

Gold Note PH-5.2 phono stage and **PSX-5.2** power supply

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Let me state at the outset of this look at the brand-new Gold Note PH-5.2 and PSX-5.2 that I am already the very happy owner of their senior siblings, the PH10 and matching PSU, having reviewed them about seven years ago and found them sufficiently beguiling to purchase. They have been at the heart of my system ever since, delivering great results with guest turntables, cartridges, amplifiers, loudspeakers and interconnects, as well as with my own system components when they can get a look in. Throughout all this, I have yet to find a phono stage that can match the PH10 in versatility, ease of use and, above all, sound quality. With all that said, I approached this review with an open mind, as I always try to do.

The history of how Gold Note came into being is explored in detail on the company's website. It draws on decades of OEM audio component design by Maurizio Aterini, before he and his wife Elena, together with Alessio Oronti, decided

to set up Gold Note as their own stand-alone company. That was in 2012, and in the ensuing 14 years the brand has grown into a powerhouse, with products ranging from turntables and cartridges to racks and cables, and from phono stages and compact disc players to amplifiers and beyond. It is entirely feasible to build a complete system using only Gold Note products, all conceived and designed in the company's Florentine studio. The design language blends as much elegance as can be mustered within the confines of typical audio component form factors, with the company offering both half-width and standard-sized components.

Half-width wonder

The PH-5.2 is a half-width device. Finished in black anodised aluminium, the case is immaculate. The front panel is simple. On the top left is the small, embossed gold circle logo, depicting an impressive ancient Roman (common to all Gold Note products). Below that is a small LED that glows red when »





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» the unit is on standby and green when it is in operation. To the right of that is the 60x40mm coloured touchscreen. Through the touchscreen, the user can access and adjust all performance parameters on the fly without disturbing the stylus in the groove. On the right side at the top are the maker's name and the model number. The side panels have elegantly curved ventilation holes at the top, which carry over onto the top panels. Towards the rear of the top panel are two circular vents, with a larger version of the noble logo figure in the centre.

The rear panel has clearly marked RCA inputs for the right and left channels, with an earthing peg above. On the output side, we have the option of RCA or XLR connectivity to the amplifier. Above those, in the centre, is the male DIN-type plug for attaching the external power supply, a master on/off rocker switch and an IEC mains input socket. I have always found the quality of connectors on Gold Note components to be excellent, and they have not been skimmed on here, despite this being towards the entry level of Gold Note products.

Finally, the underside features four acoustically damped feet that keep the unit secure on the rack shelf, even with the weight of cables hanging down at the rear.

Power supply

The PSX-5.2 is a particularly interesting new entry in the Gold Note catalogue. It shares the same form factor as the phono stage but weighs 2kg. The front panel carries only the gold logo, the red/green LED, and the brand name and model number. Its true nature is revealed on the rear panel, which has two DIN-style sockets - one male and one female. Suitable cables for both are included in the package. Yes, this single PSU can be connected to both a 5.2 phono stage and the new CD5.2. Brilliant! Both can be attached at the same time, but the PSU will drive only one at a time, which is perfectly logical. The feet on the underside are the same as those on the head unit.

During the review period, two very different amplification systems were used. At the outset, the PrimaLuna EVO200 Hybrid amplifier and a matching EVO300 all-valve pre-amplifier were in for review, later replaced by the new Quad Platina integrated. Loudspeakers throughout were Harbeth Compact7 ES XDs. The turntable was my own Vertere DGX, with the Vertere Mystic II moving-coil cartridge installed on the GrooveRunner arm. I kept the Vertere cabling between



the deck and PH-5.2, with Vertere RedLine RCAs running from the phono stage to both the PrimaLuna pre-amplifier and the Quad integrated. The latter offers XLR inputs on the analogue inputs, so I did give that a try too, more of which later.

100 hours of solitude

Both units were brand new when they arrived at Kelly Towers, and at the suggestion of the UK Gold Note distributor Airt, no critical listening was to be undertaken for about the first 100 hours of use, the key word being "critical", of course. In any case, I dutifully wired the two units together using the supplied umbilical cord, inserted the mains lead into the PSX-5.2, connected the turntable to the PH-5.2, and connected that to the EVO300 pre-amplifier. The touchscreen made set-up very simple. I selected MC with an impedance of 1kOhms (as preferred for the Mystic II) and set the gain to 0Db. To get the party started, I cued up my remastered pressing of the Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed* on the DGX, with every intention of walking away and leaving the system to its own devices. Within the first 30 seconds, the strains of 'Gimme Shelter' had me up from my desk in an adjoining room, and there I stayed for the rest of that first day. The sound was big and bold, with an inky black silence from the loudspeakers when I was changing sides or putting on new material. If this was how it sounded before it was "run in", I was already impatient to hear it when it was truly ready.



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» After about three days of playing music pretty much non-stop, I did detect an opening up of the sound. Not dramatic, not "it sounded broken" before, just a little extra roundness to the already excellent bass, a slightly increased sense of realism in the human voice, and a slight gain in height, width and depth to the soundstage. What had started as good had moved into excellent territory, and we never looked back from there. What was more interesting was that I suddenly realised I did not feel the sound quality had lost anything I could detect between the PH-5.2 and my own PH10. So I took the time to switch my units back in and played the same music, and the differences were so marginal that I was not sure I trusted that they really existed.

While reinstalling the PH-5.2, I played it alone without the PSX, and I could clearly hear a slight loss of detail, soundstage, and sheer dynamism. It was still great, but I was keen to return to the full two-box performance, and that was how the rest of my time with them was spent.

When the Quad Platina arrived, I took the opportunity to compare the RCA and XLR options from the PH-5.2 into the amplifier. Again, I waited until the Quad had been running for a few days before doing this, and it was really hard to detect much difference between the two, to be honest. If your amplifier only offers RCA as an input option, you will not be missing out on all the goodness from the Gold Note duo. The Platina does offer an MC phono input, and for the sake of completeness I gave that a go, but I missed the performance of the Gold Note so much that I cut that quite short. The Gold Note listening experience was utterly captivating, being genre-agnostic in its compelling musical delivery.

Excellent offering

This is another truly excellent offering from Gold Note. At the recommended UK price of £999, it represents great value for money. Add the PSX-5.2 for another £700, and you will have the very best-sounding sub-£2k phono stage I have yet heard. Within the constraints of time and space, I have not yet been able to explore all of its capabilities. I played with the selectable EQ curves (RIAA, Decca London, and American Columbia, all with the Enhanced option) a bit

and could clearly hear what each was doing, but in the end settled on the regular RIAA version, which suited my Mystic II best. How amazing that we can try all those options. With the so-called vinyl revival showing few signs of fading any time soon, this Gold Note system should find a huge new group of fans to entertain. If I did not already own the PH10/PSU duo, I would be in the queue for sure. Another gold star for Gold Note. +

Technical specifications

PH-5.2

Type: Phono Stage

Equalisation curve control: 3 EQ curves (RIAA, Decca London, American Columbia) all with 'Enhanced' option

Infrasonic filter: 10Hz/36dB octave

Frequency response: 20Hz -20kHz $\pm$ 0.3dB Enhanced 20Hz-50kHz $\pm$ 0.3dB

THD (Total Harmonic Distortion): <0.05% @ 1kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio: 89dB

Dynamic response: 105dB

Dimensions (WxDxH): 20 x 26 x 8cm

Weight: 1.2kg

Price: £999, €950, \$1,195

PSX-5.2

Type: 4 rail audio-grade power supply.

Voltage regulators: Two, ultra-low noise

Maximum output voltage variation: 0.5 %

Line noise rejection: >80dB

Common mode noise rejection: >80dB

Full power response time: <2,5µsec

Dimensions (WxDxH): 20 x 26 x 8cm

Weight: 2kg

Price: £700, €690, \$985

Manufacturer Gold Note  goldnote.it

UK distributor Airt Audio

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