

Luminous Audio Axiom Preamplifier

By Jake Montzingo

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Specifications

One stereo pair of inputs and one stereo pair of outputs

MSRP: \$135 Holco Version

www.luminousaudio.com

A perfect audio product is one that meets all of your audio needs. It performs every function that you need it to, while not having any options or functions that you do not need and thus do not need to pay for. The perfect audio product also looks great, is easy to use, and most importantly sounds great.

There are many audio products which are great, but very few that are perfect, if any. The Axiom passive preamplifier from Luminous Audio is almost the perfect audio product, but where it falls short, it is also the reason for its great success; I am not going to hold that against it. What is this bitter-sweet intersection of agony and ecstasy, keep reading friend.

After a chat with Tim Stinson of Luminous Audio, I shortly received a lovely white box on my doorstep with a blue light bulb and the words Luminous Audio printed on the side. Armed with my pocket knife, I cut open the box to reveal a black, small form factor box and two blue, static-free bags with some attractive cables in them; see Affordable Audio Magazine issue January 2010. Upon inspection of the Axiom passive preamplifier (the black, small form factor box), I realized that the preamp was as simple, yet functional as it could be. On the front of the black box was the volume knob and a raised Luminous Audio logo. On the rear of the unit were two pairs of RCA connections, and on the bottom of the unit were four rubber feet and a pair of IN and OUT labels that correspond to the rear RCA connectors. The Axiom is literally a plug-and-play preamp when you run a source signal in one side and run its attenuated brother out the other side to your amplifier.

However, as simple as the Luminous Audio Axiom preamp maybe to use, it is not as simple to purchase. The beauty of the Axiom is that it is not just any passive preamp, it is YOUR passive preamp. You can start by choosing whether you want a balanced or unbalanced version of the Axiom to which ever will best suit your needs. When you contact Luminous to order one, there are five main pieces of information that they need to know: Axiom version (RCA or XLR), efficiency of your speakers in decibels at 1w/1m, input impedance of your power amp, input sensitivity of your power amp in millivolts, and output voltage of your CD player (or source). Equipped with these figures, Luminous Audio will then build you a custom configured Axiom to the specifications of your equipment. Where other passive preamps might fall-flat in system compatibility or synergy, the Axiom is always going to be a great fit for your equipment because it is based upon your equipment. And what happens if your equipment is to change? Simply send the unit back to them and for \$25, they will readjust the gain ratio of the Axiom to fit your new equipment! The Axiom preamp itself is a fixed series/variable shunt device; the signal flows through one high quality resistor and the amplifier's inputs are shunted to ground via the Axiom's Blue ALPS potentiometer. As far as that resistor is concerned, the Axiom comes standard with a Holco resistor, or a Caddock resistor can be chosen as an upgrade for just \$25 more. The Axiom is also wired with the same 4/9's silver wire that is used in their Synchestra interconnects. If quality components create a quality product, then Luminous Audio has struck gold.

Now we get back to that bitter-sweet intersection of agony and ecstasy. The ecstasy is that the Axiom preamp coupled with Luminous Audio Renaissance II interconnects is the best sounding preamp/interconnect combo I've heard in my system. It is clear and detailed, yet very musical and non-fatiguing. The agony arises in that the Axiom only does have a single input and output, making it a hassle with multiple sources. However, where the Axiom lacks in inputs, it makes up for sound quality as there is no switch or relay in the signal path of the preamp. It is composed of connectors, wires, and attenuators; that's it. Tim Stinson did recently informed me that they are developing a multiple input version of the Axiom, the XLR version of which will be housed in their new, larger professional chassis. That number of options should be able to accommodate all user types to the wonders of the Luminous Audio Axiom.

The ecstasy that is the Axiom passive preamplifier comes from its great synergy with my stereo system. This may not be a surprise to most audiophiles as system synergy is everything, but usually synergy is something that can be hard



to find and may take many trial and error sessions with many pieces of equipment. This may still be true with the Axiom, but the custom tailoring of the preamp to your system only adds to the possibility that your system will sound truly awesome with the Axiom taking the volume reins. After I had burned in the Axiom, I cranked Journey to hear just how much the Luminous Audio Axiom and Renaissance II interconnects meshed with my system. As I reached the second verse of "Faithfully", I realized that I could feel the energy and passion in Steve Perry's voice and was being rocked by his vocals. Song after song revealed the same awesomely musical experience until I finally conceded to put the big hair away and spin *Before These Crowded Streets* by Dave Matthews Band. "Crush" provided a spacious sound stage with good instrument separation and a scratchy and fleshy body to Dave's voice. The warm musicality and liquid mid-range in the guitar and voices were very present and melted my ears as a culmination on the Axiom in my stereo system.

Final Thoughts

The bottom line is that the Luminous Audio Axiom Preamplifier is a great piece of audio equipment that reflects Luminous' philosophy perfectly, "To bring music lovers closer to the recorded musical truth." By being as simple as possible, and thus affecting the audio signal as little as possible, the Axiom passive preamp is as easy on your ears as it is easy to use. This preamp is not for everyone as it cannot do component switching and does not have a remote control or any active functions. But, if your goal is to attenuate the volume of your amplifier, you literally cannot find a better product for less money than the Luminous Audio Axiom Preamplifier.

Associated Equipment

PC Music Server
 Matrix min-i DAC
 Forte 1A Amplifier
 SVS MBS-01 Speakers
 Grant Fidelity MSB-1 Speakers
 SVS PC-12Plus Subwoofer
 Luminous Audio Renaissance II Interconnects
 Esoteric Audio E7 Speaker Cables
 Cardas High Speed Data Transmission Cable
 Amphenol Premium Glass Toslink Cable
 PS Audio Punch Power Cord
 Monster Cable HTS 2500

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