

NuForce AVP-16

Chris Martens

Multichannel Controller

AUDIO REVIEW

The Gift of Simplicity

There's an old hymn that proclaims "'Tis a gift to be simple" and that line fits the personality of NuForce's AVP-16 7.1-channel A/V controller to a "T." Where many controllers tout auto-this, microprocessor-controlled that, and HDMI-equipped everything, the affordable AVP-16 is headed in the other direction with one main objective in mind: namely, achieving superb sound quality—especially for high-resolution multichannel music—for

the least amount of money. To grasp what the \$995 AVP-16 is about, picture it as a high-performance 7.1-channel analog audio preamplifier that provides just enough basic surround sound decoding and video-switching functionality to serve as a solid A/V controller. What the AVP-16 is not is a features-rich controller equipped (or, depending upon your point of view, burdened) with the

latest and greatest video processing options, or with elaborate custom installation-oriented features. On the contrary, this controller turns back-to-basics engineering into something of an art form.

Keeping It Simple

The AVP-16 provides simple and effective pass-through switching for composite, S-video and component video signals but provides no video upconversion or format transcoding features of any kind. This means all incoming video signals remain in their original formats as they pass through the controller. When using the AVP-16 with source components that output video signals in multiple formats

at once, the game plan is to select the source component first, and then to use the AVP-16's video input switches to choose which sets of video input you

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want to use. You might think this sort of manual switching would be a pain, but in fact it is literally child's play. My kids had the AVP-16's operational protocols figured out in a matter of minutes with zero instruction from dad. Works for me.

On the audio side, the AVP-16 is a straightforward solid-state 7.1-channel analog preamp, with single-ended (RCA jack-equipped) outputs for all channels and a set of balanced (XLR-type) outputs



specifically for the left, center, right, and subwoofer channels. This design touch acknowledges the fact that some audiophiles already own amplifiers with XLR-inputs, and that stereo purists might wish to make the transition to surround sound incrementally, adding a center channel and subwoofer first and surround channels later on.

Purists Dig It

How does the AVP-16 perform in real-world systems? I found the AVP-16 was at its best when playing high-resolution music material (SACD, DVD-Audio, and Dual-Disc) in BYPASS mode. Solid-state preamps sometimes have a cold, sterile quality that distances listeners from the music, but the AVP-16 does not. Instead, it offers a delightful combination of clarity and natural, organic warmth. On Gary Burton's *Like Minds* [Concord, SACD], for instance, the AVP-16 brought out the round, full, honey-sweet tonality of Pat Metheny's jazz guitar, yet it also had sufficient transparency to reproduce the sound of Roy Haynes's sure and almost in-

describably delicate percussion work. The AVP-16's overall presentation on *Like Minds* was so clean and pure that many guest listeners offered unprompted compliments on the sound. On well-recorded orchestral material such as the Gergov/Norrlands performance

of David Chesky's *Concerto for Orchestra* [Urban Concertos, Chesky, SACD], the NuForce did a great job of capturing the ambience of the recording venue while conveying the sound of an orchestra arrayed on a wide, deep, three-dimensional soundstage. Overall, the AVP-16 sounded much like NuForce's excellent P8 stereo preamplifier (reviewed in *The Absolute Sound* issue 169), which is saying a mouthful given that the AVP-16 costs less than the P8 does.

On CDs and other stereo program material the AVP-16 performed well, offering the expected batteries of Dolby PL II and DTS Neo:6 processing modes, plus eight proprietary DSP modes (CHURCH, STADIUM, THEATER, and so on.). The Dolby and DTS modes proved

effective, though their sound was not quite as pure and transparent as that of the BYPASS mode. My suggestion would be to avoid using the AVP-16's other DSP modes, though, since they aren't up to the controller's otherwise high sonic standards.

On DVD movies, the AVP-16's video pass-through switching added no visible noise or artifacts. Sonically, the controller's Dolby Digital and DTS decoders worked well, though they sometimes smoothed over extremely low-level, high frequency textural details. As a small example, consider the "Ann Disarms Kong" scene from *King Kong* where Kong seizes a full-grown bamboo tree to munch on as a light

snack. High-resolution controllers let you hear an explicit snap and crunch as the thick, tubular bamboo trunk breaks apart while Kong chomps down on it. In contrast, the AVP-16 captures the snap of the trunk but loses textural detail as Kong chews on the shattered tree. Nevertheless, the AVP-16's surround sound processing easily equals that of most mid- and some high-priced AVRs.

The AVP-16 will appeal to stereo enthusiasts looking to take their first steps toward home theater and multichannel music. The NuForce provides the core sonic qualities that audiophile's demand, with solid though minimalist video switching and surround sound processing features. **TPV**

The Last Word



- Fine sound quality in BYPASS mode
- Nice combination of clarity and warmth
- Simple, effective video and surround sound features
- Value



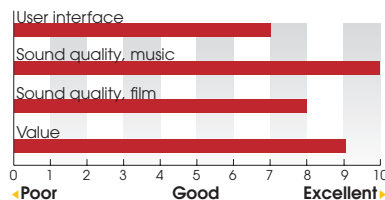
- No HDMI, no video upconversion, no auto-setup
- Surround modes not as pure as BYPASS mode
- Remote is beautifully made, but ergonomics need work

Specifications

NuForce AVP-16 Multichannel Controller

- Decoding formats: Dolby Digital, Digital EX and Pro Logic IIx; DTS, DTS-ES and Neo:6; eight proprietary DSP modes.
- Video inputs/outputs: Component video (three in, one out with support up to 1080i), S-video (four in, one out), composite video (four in, one out)
- Audio inputs/outputs: 7.1-channel analog (single-ended RCA, one in, one out), 3.1-channel analog (balanced XLR, one out), stereo analog (seven in, one out), digital audio (seven in—four coax, three optical)
- Dimensions: 3.54" x 17" x 18"
- Weight: 17.5 lbs.
- Price: \$995
- nuforce.com

NuForce AVP-16 Multichannel Controller (compared with similarly priced multichannel controllers)



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- Chris Martens, *The Absolute Sound*, issue 168

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