

toneAudio.

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What Are You Listening On?

**CANADIAN
IMPORTS**
THE TETRA 506s

**FUN FUN WITH
MANLEY'S
MAHI MAHI**

**CROSS
POLLINATION**
Two Generations
Reflect Musically

**BE A STAR
WITH
GUITAR HERO**

**New Digital From
ModWright**

REVIEWS, MUSIC &
SO MUCH MORE

Headphone Planet

The National Head-Fi meet in New York this spring renewed my interest in headphones with a vengeance. Granted, I'm a newcomer to this world, but it has been a lot of fun and has given me another perspective on this aspect of audio. I recently picked up a pair of Sennheiser 650s to use as a reference (with a few more pairs in the works) and have even dusted off my old STAX phones to remember where I used to be in the game.



These days, I'm using my Pacific Creek SE 300I amplifier as a reference headphone amp, just going right from the outputs to the 650s. The impedance difference really hasn't been a big deal and with my Western Electric tubes in place, it's a very nice warm yet detailed sound. I have been using the Ah! Tjoeb 4000 player from Upscale Audio with all of the available tweaks and some NOS 6922s in the output stage. However, the Pacific Creek amplifier is a pretty big beast and is not that handy for living room or bedside listening.

The CI VHP-1 Headphone Amplifier and External Power Supply

Many of you may be familiar with Channel Islands and their popular Class-D monoblocks, but they also make a great headphone amplifier, the VHP-1 that is very small in size. This little amplifier is all solid-state and only costs \$349. For another \$159, you can add the VAC-1 external power supply to upgrade from the stock wall wart. Believe me, this is definitely money well spent, as it opens up the soundstage and extends the bass considerably.

Another great upgrade to this setup is the addition of a DH Labs Power Plus power cord for another \$180. Add a good interconnect and you have a nice system for around a thousand bucks, minus the CD player of your choice.

I started my listening with a pair of DH Labs BL-1 interconnects (\$99, 1 meter pair) but swapped out for a pair of Cardas Golden Presence (\$700, 1 meter pair) with excellent results. *(continued)*

This cleaned up the high frequency response quite a bit, and really showed off what this little box can do. Granted, it's still not quite as liquid as my 300B amplifier, but it's outstanding at this price point. I know it's a little obsessive to use a pair of interconnects that cost more than the headphone amplifier, but you won't be able to take advantage of all the performance the VHP-1 can deliver with inexpensive cables.

Both boxes are only 4.40"w x 2.65"h x 4.40"d, so they are perfect for a bedside system, or anywhere space is at a premium. Much easier to work around than that giant 300B amplifier!

The general overall sound of the VHP-1 is very musical and not that solid-state at all. There are two gain settings, high and low, so you will have to experiment with your particular phones for the optimum match. (The HD 650s worked perfectly with the high gain setting)

As with any piece of audio gear, bigger power supply usually translates to bigger sound, and the VHP-1 is no exception to this rule. While the stock VHP-1 sounds very good, you will really get a lot more air, punch and bass extension if you add the VAC-1 power supply. Revisiting the more bass heavy tunes I used for test listening revealed a completely different presentation, with the lower registers extending down a bit further as well as tightening up a bit. Same with the overall "imaging" of my HD 650s, the more time I spent with the VAC-1 in the mix, the less aware I was of the headphones. **The better your phones, the more you will appreciate the VAC-1 part of the combo.**

Everyone here enjoyed the VHP-1. It's very easy to use; a gain button and a volume control make it goof proof for even entry level users. I had to keep going over to our art director's desk to retrieve it, so that is a good sign. It even made the trip over to Steve Hoffman's house, and he liked it enough to purchase one for use with his AKG 701s to use for mastering.

Being solid-state, you can just leave it on continuously. Break-in is relatively short and after a few days of constant play, with a spin or two of your favorite break-in disc for good measure and you will be ready for serious listening.

The VHP-1/VAC-1 is a great combination wherever you choose to use it, but its small size really lends itself to more portable applications. I have a friend that takes his to work in a small Pelican case along with his phones and iPod! This would also be great for traveling, putting high end sound at your disposal on the road.

For many of you, this may be all the headphone amplifier you ever need. Whether you are new to the headphone game, or just want a more portable headphone amplifier without sacrificing quality, the VHP-1/VAC-1 will not let you down. It was exciting to see how much musical enjoyment you can experience with such a modest outlay of cash!

Two great inexpensive phones: the Sennheiser HD 202 and the Grado SR60

One thing we always get accused of in the realm of reviewing gear is that we concentrate on the expensive stuff too much. We will try our best here on Headphone Planet to give you a fair share of headphones and accessories that are reasonably priced, as many of you are just starting out with this (potential) obsession. We also want to reach out to those of you in the iPod crowd, that perhaps could care less about the rest of the gear in *TONE-Audio*, but would like a better set of headphones to use with your portable, or perhaps at your computer. I think the two we have this issue fit that bill very well and they are both under \$100. *(continued)*

