

No.36
Hi-Fi Audio
SV811

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

The SV811 Thermionic Paradox

By: Harvey "Gizmo" Rosenberg



As the Guildmeister of the Triode Guild, it is my responsibility to sit in judgment of America's thermionic coolosity. And it is therefore my job to cause considerable pain to those who are simply thermionic under-achievers. You know the type I mean...tube weenies. The kind you just must kick sand in their face. Implicitly, it is my responsibility to define the concresence of coolosity of the thermionic arts, and those of you who are worshipping in the Temple of Pentodes are about to meet a new gaggle of directly heated triodes, some of which existed before Franklin Delano Roosevelt saved the country. Any of you that have not heard, experienced or touched Nobu Shishido's 833A single-ended amplifier, which uses an ancient 'cookie-jar' Class B RF tube, are candidates for having thermionic sand kicked in your face. So stop right now reading this and contact Svetlana and get all their data sheets, so you can see the top of the thermionic mountain....at least until Western Electric comes out with the 308B, which is thirteen inches long and four inches wide, and will cost \$1800 per. When you look at the Svetlana data, you are looking at a new directly heated triode vernacular. And this new language is emerging in the most exciting decade for the audio arts since the time that Lee de Forrest created the first big bang in 1906.

It appears to me that the thermionic arts race is now being lead by Svetlana because no matter what your artistic proclivity, you have one stop shopping here....read on to understand my point.

The reason I call the current stage of the thermionic revolution that started less than a hundred years ago a revolution is because the thermionic orthodoxy has crumbled and everything is new again. America is finally catching up with Japan

in terms of creativity and experimentation, because we are finally confident enough to experiment with anything under the thermionic sun. One example I use of a true revolutionary is Nobu Shishido, who blessed me by letting me audition three of his single-ended amplifiers..... two of which used class B RF triodes. Did any of you hear his amazing 100 watt single ended amplifier, using the 'cookie jar' 833A class B triode? America is just catching on to Class A directly heated triodes and Japan has now moved to the next phase...Class B.

Who would have imagined just a few years ago that not only would all of the classic American pentodes be reincarnated in Eastern Europe and China, but there would be a plenitude of 300Bs including the original? And what about all the creativity in tube manufacturing and design being dedicated to giving us more musical thrills?

I believe that Svetlana is the coming force majeure in the tube business because the combination of George Badger's business skills, and Eric Barbour's total thermionicity gives them a unique insight into the needs of those radically disturbed individuals who worship small glowing objects.

The SV811/572 family of tubes is a Svetlana creation; and is exactly the right instinct, because if you are not listening to directly heated triodes, you are wearing a yellow Jack Nicklaus polyester leisure suit as you get off your Suzuki 100cc motor scooter to play miniature golf. Get what I mean about pentodes are not cool? So George rightly figures that if he can bring directly heated triodes of high quality, high performance, and low cost to the market the thermionically insane will respond.

Let's put directly heated classicism in perspective: would everyone want a single 300B tube that reliably produced 15 watts and cost a great less than \$300, and may even sound better? I've always looked at the 300B as the threshold where more is more power and not more magical mystery tour, but for most 7 watts is not enough, especially in a world that has not yet learned the ancient wisdom of high impedance/high efficiency speakers. So if you need more, what do you do? Double up on 300Bs, use an 845, or 833, or 211? When using single-ended circuits as we seek greater power, we also gain greater harmonic discombobularity relative to the lower powered tubes, because bigger tubes mean bigger transformers. Is the price and complexity worth it?

To most, (and they are all wrong,) the SV811 family is considered the 'value line' of directly heated triodes. Superior technical performance to the 300Bs, greater design variants, and very high quality construction, but...according to the thermionic grape vine, not in the same league as the 300B in terms of tonal quality. And the single-ended SV811 amplifiers I experienced confirmed this evaluation, or so I mistakenly thought SV811s were not as tasty as 300Bs.

When I heard that David Berning had created an SV811 single-ended amplifier that used no audio output transformer, my instinctive response was 'change tubes'. Because the 300B was a more universally accepted tube, and sounded better. At that point David asserted that the SV811-10 was a technically 'better' tube, but that was beside the point.....everyone knows the tone of the 300B is right.

Now let me remind you of what we do at the Triode Guild that no others have the ability to do....we test all of our circuits by making master recordings in our own recording studio with an extraordinary Steinway Concert Grand on a very tweaked and modified Ampex tube tape recorder with RCA ribbon microphones, and then we listen to these master tapes played back through our Tannoy Westminster Royals that are about as 'normal' as Pee Wee Herman, because there is nothing between the amplifiers and the drivers...no inductors, no capacitors.. nothing to store energy. In other words we listen to what we just recorded in a system where there is nothing between the amplifiers and the drivers.

When Mark Conese and I compared the sound of David Berning's new ZOTL single ended SV811 amplifier to the 300B version, we thought there was something wrong with the 300B amplifier.....and it had brand-new Western Electric tubes. Marco, the pianist, completely agreed with us. The 300B amplifier sounded warm and fuzzy compared to the SV811. The SV811 was much closer to the sound of the Steinway, and the 300B was not!

So we called David Berning to find out if something was wrong with the 300B amplifier, and he confirmed our impression.....the 811 was clearer, more dynamic, more linear and much lower in distortion than the world's best 300Bs. How was that possible?

Eric Barbour thinks he knows, and it is in the construction of the tube, and I suggest you check out the Svetlana Web site to find out why he feels this way...and I believe he is right...but here is the whopping paradox, and it has to do with ripped jeans...or I should say the thermionic coolosity metacontext... for which I am partly responsible.

Because SV811s are a new boy in town, and are so affordable they are used as 'poor boy' 300Bs. Almost everyone who is using them is using them with low cost, underachieving output transformers. If they were \$300 a pop they would be used with much better transformers and then most would probably say...if you want the 300B sound with more drama, more dynamics and lower distortion go join the Svetlana SV811 clan....especially because you have three different variations of the same tube.

I suggested to George that he change the nomenclature and packaging..... change the number of the tube to 330Bs, and use classic American vintage graphics on the package. And raise the price about \$150 each. Then, crazed audiomaniaacs will take this FAMILY of tubes much more seriously.

Are you wearing your brain clamp? Because I am now going to blow your mind! I am now loving my Manley line stage that uses 300Bs...that's right, directly heated power tubes in a line stage. This is the future, and I happen to know that Eric Barbour is secretly working on circuits that use the SV811 family of tubes in line stages, and I am certain they will outperform 300Bs in this role, which means that the next revolution in the thermionic arts, which is using directly heated power triode line stages, will surf in on Svetlana's new cool tubes.

THE RIGHT 300B ATTITUDE

Am I suggesting that 300Bs are obsolete? Am I suggesting that you should stop driving around in your 1940s Ford Woody Station Wagon? You can NOT become a triode savant unless you have lived with and loved 300Bs. It is an artistic initiation that you must experience. 300Bs will always be the triode mean between the 45 and the 833.

Which is why I recommend so highly the Svetlana SV300Bs, which, according to my listening tests are out-performing my Sovteks. How can I be so certain? Besides listening to them in a variety of transformer-coupled single-ended amplifiers I can now compare them in the Manley 300B line stage! The Svetlanas appear to be of higher construction quality, because they are much less microphonic, and I think the glass envelopes are much heavier.

Are you getting my drift? It appears that Svetlana is becoming the one stop shopping center for all of our thermionic desires. These guys have it all. If you want the lovely sensuality of 300Bs or if you want a higher level of resolution, clarity and dynamism join the 330 (SV811) clan.

I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE AND IT IS AN 833A SINGLE-ENDED OTL

I am working on a plan to kidnap David Berning's mother and father (he is not married and has no children) and will use these hostages to convince David to make an 833A ZOTL/SE, so we can hear a new form of magic that heretofore has never existed on earth. What does one hundred watts of single-ended directly heated OTL sound like?

My experience with Nobu Shishido's 833A amplifier leads me to believe that you can't get any higher than the 833A, and I simply do not understand why so many men are going gah-gah over the Western Electric 212E. The 833A costs under \$400 and is the bargain of the decade. I strongly suggest you start hoarding them now, because once word gets out they will skyrocket in price. Let me remind you that my batting average is one hundred percent on predicting thermionic trends, and next year at this time you will see many more 833A amplifiers.....again.....right now 833As cost less than Western Electric 300Bs, and that alone should convince you of the insanity of the audio arts.

Let me say this again very plain....THE CONCRESENCE OF THERMIONIC COOLOSITY IS THE 833A, and Nobu Shishido created his 833A amplifier just before he rose to Triode Heaven. TAKE TWO PROZAC AND THINK ABOUT WHAT I SAID

I wouldn't blame your eye if it is twitching now. You have just realized that pentodes are not cool, and you are wondering what type of directly heated triode to immerse yourself in.....you have gaggles to choose from. You can choose from the ultra warm and fuzzy 2A3 to the 833A. And you know that if you don't love a 300B you won't be taken seriously. These are painful choices, and why this current thermionic revolution is so exciting...only a few short years ago there were no choices.