

The Wyetech Ruby STD Line Stage

A Touch of Royalty

By Rob Johnson

When unboxing the Wyetech Ruby the first eye-catching feature is the violet purple, powder coated exterior accented with brass feet below, and brass handles on the front. Purple is a color often associated with royalty. With a bold color statement like that, the company must have confidence in a product's sound. Would my ears get the royal treatment? As it turns out, yes, it's a mighty good sounding piece of gear, as it should be for \$9,500.





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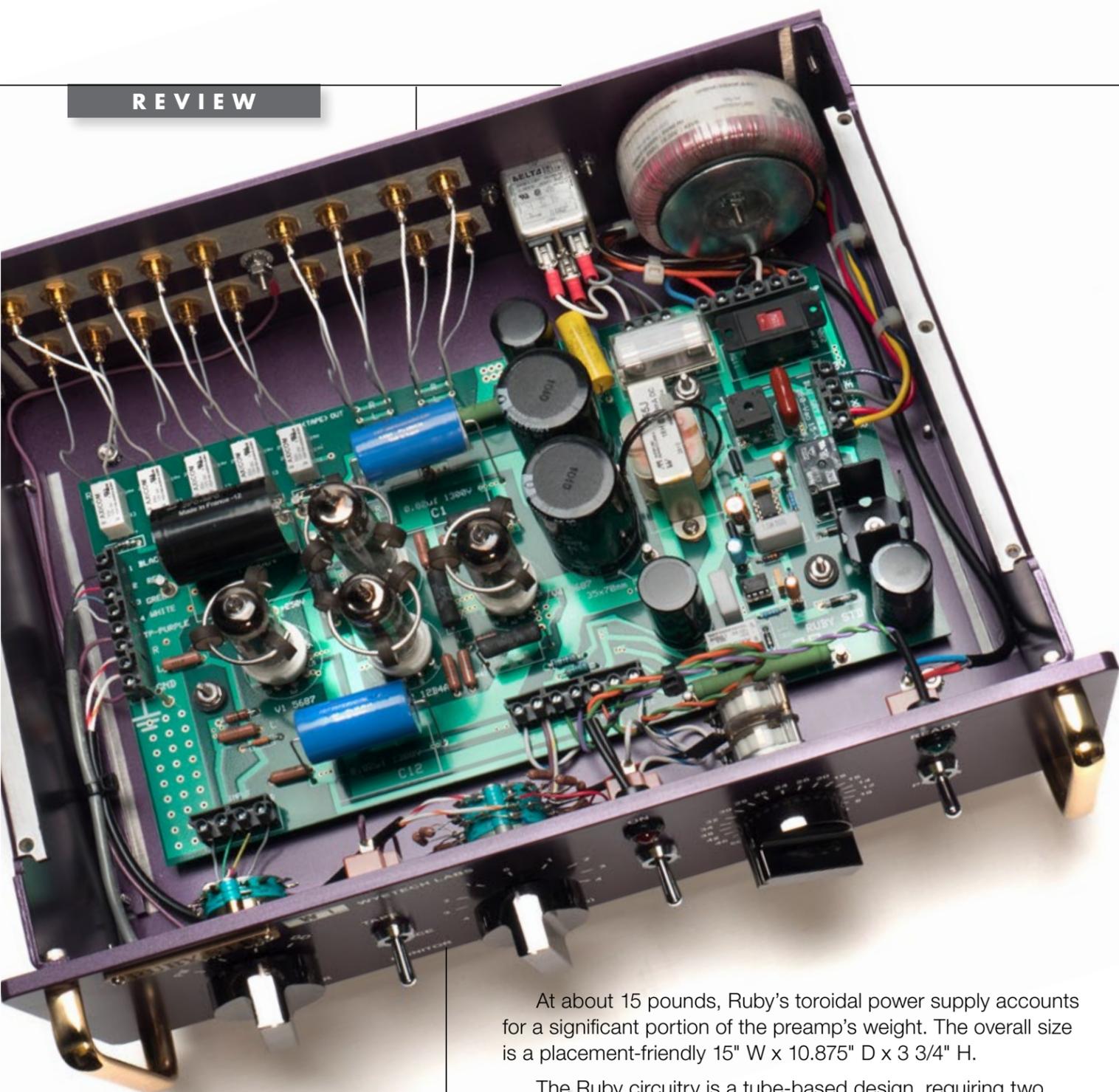
The emperor's clothes

The Ruby's front panel controls offer an equally unique look. At first glance, the Wyetech looks more like a piece of scientific gear than a high-end audio component. Knobs, toggle switches and two LEDs have a Cold War era aesthetic, accentuating readability, adjustability and functionality over subtlety. The striking appearance has potential to be polarizing. On one hand, witnessing a unique external design is a lot of fun. Houseguests noticing its façade are guaranteed to pause and ask questions. On the other hand, those who prefer gear that draws attention to itself only by its sonics may find the Ruby's physical appearance a showstopper. If the look is to your liking though, a marvelous piece of kit it is.

Controls are straightforward and

intuitive. The volume knob's stepped attenuator with gold-plated contacts offers plenty of increments to select a desired decibel level. While I respect the desire to have the cleanest signal path, the design downside is that there's no remote control. Each potential owner will need to weigh whether remote functionality is a must-have, and if so, the Wyetech falls from the short list immediately.

Other knobs controlling source and balance, plus three heavy duty toggle switches, round out the front panel control complement. The three switches control power, mute, and the choice of source or tape monitoring. The tape / source switch serves as a home theater pass-through should an owner wish to integrate their two channel system into a larger system. *(continued)*



At about 15 pounds, Ruby's toroidal power supply accounts for a significant portion of the preamp's weight. The overall size is a placement-friendly 15" W x 10.875" D x 3 3/4" H.

The Ruby circuitry is a tube-based design, requiring two 5687s and two 12B4As. Wyetech factory-installs NOS military grade JAN Philips tubes, so you have a high quality valve complement right out the gate.

We conducted our testing in the stock configuration; however the Ruby offers opportunity for tweaking, fine tuning the sound to its owner's preference—tube rolling, swapping the included Herbie's Halo tube dampers, and experimentation with vibration-isolating materials in addition to the included 3M material on the feet.



Ruby features only single-ended ins and outs. Four source inputs are flanked by the tape loop ins and outs. An additional lineout connection allows a little extra versatility many preamps lack. Rounding out the rear panel are two sets of main outputs. If the owner chooses to send a signal to a subwoofer, for example, Wyetech has you covered.

After making all the necessary connections, the Ruby is ready to shine. Turning on the power switch activates a 90-second warm up sequence during which the unit is muted automatically. Mute engagement is indicated by a red LED. Once the warm up period concludes, mute is deactivated and a green light over the power switch indicates all systems are a go.

Sing, my minstrel

With a purple linestage it is only right to choose Prince's *Purple Rain* as an initial album for listening. On "Let's Go Crazy" Ruby does a marvelous job offering a clean window into the music, capturing the excitement of the performance. Sound is not romanticized, but it's not stark either. There's a neutral organic quality that's inherent in the sonic signature regardless of music genre.

Wyetech claims that Ruby STD's frequency response remains almost flat from 9Hz to 1.25 MHz. (no, that "MHz is not a typo). With a frequency range both below and far above human hearing potential, the numbers may serve more as bragging rights than as an enhanced

audio experience for a human listener. I do know, however, that the frequencies I can hear through the Ruby are well presented.

Bass is weighty with plenty of punch, and equal portions of definition and detail. The old wisdom suggesting that tube-based designs have limitations to their low-frequency presentation is proven an obsolete notion in this circuit design.

Ruby does a very good job of separating musical elements in the soundstage. Even when a recording's engineer pans vocals, drums, and other instruments into the center of the overall stereo image, the Wyetech manages to take the musical information, sort it, and recreate it in a way that each element maintains a perceived location in three dimensions. *(continued)*



Instruments are not compressed together into a flat and heavily occupied plane. Vocals remain upfront, and decay revealed by the Ruby places percussion at the rear of the soundstage. While not as wide as some soundstages I've experienced, Ruby does extend the stereo image beyond the right and left speaker boundaries when the recording dictates. Similarly, the vertical soundstage has a lot of extension when the music demands it.

Female vocals are presented in a very enjoyable and lifelike way. Ruby manages to reduce vocal stridency sometimes revealed in albums like Portishead's *Dummy*. At the same time, there is no perceived loss of information. Simply put, vocals sound natural. Some preamplifiers magnify small musical details, generating a perceived front row listening experience, while others offer a sonic profile placing the listener further back in the auditorium. The Ruby does neither, dropping you into the seat where the sound engineer has decided you should sit.

Emotional connection to music is a different experience for everybody, yet the Ruby provides a window into well-traveled recordings, capturing the essence of a musical experience, more than just playing back the songs. Not every piece of equipment offers that level of listener engagement. It's easy to get lost in late night listening sessions with the Ruby in place. Foo Fighter's live acoustic version of "Everlong" captures all the nuance and upfront detail of Dave Grohl's voice and accompanying acoustic guitar, with applause, whistles and yells from the audience residing far back in the distance. When the audience sings along, it's hard not to get swept up in the experience and join them singing as if there at a live concert. That's what high-end audio is all about.

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Additional Listening

Like any proud papa, Wyetech's Roger Herbert made some pretty strong claims for his creation. With a handful of great preamplifiers at my disposal from Pass Labs, Audio Research, Octave and my reference Koda K-10, it was a fun exercise to compare. With a \$9,500 manufacturer direct price, it's more than fair to put it up against the majors costing nearly twice as much.

Always hesitant to exhaust my adjective gland with the usual audiophile banter, I do feel the Wyetech Ruby reveals a lot of music, with performance on par with the preamplifiers I have on hand. However, like comparing a 3-series BMW to an Audi, Lexus, or Mercedes of a similar price, it's more about "different" than

"better or worse."

In the context of the four different systems at my disposal, the main characteristics of the Ruby that came through loud and clear, even on my modest reference system over at The Audiophile Apartment (Simaudio NEO 430 DAC, BAT VK-P6 Phono, Clearaudio Concept Wood Turntable, modded SAE 2200 power amp and rebuilt Acoustat 1+1s with REL sub), were this preamplifier's spectacular bass drive, extension and control along with an incredibly deep soundstage.

Of the preamplifiers in my collection, I'd compare it the most closely to the \$33,000 Koda K-10, with an almost absence of "sound," but with a few drops more of tonal saturation. Particularly with the Acoustats,

the Quads and the ProAc Tablette Anniversary speakers, all masters of throwing a three dimensional soundfield, this preamplifier is absolutely intoxicating.

The Ruby also excels at low-level detail retrieval. Revisiting old recordings brought that "a-ha" moment more than once, hearing little tidbits a little clearer, a little cleaner, or even ones that weren't there before.

It may turn out that you love the purple color and the industro-retro styling, but you might not be able to live without a remote, or balanced capability. Herbert swears by single ended, as does Lew Johnson at C-J and the guys at BAT; Boulder and ARC swear by balanced operation. That's your call. The Ruby im-

plements its topology flawlessly and has no problem driving a 20-foot length of Cardas Clear interconnects with no loss of signal integrity.

So, the \$9,500 question is whether you want to go direct and deal with a nice man from Canada, versus the more traditional dealer channels. I haven't seen any Wyetech preamplifiers for sale on the secondary market recently and the few people I've talked to that own one, wouldn't part with theirs. Herbert offers a five-year warranty, and what's under the hood looks straightforward enough, that should something take a dump fifteen years from now, it should be easily serviced. Last but not least, Herbert offers replacement tube sets for a very reasonable \$200. Consider-

ing how volatile the tube supply can be, I'd suggest purchasing at least one extra set, maybe two, when you purchase your Ruby. I can't imagine you'd be trading up to much better down the road, but you know how wacky audiophiles can be. I suspect that the Ruby would be one of those components you'd always miss if you sold yours.

You'll see the Ruby next month in our tenth anniversary print issue, where it will be receiving a Publisher's Choice Award – and I only hand 7 or 8 of those out a year. This is a very special preamplifier, offering performance rivaling the world's finest, as Herbert said it would. If its other parameters work for you, you will not be disappointed—this is a wonderful preamplifier.—*Jeff Dorgay*

Wyetech
Ruby STD Linestage
MSRP: \$9,500

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