



Super Stealth SE

I don't consider myself an audio specialist, nor an audiophile. I'm an audio amateur who simply enjoys good music reproduction. I also recognize that listening to audio is a matter of personal choice. Furthermore, I rarely express my opinion, like everybody seems to do nowadays through Facebook or Twitter. Often too much information kills the information itself, but writing the following review appealed to me.

I spent years, and much money, listening to different audio equipment, including some famous brands that were way more expensive than any MAD (Mapletree Audio Design) products. I always knew what I was looking for in terms of audio, but never really found any music set up that could please my ears in a satisfactory way.

My mainstream equipment is a tube based sound system, in a stereo configuration, coupled with a pair of high efficiency speakers. Do I, after all, come close to reaching my audio Nirvana: do I have dynamic sound, while retaining some sweetness characterization? Well, we'll see.

Among the audiophile community, SET amplifier types are hugely regarded. I had both 2A3 and 300B stereo amplifiers, in a single ended triode connection. They were really good pieces of equipment. However, it always seemed to miss something like dynamics or punch. One day, I had the opportunity to listen to the previous version of Stealth monoblocks made by MapletreeAudio. They had 12AU6 tubes, and I was amazed by the sound produced. The owner of these monoblocks told me that they are "ultra linear" monoblocks. I remember having heard that ultra linear amplifiers can sound really good. I contacted Lloyd Peppard and he told me that the new Stealth, now called Super Stealth, utilize a pair of 6v6 monoblocks, which appealed to me even further. I have heard about the "creamy" sound that these famous tubes produce in guitar amps. Furthermore, it is in a push pull configuration. Unfortunately, I cannot go into more detail than this, as my technical knowledge has limitations.

Super Stealth monoblocks are designed and hand crafted by Dr. Lloyd Peppard, a retired electronics engineering professor. Mapletree Audio Design is a Canadian based company located at Seeley's Bay, ON.

Briefly, my sound system consists of Klipsch LaScala speakers, with an efficiency of 104dB. My pre amplifier is also a MAD product, an Ultra4 with some 12SX7GT tubes. For digital music I have a USB DAC, and I'm still spinning some old records for my analogic taste. To complete the system, I'm using a PSAudio power conditioner with some Cardas/nordost cords and interconnects.



I have had the super Stealth for about 2 weeks of break-into listening, and conclude that these monoblocks sound amazingly good.



I would like to mention before I go further that I'm really very pleased with the quality/price ratio of the Super Stealth. A sound system has to be well designed at the first step and the Super Stealth surely belongs to this category.

After contacting Lloyd Peppard, I asked him to order a special edition of the Super Stealth. Consequently, my monoblocks have a rectifier tube. I always like to change the rectifier tube, as this has a major impact on the sound: I will get back to this later on. They also have DC and Bias balance adjustments to minimize distortion. Also note that there is a heater voltage, permitting the use of a 6 or 12 V version.

Tube-wise, a Super Stealth SE monoblock contains a GZ34/5AR4 rectifier tube, but any pin-compatible tube with direct or cathode heating can be used. For example, 5V4 and 5Z4 would be good substitutes in the Super Stealth. I do not want to use directly heated types like the 5Y3 or 5U4 even if the schema permits it. That family of tubes will cause a slight reduction in B+ voltage due to a greater tube voltage drop, and loss of the soft startup.

A pair of 6V6GT tubes delivers 8 W in a class AB₁ ultra-linear push-pull. One day I may try some 6V6 metal tubes.

I'm using a 6SJ7 and a 6SL7, which are the 6 V versions. I still have the choice, with the heater voltage switch, to use a 12SJ7 + 12SL7GT: this is an interesting option.

I believe these last two tubes offer a topology based on a Mullard driver circuitry (6SJ7 voltage amplifier and a 6SN7GT in a long-tail phase inverter). Again, my technical knowledge is limited for further explanation.

So far for the technical aspects, now a little bit about the theory.

I was intrigued about Ultra Linear amplifier after I read an article on them ("An ultra linear amplifier" by David Hafler and Herbert I. Keroes, Audio Engineering, 1951). I recommend that anybody interested should have a look at it: it's easy to find on the internet.

As I said before, SET amplifiers have a sweet sound but they lack dynamics, to my taste. After reading the article and listening to Lloyd Peppard's monoblocks, I concluded that ultra linear amplifiers seem to combine the best of the 2 worlds between triode/ pentode, sweetness/ rashness and lower gain to higher gain. Sweet sound in a dynamic matrix is the best I can describe them.

The Super Stealth sure have good dynamics and clarity but also a huge impacting bass. I remember reading this in the 1951 article. An ultra linear amplifier tends to have not just more bass, but also a lower bass. Ultra linear amplifiers create a single ended triode kind of sound, a sweet and rich round sound. But they have added dynamics and a higher gain, with more velocity and punch. Now I would like to learn more about the concept behind the ultra linear amplifier, as a push pull configuration, with no feedback.

After all of this discussion, a listening comment: I will not debate the usual stuff like the highs, mids and the bass. These monoblocks shine in all those frequencies, but the most striking aspect is the relationship between these, in a harmonic way. Also, I notice a dark background similar to the defunct BlackGate capacitors, to make a comparison.

For my part, I found playing with tubes suits my abilities better than heavy technical work, and they please my ear, which is what it is all about.

Playing with tubes is the fun part: my unit came with 6V6GT tubes, a GZ 34 rectifier, a 6SL7 and a 6SJ7, all Russian tubes. Do not get me wrong: even if I do like to play with tubes, the sound produced with the stock tubes is really good.

But to have some audio fun I tried some different tube variations. Changing the rectifier tubes has always been my favorite. I think this has a major impact, sound wise. I have tried a NOS RCA 5V4, ST shape, which gives 10V less than a GZ34. This is a really good tube. The sound is more "muddy", but somehow richer. A NOS Mullard GZ34 is a whole different story. It's my favourite, and gives the monoblock an incredible clarity

and tons of dynamics. This is not the same amplifier: it is quite fascinating to compare. Depending on my mood, I interchange the rectifiers.

6V6 tubes: the Stock 6V6GT Sovtek is quite good in the bass region. It's a solid tube, but for the current 6V6 tube production, I have tried some Tung Sol reissue, and they do sound really close to the old NOS 6V6 tubes. The best part is that you can get a quad matched pair for about \$50. I also tried some NOS TungSol, and Sylvania, but somehow they were lacking bass and punch. I finally tried some NOS 6V6GT RCA and I found my holy grail. Those tubes are precious, well balanced with a well defined bass and that creamy sound. Again, do not underestimate the Russian Tung Sol reissue, but once I tried the NOS RCA 6V6 GT, grey coated glass, I cannot go back. I now understand what people mean by creamy sound: these are a marvelous well balanced tube.

For the 6SJ7 and 6SL7, I did not think about it for hours: I just put on the RCA special red versions, 5693 and 5691. These are extra long life tubes and seem to sweeten the overall sound spectra, giving more impact by restraining the sound stage around the instruments.

To conclude, those monoblocks put an end to my quest for sound. If you are looking for a big shiny chassis with monstrous transformers this is not for you, but if you are into a solid sound reproduction at a very affordable price, with no gimmicks, you might consider Dr Lloyd Peppard's products. I have made my choice and do not regret it.

The only thing missing is that there is no magic eye tube indicator, but that's another story.

For more information see: mapletreeaudio.com

Igor Bilot
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