

The High Fidelity Museum

www.hifi-museum.com

Questions, comments,
suggestions? We would
like to hear from you.
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fective one. Anyone with a basic knowledge of soldering shouldn't have any problem completing this kit. (A word of warning to those who have never built a kit. Kit building isn't for everybody and can be quite boring to some. We suggest that you at least own a basic set of hand tools, a good soldering iron, and a voltmeter before you attempt any kit - even one as simple as the Hafler.)

Well, how about the sound? Stated simply, the sound is good but not exceptional. The tonal balance is fairly neutral, and the front to back depth is very good. However, the Hafler imparts an unmusical edge and a graininess to the sound that make it distinctly inferior to many others on the market. The Hafler has what many of us have come to know as "transistor sound."

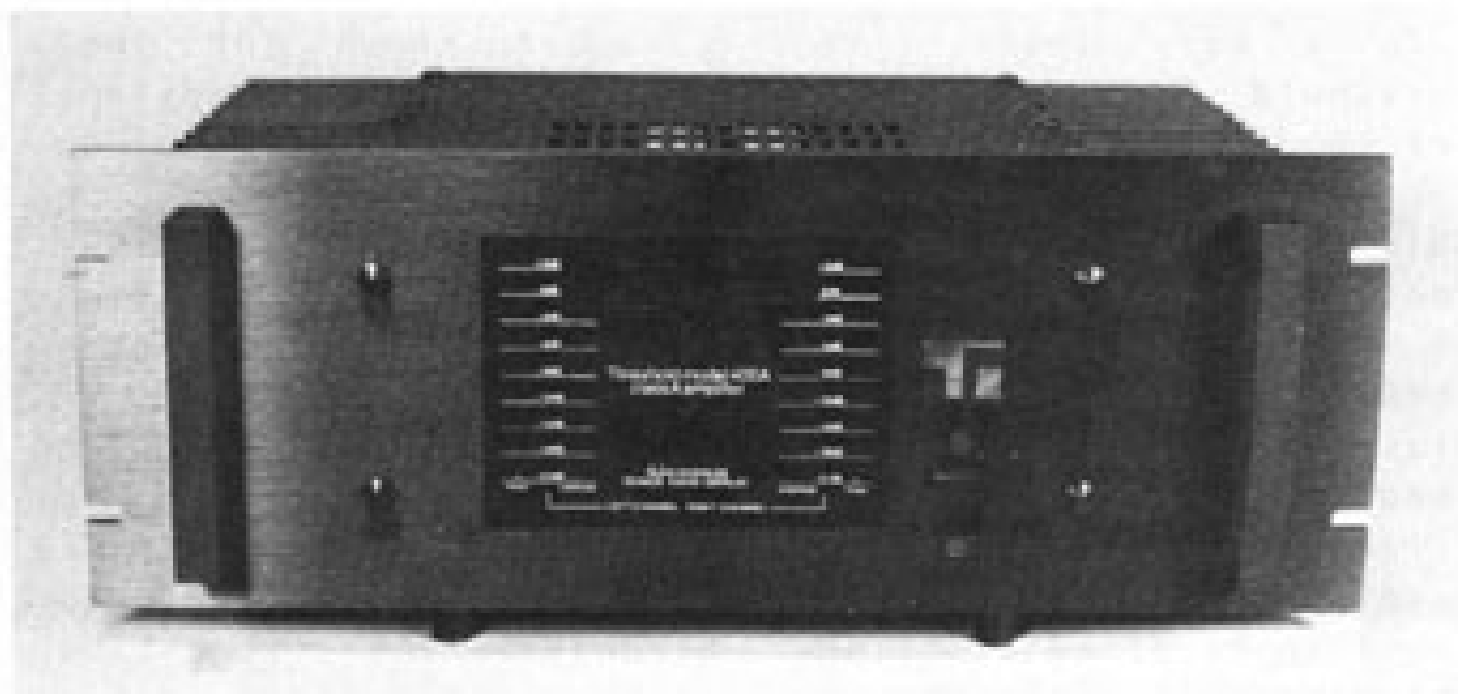
In light of this, we really don't see any point

in discussing any of the intimate details of the sound. It is undeniably the best \$300 preamp on the market and certainly preferable to say, a stock Dyna PAT-5. However, we find it very hard to get excited about this unit even though it might be something of a "best buy." It's not that the Hafler is a bad preamp; it's just that we are accustomed to better.

In closing, there's one thing about the Hafler that really bothers us - their sales brochures. It seems that the Hafler Company is trying to convince prospective buyers that their preamp is a state-of-the-art design. There is no way to build a state-of-the-art preamp from cheap parts - period. Although they may not want to admit it, what the Hafler Company has done is to build a decent \$300 preamp. We are inclined to believe this was their goal in the first place.

Threshold 400A

Threshold 400A / a 100 watt per channel (into 8 ohms) class A power amplifier / Manufactured by: Threshold Corporation, 1832 Tribute Road, Suite E, Sacramento, CA 95815 / Unit tested: A7806573 / Price: \$1215 / Source: staff owned.



either blow-up or oscillate and sound terrible.

We could hardly ask for much more in an amplifier. Some of you are probably thinking: Is this amplifier really that much better than most other good transistor amps? The answer is a definite yes. Many audio components, as imperfect as they are, are more or less a matter of taste. However, we find it hard to imagine that anyone could be dissatisfied with the performance of the Threshold 400A.

As we go to press, we have been informed that Threshold is modifying the 400A to include the front-end circuitry of the 4000. Of course, there will be a price increase. Those who already own a 400A may have theirs modified, if they wish, for the difference between the old and the new price.

We are somewhat inclined to believe that the above is a distortion in some of our recordings and not a flaw in the amplifier. The point we are trying to make is, of course, that the 400A is extremely accurate. It extracts every detail from our records while, at all times, being very listenable. Sonically, the 400A is a joy.

The 100 watt per channel rating of this amplifier is no indication of its dynamic capability. We used one 400A to drive Magneplanar Tympani 1-Ds to very loud levels without any signs of clipping. We are, at the present, using it to drive a pair of modified Dayton-Wright electrostatics. The impedance of these speakers, at certain frequencies, dips to 1/2 ohm. Our 400A drives this load with no problem whatsoever. Most other amplifiers would

In a very short time, Threshold Corporation has set something of a standard for power amplifiers by which most others can be judged. Under the direction of designer Nelson Pass, Threshold has explored class A, cascode, and even feed-forward modes of operation. The main thrust of development at Threshold seems to be aimed at finding ways to circumvent imperfect transistor operation. Innovative ideas for amplifier construction have been one of the main reasons for Threshold's very obvious success. The 400A is the fruit of one of these ideas.

We can't recall ever having seen an amplifier that was better constructed than the 400A. Visual inspection reveals that the parts used within are of the highest quality. Massive heat sinks cover its very black exterior. To indicate power output, peak and average reading LEDs are included for both channels.

For several years now, there have been two bitterly embattled factions: those who prefer tubes and those who prefer transistors. Transistor amps have been characterized as having more detail and better bass but a hard, gritty, two-dimensional sound. Tube amps, on the other hand,

have been known for their pleasant three-dimensional sound at the expense of detail, clarity, and a controlled low end. Neither one of these extremes could be called absolutely accurate.

The sound of the 400A does not fit either of these categories. There isn't a trace of grit or hardness. At the same time, it has unsurpassed detail and clarity. The low end is tight and controlled but with a certain fullness. The resolution of instruments is outstanding.

Depth rendition sounds to be entirely realistic. That is, depth is reproduced when it is indeed present in the recording. Most transistor amps never have any depth while tube amps seem to impart depth to everything whether it is present in the recording or not.

There is little about the sound of the 400A that gives it away as being a solid-state amplifier. There is, at times, a certain thinness about the sound that we are at a loss to explain. There is also a slight coloration, a "noisiness" in the treble region. These characteristics are extremely subtle, however, and require hours of attentive listening to detect.