

A close-up photograph of the Mark Levinson No 585 Integrated Amplifier. The device is black with a silver front panel. On the left, there is a large, light-colored volume knob. To its right, the word "input" is printed. Further right, there is a red LED display showing "USB". Below the display are four buttons labeled "polarity", "setup", "enter", and "display intensity". The Mark Levinson logo and "INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER No 585" are printed on the right side of the front panel. At the bottom right, there is a "standby" switch.

MARK LEVINSON No 585

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Reviewer Edgar Kramer





▽ CONNECTIVITY IS COMPREHENSIVE, COMPRISING A WHOLE STREAM OF BALANCED, UNBALANCED INPUTS/OUTPUTS AND NO FEWER THAN SIX DIGITAL INPUTS.



The refined industrial design principles are carried through to engineering ideologies encompassing advanced circuitry and high quality componentry.

Back in the early 1970s Mark Levinson, the man, was almost single-handedly responsible for the advent of the American high-end audio industry. At the time, at the helm of Mark Levinson Audio Systems, Levinson, together with a couple of his contemporaries who can also be credited for playing their part in the nascent high-end audio industry, was responsible for products of a quality level that was unprecedented. These are now considered true audio classics — mention the Mark Levinson-conceptualised John Curl-designed ML-2 Class-A monobloc amplifiers and you'll hear tones of reverence from the audiophile cognoscenti. Ditto for the exquisite ML-1 and JC-2 preamplifiers, considered iconic and commanding high prices to this day.

Then in the early 1980s, MLAS was purchased by Madrigal Audio Laboratories. The new company went on to produce several components that reached similar success in terms of both critical acclaim and owner satisfaction — the No 30 Reference Digital Processor and No 31 Reference CD Transport were highlights of early digital audio engineering and craftsmanship that stand up well today even after 30 years of digital development.

Now under the ownership of multinational Harman International, the Mark Levinson name lives on and is in good stead to continue the legacy of excellence.

NUMBERS GAME

Talk has been doing the rounds for some time around audio circles of a possible replacement for the very successful No 383, the company's first attempt at an integrated amplifier. Then, at the CES Show in 2015, Harman International showed

the Mark Levinson No 585, which not only replaces the No 383 in terms of being an integration of preamp and power amp in one, but now offers further functionality by way of a built-in digital-to-analogue converter and other useful additions.

The No 585 is a sizeable component, and it's presented in an instantly recognisable Mark Levinson aesthetic — that attractive mix of silver and luxuriously-anodised black aluminium with the large red dot-matrix-style display, the trademark look for Mark Levinson products of the last few decades. Needless to say that the exceptional build quality also lives on.

These refined industrial design principles are carried through to engineering ideologies encompassing advanced circuitry and high quality componentry. The dual-monaural Class-A/B amplification is fully balanced and features a large 900VA custom toroidal transformer with a bank of small capacitors — in close proximity to the amplification stage — used for their fast reaction times and potential lower series resistance. Twelve bipolar output transistors are used on each channel, mated to decent-sized heatsinks placed at the amp's flanks.

In a first for the brand, this integrated amplifier features a built-in digital-to-analogue converter (DAC). This is a 32-bit resolution 'Sabre' device from ESS Technology, and while the device features very low native jitter, proprietary techniques have been used to reduce this jitter even further.

The rear panel sports four line inputs, with 'Input 1' being a balanced XLR and the remaining three via RCA. With the new DAC onboard, digital inputs abound, with connectivity for AES/EBU via XLR, two S/PDIF coaxial RCA inputs, two optical Toslink connections and an asynchronous USB-B socket. A number of communication-type ports are provided, including Ethernet RJ-45 and USB-A (flash drive) for software upgrades.



△ SOLID NO-NONSENSE ENGINEERING INCLUDES A LARGE CUSTOM TRANSFORMER, MULTIPLE SMALL CAPACITORS AND APPROPRIATE INTERNAL HEAT SINKING.

The brand's 'Hurricane' speaker binding post design is one of the best around, easily hand-tightened and accepting both banana plugs and spades. A set of RCA line outputs provides the opportunity to use the amp's preamplifier stage with an external power amplifier or, if you're feeding a subwoofer, you can access the built-in 12dB/octave 80Hz high-pass filter.

There's a choice of fixed output for recording purposes, or variable for configurations using a power amp, and a home theatre pass-through option is provided via the menu.

The menu itself has a number of levels and options, among them some rather clever stuff such as the ability to export all the settings to a USB drive, thereby allowing the rapid configuration of a duplicate 585 — this can also be seen as a form of settings back-up. Further options extend to input name allocation, gain matching, maximum volume

setting, turn-on volume setting, volume control range and sensitivity adjustment along with a number of other custom configurations.

The DAC implementation is capable of 192kHz/32-bit resolution and native DSD at 64fs single and 128fs double. Navigating through the menus reveals, among other things, a choice of three PCM filters to tailor the sound. These proved quite subtle, and include a choice of 'Fast' with steep roll-off characteristics (ML suggests this filter for electronic music), a more universal 'Slow' with a gradual roll-off and 'Mphas' minimum phase (said to suit acoustic music). For the playback of low bandwidth compressed files (Lord help us), there's a 'Clari-Fi' circuitry which aims to revitalise the sonics; it can be selectable (or preferably defeated) via the included all-metal remote control. As a nice touch among the usual functionality, the remote also provides USB input playback control.



△ UNMISTAKINGLY MARK LEVINSON, THE No 585 BEARS THE TRADEMARKS OF LUXURIOUS BLACK & SILVER ANODISED ALUMINIUM WITH RED DOT-MATRIX DISPLAY.

The amp has been conservatively rated as being able to output 200 watts into 8 ohms (20Hz to 20kHz with a THD of less than 0.01 percent), and a frequency response spanning from 2Hz to 250kHz (+0.2dB/-3dB). The preamp stage's input impedance is 45kohms via RCAs and XLR and the amplifier's damping factor has been quoted as 40 at 20Hz referred to 8 ohms.

A short note: at the time of the review we were told a small firmware update was due for imminent release to alleviate a minor turn-on

transient. We experienced it on our efficient speakers as a low-ish level thump (and its level would be significantly lower with speakers of average sensitivity) after the amp's warm-up procedure. It is a trivial matter for firmware update rectification.



At this level of amplifier-building expertise the clever engineering is evidenced in terms of utter circuit silence while in operation with music playing.

INTEGRATED SOUND

It's been said that the Mark Levinson of old possessed a warm and fuller sound, while in the last few years the company's signature has had a far more neutral bent. The 585 integrated treads the fine line between the two sonic signatures. It's not syrupy warm nor coldly analytical. As Goldilocks experienced, the 585 was... just right.

This is a seductress of an amplifier whether using the line inputs from a quality source or via the asynchronous USB or digital inputs. But where some components that exhibit a sweet character can make playback a bit 'samey' from track to track, the 585 is incisive, resolute and detailed enough to present music in an accurate manner, while never sounding strident or brash.

This musical ease was pleasingly in evidence both via the line inputs using our reference AMR CD-77.1 CD player, and when connected via the USB input, where the pairing of amplifier and computer proved a seamless handshake which had us running computer audio in seconds. This is quite an important point; we've had many a hairpulling hour or two of rebooting and troubleshooting with other components in the past. The 585 just locked in instantaneously.

The subtle sweetness inherent in the sonic signature of the 585 did not detract from its power to resolve complex layers of sound and low level musical detail. The many subtleties and minutiae of recordings such as Harry Belafonte's gloriously epic *Live at Carnegie Hall*, with its spatial grandiosity intermixed with Belafonte's lyrical expressiveness, was an easy task for the 585's resolving power. The amp was also highly adept at marking the singer's undulations in terms of his vocal expression and dynamic shading.

At this level of amplifier-building expertise, the clever engineering is evidenced in terms of utter circuit silence while in operation with music playing. As the audiophile saying goes, the background was the blackest of blacks. This enabled phenomenal low level transient information to come through, allowing incidental details, be they instrumental or vocal, to cut through and be easily discerned above the super-low operating noise floor. This

is an ultra-quiet amp. So combine this with the descriptions in the above paragraphs and you have the makings of a fluid, musical amplifier that can provide, almost paradoxically, profound levels of detail and information.

Moving on to the low frequencies, the 585's bass control and depth were extremely satisfying. The amp's well thought-out power supply shows its mettle with a bass register that is tight, detailed and deep even with the demanding Wilson Audio Alexia. The overall dynamic envelope was satisfying, even if nit-picking might not place the 585 in the very highest upper echelons (that's what ML's big power amps are for). With more common and easier loads, such as our lovely little Axis VoiceBox S small speaker reference, the 585 procured a more extended window of dynamic contrast and fuller low frequencies.

The concept of transparency can be difficult to grasp when reading from mere words on a page but it's easily identified when heard. It's a sense of hearing *into* the recording, where not only detail is evident but where timbre and immediacy are also strongly conveyed.

The 585 excels at this too, and its delicacy with vocals and acoustic instrumentation was stunning. Every nuance and tonal characteristic was communicated by the 585 in a way that just relaxes the listener and resigns him/her to musical enjoyment. The brain seems to struggle less to process and identify sounds from its memory bank of tonality because the 585 so closely approaches the real tonal qualities of instruments and voices.

I had no qualms with spatial and imaging issues in our very soundfield-friendly testing room. The 585 behaved the way most excellent amplifiers do in this room, providing a soundstage with very good width and depth and with precise image placement that was unchanged by volume level. Easy report — excellent performance here too.

CONCLUSION

With this amplifier the Mark Levinson brand has achieved a winning formula, the No 585 proving a powerhouse of thorough and skilled engineering which follows on to superb performance. It's exquisitely built, and possesses features that effectively make it a useful analogue and digital control centre. Its USB adaptation is exceptional, while the provision for high resolution playback — including multiples of DSD — and the proprietary ClariFi circuit for compressed audio files (if you must) provide comprehensive playback options.

The Mark Levinson No 585 integrated amplifier should be in the must-audition list for any audio enthusiast and music lover looking for system simplicity, intelligent design, versatility and exceptional audio performance. ■



△ THE REAR PANEL IS A POSTER-BOY FOR ORGANISED LAYOUT, WHILE THE 'HURRICANE' BINDING POSTS ARE AMONG THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS.



SPECIFICATIONS

MARK LEVINSON NO 585

POWER OUTPUT: 200W RMS per channel into 8 ohms (20Hz-20kHz)

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (THD):
< 0.01% (1kHz, 200W, 8 ohms);
< 0.1% (20kHz, 200W, 8 ohms)

INPUT IMPEDANCE:
>45k-ohms (RCA and XLR)

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO:
>98dB (20Hz-20kHz, unweighted);
>103dB (20Hz-20kHz, A-wtd), referred to full output, maximum volume setting

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 20Hz-20kHz (±0.13dB); 2Hz-250kHz (+0.2dB/-3dB)

DAMPING FACTOR:
>40 at 20Hz, referred to 8 ohms

LINE LEVEL INPUTS/OUTPUTS: 3 × single-ended inputs (RCA); 1 × balanced inputs (XLR); 1 × single-ended line outputs (RCA); 1 × loudspeaker outputs ("Hurricane" binding posts w/banana sockets; accept spade lugs (6.3mm) spacing up to 3mm thick)

DIGITAL AUDIO CONNECTIVITY: 1 × balanced AES/EBU input (XLR); 2 × coaxial S/PDIF inputs (RCA); 2 × optical inputs (Tos-Link); 1 × asynchronous USB input (USB-B)

CONTROL CONNECTIVITY: 1 × RS-232 port (RJ12 connector); 1 × IR input (3.5mm jack); 1 × programmable 12V DC trigger output (3.5mm jack), 100mA maximum; 1 × programmable 12 DC trigger input (3.5mm jack); 1 × Ethernet port (RJ-45 connector)

DIMENSIONS (WHD): 438 × 193 × 507mm

WEIGHT (UNPACKED/PACKED):
32.6kg/43.4kg

PRICE: \$21,595

WARRANTY: Five years

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on 02 9561 0799
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