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Euro Audio Team KT88 Diamond Valves

by Roy Gregory

People have been arguing about the quality of valves for many years, but with production heading East, that debate has tended to shift from the preferred choice amongst premium brands to the most acceptable option from what's available. Sovtek's baseless 5881 and original ECC83 demonstrate that modern factories can produce superb valves, but the onus has definitely shifted from quality onto quantity.

Perhaps the first "audiophile" valve, certainly the first to attract widespread attention was Western Electric's 300B. Built precisely to the original specification, as used by the company in days of yore, its performance stands so obviously head and shoulders above the run-of-the-mill Eastern European and Chinese offerings that owners of the appropriate amplification have been shelling out the several hundred pounds a tube asking price without demur. It seems a lot of money, especially when the things wear out, until you hear the results. Besides, generally speaking, 300B amps only use one or two output tubes per channel.

The importance of the WE 300B lies not in the numbers sold (there really aren't that many 300B amps out there) but in the precedent they created. Even the Chinese have responded, producing their own, premium grade Mesh Plate 300B. However, what we have here is altogether more interesting. Sourced from the original Tesla factory in Prague, Euro Audio Team are offering a KT88 that claims parity with the legendary MO Valve Company original (they also offer a couple of different 300B designs, but that's a story



for another day). Internally, the construction of the EAT KT88 appears identical to the MO version, while each tube is reassuringly solid when handled. They come in matched pairs as standard, with quartets or larger groupings for a very small extra cost. They also carry an almost unheard of six-month warranty.

Sonically the results are absolutely superb, trouncing generally available examples and bettering even NOS MO samples (which will cost you rather more than EATs). Romantic they aren't, but if you want power, transparency, grip, focus, detail and definition – all woven into a singularly convincing whole, then look no further.

What's more, with KT88s (and the 6550 equivalents) generally being used in multiple arrays, quality and matching becomes even more important to an amplifier's overall performance. Consistency and longevity appear good, with no failures so far (and we've tried!) which combined with the fantastic musical and sonic performance makes these valves a must own upgrade for everyone with an appropriate amplifier. Once again, they seem expensive until you hear the results, at which point purchase becomes a no-brainer.

Prices: **£120 ea.**

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