

AUDIO  
FILE

Two-chassis control/tube preamplifier  
 Made by: McIntosh Laboratory inc., Binghamton, NY, USA  
 Supplied by: Jordan Acoustics Ltd, Dorset, UK  
 Telephone: 01202 911886  
 Web: www.mcintoshlabs.com; www.jordanacoustics.co.uk  
 Price: £12,995



# McIntosh C1100

McIntosh's flagship £13k preamplifier is a massively complex, two-box behemoth with almost every feature under the sun, a sophisticated microprocessor-controlled user interface and a large complement of vacuum tubes comprising six 12AX7As and six 12AT7s. Think of the C1100 as a do-it-all design which aims to form the glamorous heart of a high-end hi-fi.

The package consists of the C1100C 'Controller' box and the

*'The music pulls the listener in, with beguiling silky high frequencies'*

C1100T 'Vacuum Tube Preamplifier', the idea being to isolate the control and power sections from the audio circuits. Both boxes are dual-mono in configuration and special shielded umbilical cables join them.

The C1100T has socketry for no fewer than 12 analogue inputs – six balanced, four unbalanced, plus user-configurable MM and MC phono inputs – and there are two sets of balanced and two sets of

unbalanced outputs. As a nod to the growing headphone community, the 'Headphone Crossfeed Director' adds an interesting new dimension to canned music, and Home Theatre Pass Through to integrate with a home cinema system is provided.

On switch-on you're immediately greeted by the vast bank of tubes backlit by amber LEDs. Ten seconds or so later, the LED illumination changes to green, and you're good to go. This, allied to the green backlit panel legends and largish blue level meters, makes for an impressive light show! A 'Set-up' button lets you scroll through the various options, from user-configurable input names to IR control codes and automatic shut-off.

## ENGAGINGLY TUNEFUL

Most people buy valve preamps in the expectation of their adding a smidgen of warmth and sweetness without losing the energy and scale of the original recording – and that's a fair summation of the McIntosh. Spin-up the title track of The Eurythmics' *Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This* [RCA], and it's clear

**ABOVE:** Around the central fluorescent dot-matrix display are knobs for volume, input, trim and adjust – alongside buttons for set-up, on/off, mute and HXD headphone processing. Lit by green LEDs, the 12 triodes are visible from the front and top of the unit

that the McIntosh is a very high resolution device. It vividly recreates the soundstage yet doesn't throw things into overly sharp relief – it's incisive, yet not too forensic. So the C1100C/T delivers a tuneful and engaging musical performance, with a sensibility that, many audiophiles assert, can only come from a well designed tube preamp.

If it doesn't have quite the vice-like grip of solid-state designs, the Mac majors on midrange fluency and scale, presenting the music in an ordered and tidy way that flows well and pulls the listener in. High frequencies sound beguilingly silky.

The big McIntosh proves most at home with laid-back programme material, such as the smoky jazz of 'Say You're Mine' from Donald Byrd [*The Cat Walk*, Blue Note], for example. Here it got its mojo working, digging into the song's syncopations in a realistic manner, adept at tracking the subtle dynamic inflections of the musicians, too. On classical music the McIntosh also shines brightly, showcasing its excellent three-dimensional soundstaging ability.

Bernard Haitink's superb reading of Vaughan Williams's Symphony No 2 [EMI] sounded wonderfully atmospheric with a beautifully tactile string sound. Stereo images were located in the recorded acoustic with rifle-bolt precision to give a crisp and panoramic view.

## VERDICT

With dramatic styling, extensive facilities and fine sound, this big Mac is an impressive package, serving up a smooth yet powerful sound. Factor in build quality, and many audiophiles will find this their ultimate preamplifier. ☺

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output (<1% THD, 47kohm)	24Vrms (Balanced)
Maximum input level (<1% THD)	>10Vrms (Balanced)
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	217–97ohm (Balanced)
Frequency response (20Hz–100kHz)	–0.10dB to –0.11dB
Input sensitivity	177mV (Balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	101.0dB
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz re. 0dBV)	0.00009–0.0005%
Power consumption	57W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight (C/T)	445x152x483mm / 12.3/11.3kg