

The Essential Home Theatre Resource™

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R. E. Designs SCPA 1 Six-Channel Preamp

The SCPA 1 six-channel preamp from R. E. Designs is a very simple device. It offers six inputs, six outputs, a master volume control, and trim pots for each channel. A power switch is the only other feature.

What's a six channel preamp doing in a home theatre magazine? Well, if you have a DVD player with built-in Dolby® Digital and/or DTS® Digital Surround™ processing, all you need to assemble a high quality home theatre system is a six channel preamp along with amplifiers and speakers for all six channels. This is potentially a less expensive path to higher quality sound and an alternative that I predict we'll hear a lot more about in the future.

I used the R. E. Designs preamp for the review of the Sony SCD-C555ES multichannel SACD player and for the reviews of the DVD-Audio players that appeared in previous issues of *Widescreen Review*. The SCPA 1 preamp provided the simplest, purest signal path between the players and the amplifiers allowing me to hear more sound from the components under review and less sound from the audio system downstream. The ability to adjust channel levels to within .025 dB assured the best possible surround sound balance for the most enveloping effects.

Outside

The R. E. Designs preamp is a remarkably simple and straight forward product. It comes in a nicely finished black enclosure with little expense devoted to superfluous cosmetic touches. The appearance of the SCPA 1 is more in the tradition of professional components than typical consumer products.

The front panel of the SCPA 1 has a power switch and a power-on LED at the left, a master volume control at the right, and six, multi-turn, lockable trim pots arranged in the center.

The rear panel has six single-ended RCA inputs and six single-ended RCA outputs plus an IEC power connector for the removable power cord. R. E. Designs offers an external module (a separate component) to provide additional inputs and switching.

Inside

The SCPA 1 master volume control is a 24-position, six-channel attenuator with tracking error of less than 0.1dB. The individual channel trim controls on the front panel allow the gain of each channel to be varied between 6 dB and 18 dB, and adjusted to within .025 dB for precise inter-channel balance. Adjustable gain also permits the use of dissimilar speakers and amplifiers if desired.

The main amplification devices used in the



R. E. Designs SCPA Six-Channel Preamplifier

preamp are Burr-Brown OPA671AP op-amps. These are hard-biased Class A devices which can drive a 10k ohm load in parallel with 10,000 picofarads of capacitance while maintaining a frequency response of -0.1 dB at 20 kHz. Long cable runs are no problem for the SCPA 1.

Designer Dan Banquer claims that the Burr-Brown op-amps provide sonic performance that is the equal of his best discrete component, Class A circuitry, at lower cost.

The SCPA 1 has high channel-to-channel separation and very low crosstalk. An AC line filter is incorporated at the power input.

Sound

The R. E. Designs preamp has three times as many channels as my Audio Research Reference 2 Mk II preamp and costs just a bit more than one forth as much. As you might expect, the \$10,000 vacuum tube ARC preamp sounds harmonically richer and more detailed while presenting a more three-dimensional image. The solid state R. E. Designs unit is impressively neutral and quiet. The sound from this modestly priced preamp was always smooth and musical. I found listening to the SCPA 1 to be consistently pleasant and it seemed to add virtually no objectionable coloration to the sound.

Few digital controllers, regardless of price, can equal the fidelity of the R. E. Designs preamp.

Conclusion

The R. E. Designs SCPA 1 preamp offers good sound and value for money. High-end music listeners on a budget can have great sound for stereo or multichannel music along with superior sound for home theatre by using this preamp and a DVD player with built-in 5.1 decoding.

The SCPA 1 works beautifully with DVD-Audio and multichannel SACD players too, and I've used it to review several of those products. ■

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Associated Equipment Used In This Review

Video:

Pioneer Elite CLD-99 LaserDisc player, California Audio Labs CL-2500 DVD-Video player, California Audio Labs CL-2500 VSW video switcher, Faroudja LD-200 line doubler, CineVision IDP950C CRT projector, Draper Silhouette Series V motorized screen (M1300 material), CinemaQuest RGB-3, S-3 and Video Pro video cables.

Audio:

Wadia 860 CD player, Linn Sondek LP-12 Cirkus turntable with Ekos tone arm and Arkiv cartridge, Linn Lingo power supply, Linn Linto phono preamp, Audio Research Reference 2 Mk II line stage preamp, California Audio Labs CL-2500 SSP digital controller, two Theta Dreadnaught four-channel amplifiers (four channels in vertical biamp configuration to drive front left and right speakers, four additional channels for center and surround speakers), Vandersteen 3A Signature speakers for front left and right channels, Vandersteen VCC-5 Reference center channel and Vandersteen VSM Signature surround speakers. Four Vandersteen 2W-Q subwoofers for main channels and either one Energy ES-18XL or one Mirage BPS-400 subwoofer for LFE channel only.

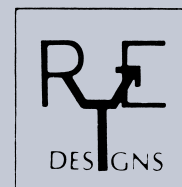
Other Components:

Four Richard Gray's Power Company™ 400s power line conditioners and one RGPC 1200s, Wireworld Electra III+ power cords, Straight Wire HTC power cords, Vantage Point Contours equipment racks and amplifier stands, AudioQuest Falcon and Apogee Wide Eye digital cables, AudioQuest Anaconda and Python interconnect cables, AudioQuest Volcano and SA-20 Hyperlitz speaker cables, Checkpoint sound alignment system, ASC Tube Traps.

Specifications:

Model: R. E. Designs SCPA 1 six-channel preamplifier.
Analog Audio Inputs: six-channel single-ended (RCA) for left and right front, left and right surround, center and subwoofer
Analog Audio outputs: six-channel single-ended (RCA) for left and right front, left and right surround, center and subwoofer
Controls: Master volume, six channel trim controls
Dimensions: (WDH In Inches): 17x16.125x5.5
Weight: 7.5 lbs.
Serial number of unit tested: N/A
Price: \$2,700

Manufactured In The USA By:



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