

The PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight CD Player

By Marc Phillips

The PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight, it didn't occur to me that it was a CD player. On that particular visit to the ProLogue One a long time ago?" The photo shoot was in process and when I saw the CD tray pop out I was really intrigued.

True to PrimaLuna tradition, it offers a lot of features and sound quality for a pretty reasonable price. And I'm not about to complain about the Eight's resemblance to other products in the ProLogue line. When a manufacturer uses the same external case in more than one product, it usually means that they're concentrating on the innards, which is always a good thing. In the case of PrimaLuna, this has always been the rule. After four years, they still have not had than an occasional tube, that's reliability!

Are You Sure It's A CD Player?

With the exception of the transport drawer located in the middle of the faceplate, the PrimaLuna ProLogue does look more like an integrated tube amplifier than a CD player. While most so-called "tubed" CD players may toss a couple of tubes into the output stage, the ProLogue Eight has two 5AR4s for full-tubed rectification, as well as two 12AU7s and two 12AX7s for a true dual-mono design. That's already one more tube than my Yamamoto Sound Craft A-08S SET amplifier.

Inside the chassis, the folks at PrimaLuna snuck one more tube in, this one a military-grade mini-triode that is incorporated into the data-clocking device, replacing the usual crystal. Called the SuperTubeClock, it's also available as an option in the brand new Ah!Tjoeb Njoe Tjoeb 4000 for an extra \$342. PrimaLuna claims that the SuperTubeClock provides gains in clarity, resolution and detail and I would have to agree.

In addition, the ProLogue Eight also boasts a Burr Brown SRC4192 24/192 upsampling circuit, Burr Brown PCM1792 DACs, polypropylene caps and custom transformers that separate the analog and digital devices. The chassis is made from heavy-gauge steel, with a hand-rubbed five-coat dark blue (almost black) automotive finish. *(continued)*



The remote control is also impressive and substantial, made from anodized brushed aluminum with shiny silver buttons. The rubber rings on the ends of the remote control, which prevent the aluminum from scratching your furniture, was a nice touch. Of course there is a tube cage to protect your kids and furry friends, but if you can, throw that back in the PrimaLuna box. You want to stare at the t obey glow, right?

And Glow They Did...

The ProLogue Eight served time in both my reference system, and my burgeoning bedroom system as well. My Naim CDX2 has been my reference player for the last two years and I was interested to see if a \$2500 CD player, albeit a very unusual one, could capture my interest. My first reaction was

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one of surprise, as I found the ProLogue Eight to have a very pleasing sound, large and round and not too much unlike the sound of a decent 300B amplifier, surprisingly enough. Under scrutiny (and after break-in), the Eight provided a slightly more detailed sound than that, but still gave me that warm feeling that only comes with a full complement of tubes.

I like to use the song "En Gallop" from Joanna Newsom's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* as a test track for new components. That's because there can be such a disparity between the full, lovely sound of her harp, and her childlike, sometimes screechy vocals. The ProLogue Eight was the first CD player I've heard that truly tamed the harsher borders around her voice. For the first time, I didn't jump in the least when Newsom sings "And I go! where the Trees! Go!, and I walk from a Higher Education!" I settled back and relaxed, knowing that my time with the Eight was going to be filled with serene and pleasing musical reproduction, especially when Joanna gently admonishes, "Never draw so close to the heat that you forget that you must eat."

This one swings

The Eight also did well with less bucolic fare. I had a few guests over one night, and after they got over the idea of a CD player with vacuum tubes sticking out of the top, they requested lots of Nirvana, Tool, System of a Down, and Led Zeppelin. I obliged, being the excellent host that I am. The Eight did a good job of impressing my guests with its ability to provide deep bass, a giant soundstage, and a smooth and extended top end. Most of all, the Eight was a highly detailed player, allowing my friends to hear things they've never heard before, which made them giggle uncontrollably. (All right, a little too much wine may have been consumed.) Who knows, I might have sold a few of these to my guests to take home that night if I would have had a few spares piled up in the garage! The ProLogue Eight was a hit...at least until I cleared the room by playing Scott Walker's *The Drift*.

My only real reservation about the Eight concerned its somewhat unusual dimensions and how they related to my equipment rack. The Eight is as tall as a tube amplifier, and you made need to give it the same amount of space as you'd give a top-loading CD player, if not more. I did slide it into a space on my equipment rack for short periods of time, but since there was only about an inch of clearance at the top, I knew it would ultimately shorten tube life. For longer auditioning periods, I wound up putting the Eight on an amplifier stand, and my amplifier on the rack.

And while the ProLogue Eight did offer a large, unfettered musical landscape with plenty of detail (all without digital harshness, I might add), I did notice that the higher frequencies could sound slightly detached from the body of music, drawing just a bit closer to the listening position. This only happened during louder passages, however, and not on every recording; for the most part, the treble was extended and clean. (continued)



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In the End a Big Success

I've been really spoiled by digital playback over the last year or so, having been exposed to some of the finest CD players in the world. I've gotten to the point where I'm not such a vinyl bigot anymore, and I'm thrilled with the sonic advances that have occurred in state-of-the-art digital playback. The good news is the level of excitement I now have for many of the players at this price point. I'm very excited by the level of performance offered by the ProLogue Eight.

While it may not provide that top-to-bottom seamlessness of those very expensive players, it did communicate space and dynamics with ease, which is where the modestly-priced players often falter.

Used in conjunction with one of PrimaLuna's matching ProLogue integrateds, and your favorite pair of 2000 dollar speakers, you can have a highly involving system for just a shade over six grand. And while the PrimaLuna ProLogue components are tall, they are also narrow, so they can sit side by side on a single shelf. Just plan your rack space accordingly. Throw in stellar PrimaLuna build quality and this player should be at the top of your list. I had a blast with it!



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Second Opinion

By Jeff Dorgay

I can happily say that I was one of the first people in the audio industry (at least in the US) to be exposed to PrimaLuna, back with their original ProLogue One. TONE still owns that little integrated, and it's been chugging along ever since without any problems. I have recommended PrimaLuna gear and I don't think I've seen more than one or two for sale on EBay ever. That says customer satisfaction to me.

PrimaLuna has expanded their product line considerably since then and everything they've come up with has won major accolades around the world with all of the hifi magazines. But this new CD player is something really special.

I admit it; I'm a very obsessed audiophile, especially when it comes to digital playback. I could buy a nice used Porsche 911 for what I've got tied up in CD players, so I'm pretty spoiled. But back in the real world, I've been listening to a lot of great players in the 2-4000 dollar range from a number of manufacturers. Just like the best players, the ones in this price category all have a signature sound that will either be a fit for your system (and your taste) or not.

Very Comfy Indeed

The ProLogue 8 spent almost all of its time in my second system that consists of the new Luxman 590 integrated amplifier, Penaudio Serenades and my Meridian 808, along with the newest Rega P3-24 and a Shelter 7000 cartridge. So, it was definitely in some good company and during the course of the review I was able to compare it to quite a few other players at this level as well as bounce back and forth between the ProLogue 8 and a comparably priced analog setup.



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For whatever reason, the synergy between this player and my Luxman/Penaudio system was stellar. No, it didn't have the resolution of my Meridian, but it was just so enjoyable to listen to, I had a wonderful time with this player. It is not fatiguing in the least, yet still possesses enough musical detail and air that you don't feel like the edges are being rounded off the corners of the music, as a few of the other players that are touted as "analog sounding" do.

The bass response of the PL8 is tight and tuneful. When listening to any of my favorite jazz recordings with acoustic bass, I was very impressed with the texture and detail in the lower registers. While there was enough of an airiness to keep me more than happy, this is one of the big differences you notice when switching back to a cost no object player, there is definitely more space between the notes.

Of course being tubed, one expects mid-range magic and this is where the PL8 really eclipses its competitors. This is one of the most pleasant, non-digital sounding players on the market. But again, the PL8 is not lacking in the dynamics department either. When listening to my favorite rock recordings, it had plenty of punch when it came to driving bass, drums and blazing guitar solos.

I Think You Need One

Because the PL8 is so anti digital, you can listen to this player all day and never get listener fatigue. For someone putting together a reasonably priced system in the 5-30 thousand dollar range, this may be all the player you will ever need, especially for those of you that are primarily analog listeners that are going to CD begrudgingly. This one will win you over on the virtues of the shiny discs for sure.

Even those of you with a cost no object system might consider a PL8 for the same reason you probably have more than one turntable; not all recordings are created equal. *(continued)*

I have an analog setup that is very detailed that I use for the best recordings and I have another that I use a Grado Statement (that costs as much as this player) cartridge because it adds that touch of warmth and magic to those discs that are less than flawless.

If you are like me and enjoy a lot of popular music, this player does a killer job at adding a bit of life to some of those overly compressed discs or the ones that are a touch bright. I have quite a few CD's that benefited from the PrimaLuna's presentation. This player does embellish a tiny bit, but it's all good and I'd much rather it go in this direction than too far the other way and be painstakingly analytical.

What really stood out for me with the PL8 was when I went back and forth between it and my turntable. At this price point, often analog offers up a much more musical presentation, but not so with this player. I am happy to report that even after eight hour listening sessions, I never caught myself aching for LP playback; I was perfectly content with this CD player.

It's Easy For Me to Spend Your Money

If you really want to obsess about this, put some vintage NOS tubes in your PL8 and you can have even more fun. When you call Kevin Deal to purchase one, spend a couple hundred extra bucks and get some of his coolio vintage tubes. A decent pair of 12AX7's, 12AU7's and 5AR4 rectifiers will still keep the purchase price well under three grand and give you even more tubey goodness.

I just happened to have some Mullards hanging around and they definitely made this player even more three dimensional, with an even bigger soundstage than before and a lot more depth. It's great out of the box, but a great set of tubes is the icing on the cake!

Is It The Player For You?

That's always the toughest. If you want the last molecule of detail from your CD's then this one is probably not going to be the player for you in stock format, but Prima Luna now offers their I/V op amp upgrade. Just like rolling tubes, this offers you the ability to give your PL8 a bit more analytical character to fine tune it to your system. Now you have the option of having two players in one, so if you are a real music lover this one is a winner. Watch for our review on the update soon.

We are happy to give the PrimaLuna Prologue 8 CD player an Exceptional Value Award for 2008. The Prologue 8 really rocks! I guarantee this is one you won't get tired of. *(continued)*

