AUDIO Alchemy

Owner's Manual

PPA-1 Phono Preamp

Contents

CAUTION: NO USER SERVICEABLE PARTS INSIDE. Do not open the amplifier chassis or remove any of its screws. Contact Audio Alchemy or your dealer if you have service needs.

WARNING: Do not expose this amplifier to moisture or excessive humidity, and do not use it outdoors. Fire hazard may result.

The lightning flash with arrowhead, within an equilateral triangle, is intended to alert the user to the presence of uninsulated dangerous voltage within the product enclosure that may be of sufficient magnitude to constitute a risk of electrical shock to persons.

The exclamation point within an equilateral triangle is intended to alert the user to the presence of important operating maintenance (servicing) instructions in the literature accompanying the appliance.

PPA-1 Limited Warranty

Audio Alchemy warrants the PPA-1 against manufacturing defects and defects in materials for two years from the date of purchase. The warranty must be exercised through an authorized Audio Alchemy dealer, subject to the conditions listed below:

1) The warranty covers only new products purchased from an authorized Audio Alchemy dealer.
2) The warranty is non-transferable and is valid only for the original purchaser.
3) The warranty is valid only if the product has been used according to the instructions in the owner's manual. Damage due to accidents or owner abuse or neglect is not covered.
4) All service must be performed by Audio Alchemy or an authorized Audio Alchemy dealer. Damage resulting from service by other parties is not covered under this warranty.
5) All products returned for service must be packaged in the original container and must include a photocopy or computer printout of the original purchase receipt. If the original container has been lost or discarded, contact Audio Alchemy for a replacement.
6) This warranty covers only defects in Audio Alchemy products. It does not cover incidental or consequential damages, or damage to other products resulting from defects in Audio Alchemy products.
7) If the product must be shipped back to Audio Alchemy for warranty service, the customer will pay shipping costs. Audio Alchemy will pay return shipping.
8) Before shipping the product to Audio Alchemy for service, the customer must obtain a Return Authorization (RA) number from Audio Alchemy. The RA number must be marked clearly on the package.
9) U.S. residents: Depending on which state you live in, you may have other rights not elaborated in this document. For further information, contact Audio Alchemy.
10) Residents of other countries: Your authorized dealer bears the direct responsibility for warranty coverage of your amplifier. Please contact your dealer with requests for service under warranty.

For questions on warranty and service matters, contact Audio Alchemy at info@audioalchemy.com. You may also call 805.323.6005, but for faster service we recommend you e-mail.
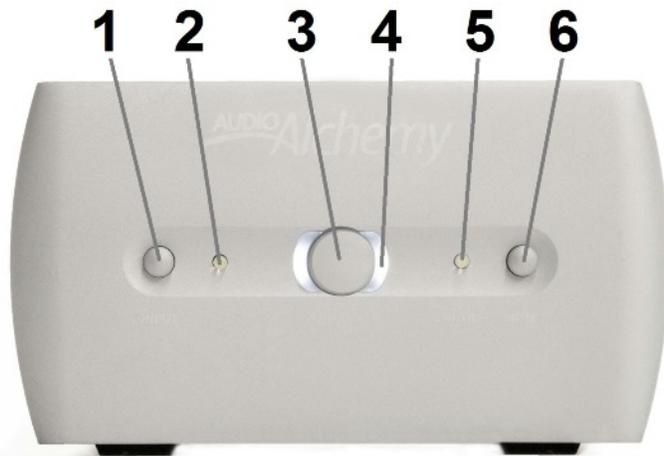
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Important Guidelines for Installation and Use

■ <u>Do not place the power supply on a carpet.</u> It can get warm during operation and some carpets can be damaged by direct contact with warm surfaces. Place the power supply on a solid surface, such as a tabletop, shelf or rack shelf.
■ Do not connect the PPA-1's power supply until all audio connections have been made.
■ Place the PPA-1 where it will not be exposed to moisture or direct sunlight.
■ Install the PPA-1 and its power supply where they can get some ventilation. They don't produce a great deal of heat, but using them in a sealed enclosure with no airflow could have long-term negative effects on the unit's circuitry.
■ Use a soft microfiber cloth to clean dust and fingerprints off of the PPA-1's surface. Stubborn fingerprints or dirt may be removed by spraying a small amount of water or window cleaner onto the cloth, then using the moistened cloth to clean the PPA-1. Do not spray any cleaner or other moisture directly onto the PPA-1.
■ You will get the best and most reliable performance from the PPA-1 by using high-quality audio cables. We recommend against using the "freebie" cables included with some turntables.
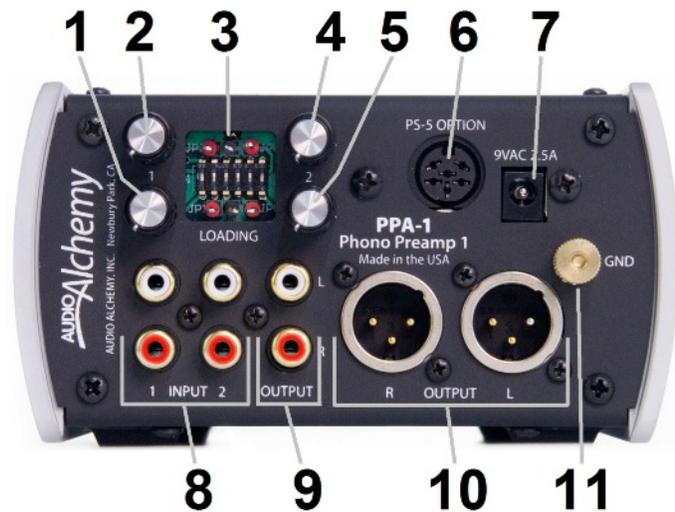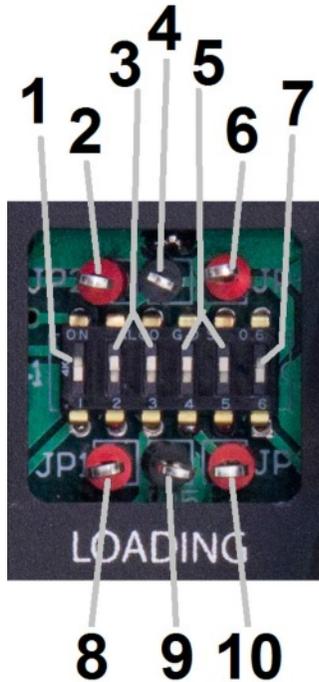
Connections and Controls

Front Panel

1. Input button
2. LED input indicator
3. Power button
4. LED power indicator
5. LED mute indicator
6. Mute button

Rear Panel

1. Input 1 MC loading knob, right channel
2. Input 1 MC loading knob, left channel
3. Loading + gain adjustment (see closeup image next page)
4. Input 2 MC loading knob, left channel
5. Input 2 MC loading knob, right channel
6. Optional PS-5 power supply input
7. Standard AC power supply input
8. RCA inputs
9. RCA output
10. XLR balanced output
11. Ground terminal

Loading + Gain Adjustment Board

1. Input 1 MM/MC gain switch
2. Test probe contact for input 1, left channel
3. Input 1 variable/fixed load impedance switches
4. Common test probe contact for left channel
5. Input 2 variable/fixed load impedance switches
6. Test probe contact for input 2, left channel
7. Input 2 MM/MC gain switch
8. Test probe contact for input 1, right channel
9. Common test probe contact for right channel
10. Test probe contact for input 2, right channel

Connecting the PPA-1 to Your Audio System

First, turn your power amp off. Do not connect the PPA-1's power supply until all audio connections have been made.

Power Supply Connection: Stock Power Supply

To connect the stock AC power supply that comes with the PPA-1, connect the power supply's cable to the coaxial AC power input on the upper right corner of the back of the PPA-1. Do not plug the power supply into the AC wall socket until you have finished all audio connections. Do not connect the stock power supply if you are using the PS-5 Power Station.

Power Supply Connection: Optional PS-5 Power Station

If you are using the optional PS-5 Power Station power supply, plug the cable that comes with the power supply into one of the multipin DC outputs on the back of the PS-5, then into the multipin Power Station input near the lower right corner of the PPA-1. Do not plug the PS-5 into the AC wall socket until you have finished making all audio connections. Be sure to disconnect the stock AC power supply before you connect the PS-5 Power Station.

Interconnect Cables

Start by connecting the PPA-1 to the turntable(s), using high-quality stereo interconnect cables tipped with RCA plugs. Plug the cables into either input 1 or input 2 of the PPA-1. (Either input can be set for MC or MM gain, so it doesn't matter which one you use.) Then connect the PPA-1's output to the preamplifier (such as Audio Alchemy's DDP-1 preamp/DAC) or integrated amplifier. Grasp the cables by the plugs/connectors, not by the cable itself, otherwise you could damage the cable or the jack panels of your audio components.

Ground Cable

In most systems, a ground cable should be connected between the turntable(s) and the PPA-1. Some phono interconnect cables incorporate a ground cable. If yours doesn't, you can buy a purpose-built ground cable terminated with spade lugs, or just use a piece of thin speaker or hookup cable. Twist the threaded knob on the connector counterclockwise to loosen it, then either insert the spade lug or wrap the bare wire around the connector. If you're connecting two turntables, just stack the spade lugs or wires on the connector. Twist the knob clockwise to tighten it. Tighten the knob only by hand, do not use pliers or any other tools.

The ground cable is intended to minimize hum by putting the turntable and the phono preamp on the same ground connection. However, in a few systems, the ground cable may actually make the hum worse. If you hear excessive hum when you use your turntable, try disconnecting the ground cable from the PPA-1 or the turntable. If the hum is reduced or eliminated, just leave the ground cable disconnected.

Operation

Powering Up the PPA-1

Once the power supply is connected and all audio connections have been made, press the Power button on the front of the PPA-1. We recommend you switch the PPA-1 on before you switch on your power amplifier. The LEDs surrounding the Power button will flash for a few seconds while the unit warms up. When the PPA-1 is ready to use, the LEDs will glow steadily.

Selecting an Input

The Input button on the left side of the PPA-1's front panel toggles between inputs 1 and 2. The LED to the right of the Input button will light up if input 2 is selected, and will go out if input 1 is selected.

Mute

To mute the audio, press the Mute button on right side of the front panel. The sound will go quiet and the LED to the left of the Mute button will light up. Press the Mute button again to restore the sound.

Setting MC or MM Gain

Either of the PPA-1's inputs can be used for moving-coil (MC) or moving-magnet (MM) cartridges. You will have to make sure the gain is set correctly for the cartridge and the input you're using. Use a toothpick or your fingernail to flip the DIP switch. Set the switch up for MM gain, down for MC gain.
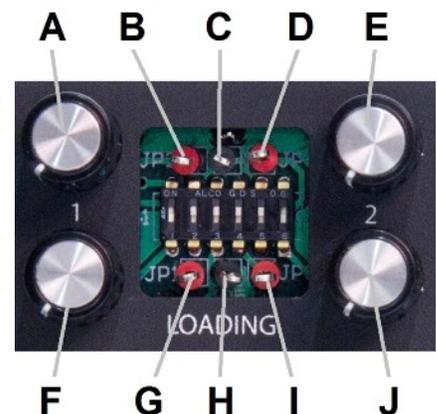
Selecting and Adjusting Cartridge Load Impedance

The PPA-1's inputs can be individually adjusted for either fixed 47 KΩ or adjustable 1-1000 Ω load impedance. MM cartridges require a 47 KΩ load. Recommended load impedances for MC cartridges varies from cartridge to cartridge. With MC cartridges, we recommend starting with the manufacturer's suggested load impedance, then experimenting with different settings (even the fixed 47 KΩ setting) if you want to try to improve the sound.

Start by selecting fixed or variable loading. Use a toothpick or your fingernail to flip the DIP switch, and be sure both DIP switches for the desired channel (switches 2 and 3 for input 1, switches 4 and 5 for input 2) are set the same. Set the switches up for variable load, down for fixed 47 KΩ load

To adjust load impedance precisely, you will need a digital multimeter. Practically any meter will do; many are available online for less than $20. Turn the meter on and set it to read resistance (ohms or Ω). Each channel of each input is adjusted separately. Touch the test probes from the meter to the appropriate contacts, then turn the corresponding knob until the meter reads out the desired impedance. Here are the correct controls and contact points:

Input 1, left channel: contact points B and C, knob A
Input 1, right channel: contact points G and H, knob F
Input 2, left channel: contact points C and D, knob E
Input 2, right channel: contact points H and I, knob J

Maintenance

The PPA-1 requires no user maintenance. If the PPA-1 does not seem to be working properly, please contact your dealer. Do not attempt to open the chassis—there are no user-serviceable parts inside.

Occasionally, gently wipe off any accumulated dust with a soft microfiber cloth. Stubborn fingerprints or dirt may be removed by spraying a small amount of water or window cleaner onto the cloth, then using the moistened cloth to clean the PPA-1. Do not spray cleaner or other moisture directly onto the PPA-1.

Troubleshooting

Power Won't Turn On
If pushing the Power button on the front panel or remote doesn't turn the PPA-1's power on, check these things in order:
1. Make sure the stock power supply or the PS-5 is plugged into the wall socket. If you're using a power strip or a line conditioner, make sure the unit is plugged in and turned on. If you are using the PS-5, make sure its AC cord is also plugged into the wall (or power strip or line conditioner) and into the back of the PS-5.
2. If you're using the PS-5, make sure it's turned on and the LED surrounding its front power button is lit.
3. Check to make sure the power supply is firmly connected to the PPA-1.
4. Check your home's electrical box. If the circuit breaker has been tripped, flip it back on.
5. If these steps do not fix the problem, please contact your dealer.

Power Is On But There's No Sound
If the front LED is illuminated but the system produces no sound, check the following things in order:
1. If the LED to the left of the Mute button is lit, press the Mute button to take the unit out of mute mode.
2. Make sure the correct input is selected. Press the Input button to change inputs.
3. Make sure the turntable's tonearm is lowered, the stylus is contacting the record, and the record is turning.
4. Check the preamp and amp (or integrated amp) to make sure they are powered up and running.
5. Check the connections between your components to make sure all cables are properly connected. If you suspect any cables are damaged, swap them out with another set of cables. If the sound comes back, replace the damaged cables.
6. If these steps do not fix the problem, please contact your dealer.

Sound Comes From Only One Channel
If only one channel is working, check the following things in order:
1. Check the connections between the turntable and the PPA-1, the PPA-1 and the preamp (or integrated amp), and the other components. If any cables are disconnected, reconnect them, and if they appear damaged, replace them.
2. If you are using monoblock amplifiers, make sure both amplifiers are turned on.
3. Try swapping the left and right cables between the turntable and the PPA-1, then between the PPA-1 and the preamp, the preamp and the amp, and the amp and the speakers. If any of these actions restores the sound in the dead channel and cuts the sound in the other channel, the cable must be replaced.
4. Swap the left and right speakers, without changing the speaker cable connection at the amplifier. If the sound in the dead channel is not restored, that speaker is likely malfunctioning.
5. Check to see if your preamp and amp (or integrated amp) are working correctly. If possible, swap them out with similar devices. If swapping the component restores the sound in the dead channel, the original component is probably defective.
6. If none of these steps restores the sound, consult your dealer.

Sound Is Weak, Distorted or Unnatural
If the sound is on in both channels but seems weak, distorted or unnatural, check the following things in order:
1. Make sure you have the gain set correctly for your cartridge (MC or MM).
2. Make sure your load impedance settings are in the recommended range for your cartridge.
3. Try a different set of interconnects between the PPA-1 and the preamp or integrated amp, and between the preamp and amp if applicable. If a different set of interconnects fixes the problem, replace the original set.
4. If these steps do not improve the sound, please contact your dealer.

Turntable Produces Excessive Hum
If hum increases greatly when you use your turntable, check the following things in order:
1. Make sure the ground cable between the PPA-1 and the turntable is firmly connected.
2. Try disconnecting the ground cable to see if hum is lessened.
3. Try plugging the turntable, the PPA-1 and the preamp or integrated amp into the same outlet or power conditioner.
4. If these steps do not reduce hum sufficiently, please contact your dealer.

For more information about the PPA-1 and other Audio Alchemy products, please visit www.audioalchemy.com.

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