the soundstage is greatly widened and enveloping. It was quite pleasing to see that the Yaqin tube buffer benefits DVD movies and concerts so well.

Because I have a separates system, I tried to see if the Yaqin would also benefit my system if I listened to my FM tuner and my turntable. I had the Yaqin in-line between my preamp and power amp. I am pleased to report that the Yaqin helps equally as well with these two sources. It was almost eerie to hear FM with the Yaqin in place. With a strong FM station playing jazz or classical, it almost sounded like listening to a recording on a tape deck. My Pro-Ject turntable also benefitted having an additional sense of depth, detail and widening of the soundstage than without.

Conclusion:

Overall, I was quite pleased with the performance of the Yaqin, even when compared to the Musical Fidelity. The Yaqin adds to your system, a much greater sense of depth, detail, spatial awareness, more life-like realism to both music and movies, while added warmth audibly and visually to every source component you use. Comparing the Yaqin to the Musical Fidelity, the Yaqin provides greater mid to low bass performance, added warmth to the midrange without being in your face compared to the Musical Fidelity with the addition of better 3D imaging. Sure, at times, the Musical Fidelity can sound better with the right music, especially with cymbals but the Yaqin is very close behind and is on par with the Musical Fidelity using an aftermarket power cord. And with the additional capabilities of switching out tubes and power cords, the Yaqin proves to be more versatile of the two tube buffers and I would suspect with a better tube on board like a 6DJ8, the difference in shimmer and life-like probably will surpass the Musical Fidelity. That will be part of a later update for this review. The Yaqin at less than half the price of the Musical Fidelity proves that you can have great sound without spending a large amount of money. Very highly recommended.

Where to Buy and Cost:

There is only one place in the U.S. that I could find that had the Yaqin available. The only other places I could find the Yaqin for sale was on eBay in the Far East. But these eBay Yaqins uses two 6J1 tubes which are very limited to alternative tubes and warranty returns would be difficult and costly due to overseas return shipping. There is a U.S. based on-line company which I found that provides a 30 days return policy so just in case you don't like the Yaqin, you can return it without a restocking fee. Also, they are the only company I have found on the Internet that sells the Yaqin I reviewed using the much more common 6DJ8/6922/6N11/6N1 twin triode tube selections.

Here is where I found the only dealer in the US that sells the Yaqin Tube Buffer:
Pacific Valve and Electric Company
Web site: <http://www.pacificvalve.us/YaqinTB.html> selling for \$175.00.

For comparison, the Musical Fidelity's MSRP is \$400 and with the upgraded power supply, plan to spend another \$400 more.

UPDATE!UPDATE!UPDATE!

I now had the chance to evaluate the Yaqin with different power cords by PS Audio and Signal Cable and tried a 6DJ8, JAN Phillips 6922 Green Label, Sovtek 6922, Electro Harmonix 6922 Gold Pin, and National 6922 tube in place of the stock tube. The best in my system is the Signal Cable Digital Reference Power Cord which I evaluated here: http://www0.epinions.com/content_338278190724 and the JAN Phillips 6922 Green Label tube which addresses all of the perceived lack of shimmer and sparkle and now exceeds the Musical Fidelity by a tremendous amount. The overall presentation is even more life-like, richer with an open and wide sound stage that exceeds the Musical Fidelity on all fronts. Definitely a champagne product for those on a beer budget even with the upgrades.

Associated Equipment:

Mitsubishi WD-52725 52" DLP HDTV
Parasound HCA-1205A 5-Channel Amp
Parasound AVC-1800 Pre-amp
Magnepan IIIa Front Main Speakers
Eminent Technology LFT-XII center channel speaker
Magnepan IIIa Rear Surround Speakers
Velodyne HGS-12 Series II subwoofer
Sony CDP-CX240 CD Player
Oppo Digital DV-970HD Universal DVD Player
Pro-Ject 1.2 Turntable with Sumiko Pearl Cartridge
Channel Island Audio VDA-2 DAC and VAC-1 Power Supply
Synergistic Research Interconnects and Speaker Cables
Stock 14 and 18 AWG Power Cord
PS Audio Prelude Power Cord
Signal Cable Digital Reference Power Cofd

Marantz SR6200 Receiver
Samsung HD-841 DVD player
Definitive Technology BP2004 front mains
Definitive Technology BP 8B rear surrounds
Definitive Techology CLR-3000 center channel
Monster Cable Interconnects and Speaker Cables

Recommended:

Yes

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