



# Mark Levinson No.585

**H**ow things have changed. There was a time when no self-respecting high-end audio brand would have even considered producing an integrated amplifier. After all, a pre-amp/power amp combination was deemed infinitely superior.

These days, just about every high-end brand has at least one, if not more, integrated amplifier in its product catalogue. Mark Levinson's first foray into that segment was 2001's pioneering No.383, which proved that less can be more.

The No.585 arrived almost 15 years later, perhaps indicating just how far ahead of its time that No.383 really was. But the No.585 isn't a mere replacement of its illustrious forebear: it sets a whole new standard, with double the power output and the ability to accept both analogue and digital signal feeds.

In other words, the No.585 not only combines the roles of pre-amp and power amp, but adds digital-to-analogue conversion capability to that list, so that you could effectively replace three high-end boxes with just one.

It certainly feels heavy enough –

and visually, it's a bold, larger-than-life, statement kind of integrated amp, with a solid, almost forged heft that promises heirloom-like longevity. The aesthetics are typical Mark Levinson, with finishes mainly in anodised black and silver.

Internal heatsinking flanks a central core that hosts all the electronics. The low-level analogue and digital circuitry is isolated from the power supplies and amplifier modules in the interests of signal purity.

The fascia is more akin to a 'floating' module that's attached to the casework, rather than being part of it. It hosts a red, dimmable alphanumeric LED display,



flanked on either side by rotary controllers for input selection and volume adjustment.

A row of six soft-touch pushbuttons below the display look after polarity, setup, enter, display intensity, balance, and mute functions. The only button on the casework itself is the power switch.

The rear panel offers some insight into the versatility and facilities of the No.585. Screw-down, wing nut-style binding posts are best used with spade-terminated speaker cable, and ensure a very positive connection.

The input array covers all the analogue and digital bases, including an asynchronous USB Type B input, while Ethernet and RS-232 are also provided.

The remote control mirrors the chunky look and feel of the ML, but not overwhelmingly so: it's slim and ergonomically tidy. The controller duplicates most of the front fascia switchgear's functionality, but adds transport control for a compatible ML disc player/transport.

Under the casework, you'll find a fully discrete, dual-mono Class AB amplifier design with individual switching relays for the analogue inputs. The volume control uses discrete 15-bit R-2R ladders and low-noise analogue switches. A generous 900VA toroidal transformer with individual windings for the two channels provides the power.

The amplifier features 12 output transistors and multiple capacitors per channel to produce what Mark Levinson says is a conservative 200 watts RMS per channel. For those needing even more power, a pre-output set allows the addition of an additional dedicated power amplifier.

Those pre-outs also feature a selectable 80 Hz crossover filter, which allows the inclusion of a subwoofer for 2.1 speaker configurations.

The digital functions are delivered by an ESS Sabre 32-bit DAC, linked to ML's own jitter-reduction circuitry, as well as a fully balanced I/V circuit. It copes with high-res PCM music files up to 192 kHz/32-bit resolution, as well as DSD files.

Setup is pretty straightforward, with the No.585 offering a host of personalisation options via the menu-based interface.

It was able to extract a fullness of tone and texture that lesser amps can't emulate, but linked this to a real agility and fleet-footedness that highlighted both the urge and the delicacy of the music.

Given the presence of an Ethernet port, a control app for iOS and Android devices would be a welcome future addition.

Still, it's relatively simple to use the on-board GUI, which affords access to options such as renaming the inputs and determining the offset level for each, while a three-stage PCM filter setting can be applied to the digital inputs.

Choices here are fast (steep roll-off), slow (gradual roll-off) and Mphas (minimum-phase). I found the minimum phase setting offered the best all-round performance, although ML recommends the Slow setting as the default.

Harman's ClariFi enhancement algorithm is also available, and is aimed at improving compressed music files such as MP3s by extending the tonal range that is usually compromised during the compression process. The level of reconstruction applied is adjustable.

The setup menu allows fine-tuning of the way the volume control works, as well

VITAL STATS

Power output .....	200 watts RMS per channel (8 ohms, 20 Hz - 20 kHz)
Frequency response .....	20 Hz - 20 kHz (±0,13 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	>98 dB (20 Hz - 20 kHz, unweighted)
Total Harmonic Distortion .....	<0,01% @ 1 kHz, 200 watts, 8 ohms
Analogue inputs .....	3x stereo RCA, 1x stereo XLR
Analogue outputs .....	1x stereo RCA, 1x binding post set
Digital inputs .....	2x coaxial RCA, 2x Toslink optical, 1x AES/EBU, 1x USB Type B
Connectivity .....	Ethernet, RS-232, 12V trigger inputs and outputs
Dimensions (WxHxD) .....	438 x 193 x 507 mm
Weight .....	32,6 kg

Price ..... US\$ 11 999

Verdict

Delivers a sound that's authoritative and compelling, while recreating levels of dynamics and sheer speed that rival the real thing. Musicality to the extreme!

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OUR RATING: 92 / 100





as accessing system management and line output settings.

The amp replaced our usual Primare PRE32/Parasound Halo A21 pre/power set-up in our reference system, and was hooked up to our KEF R500 reference speakers via StraightWire Virtuoso cabling. Source signal was delivered by both the Oppo BDP-95EU and the Marantz SA-KI Pearl Lite, utilising analogue and digital connections, while an Olive One operated as a renderer for material on our NAS drive, and digitally delivered it to the No.585.

Kicking off with Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories*, the Mark Levinson sounded immensely powerful, muscular and authoritative, thrusting the French duo's electro-groove at the listener in all its dynamic splendour, without constraining the flow of the music.

It was able to extract a fullness of tone and texture that lesser amps can't emulate, but linked this to a real agility and fleet-footedness that highlighted both the urge and the delicacy of the music.

The result was enormously engaging, to the extent that it made me want to rediscover large tracts of my music library through the richer palette and the clearer window provided by the beefy amp.

That said, the No.585 seemed to free the music from the electronics – the KEFs have never sounded so complete and so transparent. The Levinson was able to extract a level of potential from the floorstanders that had not been as apparent before.

It's also worth noting that the internal DAC is another admirable string of the Levinson's sonic bow. In fact, it's fair to say that the in-built DAC was superior to the digital converters of both the Oppo and the Marantz, allowing an instant upgrade in terms of outright clarity, soundstage dimension and detail retrieval.

Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra's rendition of Massenet's *La Vierge: Dernier Sommeil de la Vierge* was seamlessly presented on a large, spacious, all-embracing soundstage. The orchestral

elements were studied on this sonic tapestry with such precision that each section, almost each instrument, could be clearly identified.

There was a convincing sense of dimension that easily captured the scale and grandeur of the performance. The sound was tonally expansive, but not rich or lavish, adding greater tonal breadth and intensity to the performance, and contributing compelling substance and presence to the listening experience

The smooth, sweeping symphonics of the 'Andante' from Mozart's *Piano Concerto No 21*, as performed by Eugene Istomin and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, provided a splendid backdrop to Istomin's liquid, almost intimate piano. The dialogue between piano and orchestra was enthralling, expressing the delicacy of the recital with real empathy.

It showcased the ability of the No.585 to project the music with accuracy and assurance, while never losing sight of the musicality of the message delivered. Also,

## Software

*Daft Punk – Random Access Memories*  
*Jules Massenet – La Vierge: Dernier Sommeil de la Vierge Eiji Oue/ Minnesota Orchestra (Reference Recordings 176,4/24 FLAC)*  
*Mozart – Piano Concerto No 21 – Istomin/Schwarz/Seattle Symphony (Reference Recordings 176,4/24 FLAC)*  
*La Segunda – Sera Una Noche (MA Recordings 176.4/24 FLAC)*  
*Robert Plant – lullaby ... and the Ceaseless Roar (East/West 96/24 FLAC)*  
*The Doors – LA Woman (Rhino Elektra 96/24 FLAC)*  
*Sting – The Last Ship (Universal CD)*

## Associated Equipment

*Oppo BDP-95EU universal deck*  
*Marantz SA-CD KI Pearl Lite CD/SACD player*  
*Olive One network player*  
*Synology 216se NAS*  
*Primare PRE32/MM30 pre-amp/streamer*  
*Parasound Halo A21 stereo power amplifier*  
*KEF R500 loudspeakers*  
*Sonus Faber Principia 5 loudspeakers*  
*Isotek Aquarius power conditioner*



it managed to enhance the transparency of the KEFs so that the listening experience became seamless and immersive.

On Robert Plant's 'Little Maggy', (off *lullaby ... and the Ceaseless Roar*), it was the close attention to detail that was most noticeable, precisely placing the ethnic instruments, yet allowing the almost luminous vocals of Plant to swirl and soar above the instrumental accompaniment.

The Levinson easily controlled and projected the very low frequency-percussion, while retaining the intricacy of the fiddles and the traditional guitars. It captured the space and the ambient information with all-embracing accuracy.

On 'Embrace Another Fall', the sheer power and pace of the drums were juxtaposed against the almost mournful acoustic guitar (or is it a ukulele?), and Plant's melancholy vocals. And yet, the electric guitars were presented with real bite, urge and edge.

The Doors' classic *LA Woman* sounded visceral and vital, even though the recording seeks to isolate individual instruments through its exaggerated stereo mix. The Levinson introduced a level of sonic cohesion that embraced all the elements on a wide, deep soundstage.

There was a coherence here that isn't always apparent on other systems. Morrison's vocals on 'Riders On The Storm' were powerful and haunting, embraced by the dialogue between the Fender Rhodes on the left and the electric guitar's finely fingered riffs on the right. Percussion and bass provided a solid foundation of rhythm.

Somehow, I had expected the No.585 to sound a bit like it looks: beefy, forceful and high-tech. And yes, it does have those sonic attributes. But it's also hugely musical and highly revealing, with a talent for nuance and an astonishing ability to recreate scale and ambience. Vitality, it made the music come alive, while extracting and contextualising new content I never knew existed.

A true high-end integrated amplifier then, and a versatile one, that makes a compelling argument for centralising everything in a single, user-friendly and musically satisfying component.

Deon Schoeman