

Lake People Vioelectric HPA V181

Aug 17th, 2010 | By [Daryl H.](#) | Category: [Review](#)

Who Are The Lake People ?

To be honest, I was not expecting much from the V181. I had never heard of Vioelectric until this past month, and nothing I read about their product line really excited me. Add to this the limited number reviews, and the sense of mystery surrounding this company and it's easy to see why people like myself were a little unenthused. Perhaps unenthused is the wrong word, I'm always up for discovering the next giant killer, but there are so many amplifiers being made all over the world, it's difficult for any one to stand out without being heard. Lake People, based in Germany are a group of electronics engineers with a long history in the audio industry. Reading their bio page and skimming through some of the reviews helped to alleviate fears these were just some creepy lake people living out in the woods, but a legitimately respected audio company with a proven track record in the industry.



First Impressions

The V181 is their newest headphone amplifier model, closely related to the V100, but with a balanced headphone output. Even from the point of opening the package, I realized I was dealing with something truly special here. Opening the box results in another box automatically unfolding itself to reveal the amplifier padded in styrofoam. As soon as the amp revealed itself to me, it really was a "wow" moment. One thing I must stress is that the pictures of the V100, V100, or V200, do NOT do these products any justice at all. This thing is built like a tank, has elegant details and feels like the work of an artisan. I have never encountered a German made amplifier before, but if this represents how they do things over there, consider me a fan, as the V181 is simply at the top of it's class as far as build quality and aesthetics are concerned.

German Class

I quickly hooked the amp to the Neko Audio D100. This may sound odd, but even the simple task of pushing the power button on is a joy. It has just the right weight, and the feel of it clicking in is somehow really gratifying. It honestly feels like they designed it this way on purpose, to make it feel just perfect. Even the power indicator light has this pleasant, subdued glow which was a nice touch (much better than those blinding, bright LED's). The back of the amp is loaded with inputs and outputs. RCA inputs, balanced XLR inputs, gain settings, as well as a USB input, although USB is an optional feature and I cannot comment on how it operates (my unit did not have this). Revisiting the front of the amplifier, there are two single ended headphone outputs as well as a balanced output artfully placed into smooth depressions, another neat detail to add on the list. Another thing I should point out is that the gold looking feet, while not made of gold, look very good, and very high quality. Upon having first seen pictures of the HPA V181, I figured those feet were made out of plastic, or something cheap, but again the pictures really do this amp no favors, it really must be seen to be believed.



Character

Getting right down to the meat and potatoes of the review, let's talk about how this thing sounds, shall we? I'll end the suspense right now and let you know that this thing sounds terrific. It is in fact one of the best amplifiers I have heard when operating in balanced mode, and still, really, very good single ended. What makes this amplifier great to me, is how well rounded it is, it excels in every possible area, and is incredibly neutral in it's frequency response, tonality, and in it's characteristics. It is excellent with transients and has very good PRAT. I will go more in depth about just why the V181 is so good, but let's just get it out of the way, Violectric has emerged onto the scene with quite a bang.

Absolutely Black Background

I hooked the HPA V181 up to my macbook, Neko Audio MK100, and using my balanced set of Sennheiser 650's, I put the headphones on and began to search for an appropriate song. After skipping around, I finally settled on DJ Krush's "Message at The Depth", an excellent song if I may add. As the music began playing, what initially struck me was how well balanced everything sounded. Music was detailed, transparent, punchy and tonally accurate, while perhaps bordering on warm. All too often I deal with amplifiers that have terrific qualities but have some sort of balance issue, where bass is too light, or too heavy, or the midrange is too forward, etc. The



HPA V181 is absolutely neutral, or perfect in this regard. While I don't have any charts to go off of, it sounds like a perfectly flat frequency response. Moving along into DJ Krush's masterpiece, the intensity and energy picks up. Drums get snappier, and a reverb soaked clarinet goes off into a whirlwind solo. The V181 handles all this with ease. Timing is exceptional. As a reviewer, this is a term that I seldom use, as it's not something I'm really able to identify in an amplifier, but the HPA V181 brings this definition into reality, as you can audibly hear how accurate the timing is. I skipped to another DJ Krush track, but in the process I noticed how quite the amplifier is when music is not playing. As a test, I cranked the volume knob all the way up to it's max point, and incredibly there was absolutely no hum, or buzz. Just utter silence. This black background contributes to the wonderful sound this amp puts out.

Control

Another quality of the HPA V181 is its ability to render detail so smoothly. It's amazing listening to a percussionist splashing away on cymbals and actually being able to hear the different textures of each cymbal and almost feel the resolution. Other amplifiers just sound bright, messy and sibilant compared to the HPA V181 and that should be considered a tremendous compliment. Sound is also very dynamic. Kick drums thump, low and deep with the utmost control. Having just heard the more expensive Woo Audio WA2, the HPA V181 destroys it when it comes to bass control. The WA2 in comparison sounds muddy and uncontrolled.



Match Made in Heaven

Perhaps the best part of my time spent with the Violectric HPA V181 was when listening with the much famed Audeze LCD-2 Ortho's. Having tried these headphones on a variety of amplifiers including much more expensive ones (Blue Circle SBH, Woo Audio WA2), the Vioelectric was hands down the best sounding. This may be due to the better impedance matching, as the LCD-2's are tricky to drive correctly. I was also only able to listen through the single ended output as my LCD-2's don't have a balanced termination, so I can only assume that connecting them through the balanced output is going to be superior. For the first time I was really impressed with the LCD-2, as now things were much tighter, punchier and dynamic. Every other amp I had tested made these headphones lack a bit of energy and

punch. For any LCD-2 owners out there, this is a match made in heaven (although Violectric's other models should also have no problem driving these cans).

Editors Choice

It is always a pleasant surprise to hear an unknown product and see that it performs at a higher level than your used to. The Lake People Violectric HPA V181 is just that product and has 'Giant Killer' written all over it. While \$900 isn't exactly cheap, there is no amplifier under \$1000 better than it. Even at \$1100, the WA2, Yamamoto Soundcraft HA-02 and Headmp GS-1 fell short. The V181's most defining characteristic is that it has none, it is an all around good performing amplifier, has amazing build quality and is extremely versatile. Those looking to step up to a balanced configuration, or those looking to in the future should absolutely have the Violectric HPA V181 in your crosshairs, even more so if you are an Audeze LCD-2 owner. Even operating in single ended mode, this amplifier sounds terrific and superior to anything at this price point. If this is a sign of things to come from the German based audio company, then I look forward to seeing what the Lake People have up their sleeves next. Editor's Choice without question.

