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Sophia Electric 300B S.E.T. Princess Mesh Plate Tubes — Jeff Dorgay

www.sophiaelectric.com \$450 A Pair

If you are a lover of single ended triode amplifiers featuring the legendary 300B tubes, you will get many different opinions when discussing variations on the theme. Some people, like our own Steve Hoffman, are purists. They insist that the ONLY tube for this application is the Western Electric version of this tube.

The small problem with this, is that a current production pair of WE 300Bs will set you back \$1200, and the NOS versions can easily cost 2-3 times this. Again, you can argue till the cows come home on which one of these is better.

For 300B lovers on a budget, there are a number of variations on the theme that can be had for as little as \$150 a pair. But like anything, you tend to get what you pay for.

I just happen to have a pair of the WE 300Bs in my reference amplifier and I really enjoy the presentation of this tube. It has a very liquid mid-range, authoritative bass and a very extended and smooth treble. Hence, this is my benchmark tube to compare all the others. I have listened to quite a few and they all fall somewhat short of the mark. *(continued)*

However, the Princess tubes from Sophia Electric do an excellent job and considering they are only 1/3 the price of a set of WE tubes, these can be considered a great reference 300B that offers great value as well for the cost conscientious audiophiles. I use a Sophia Electric 274B rectifier tube in my Poeta preamplifier instead of the \$600 WE version of this tube and I have been very happy with it. I feel that Sophia Electric is establishing a good reputation for high quality and good value.

I used a test system consisting of my Pacific Creek 300SEI amplifier (from issue 1), the Emotive Audio Poeta preamplifier and the ModWright Denon 3910 along with my 2nd Rethm speakers. As the Rethms do not have a terribly extended low frequency response, I also substituted the Tetra 506 Customs (92db, very SET friendly) and my Senheiser HD650 headphones.

Let's get right to it: if you don't have \$1200 for a pair of Western Electric 300Bs, I think you could live happily ever after with the Sophias. I compared them to the original "no name" Chinese tubes that came with the Pacific Creek and they just trounced the stock tubes in EVERY way. Bass was tighter, treble was more extended and grain-free and the midrange was much warmer. No contest here.

Next, I moved up to a \$200 pair of Electro-Harmonix 300B EH gold grid tubes. These were better than the stock tubes, but the Princess 300Bs again really offered more of everything across the board. The Sophias were much more open and much less grainy.

I also tried a few other tubes, but I just kept coming back to the Princess 300Bs. Especially using them in my Pacific Creek amplifier for headphone duty, these are a real value.

I often use my headphone amplifier for extended listening sessions, so it's nice to have a set of these for everyday use. **Just like a guy I know that has a Ferrari 360 as his Sunday car, but uses and Acura NSX for his daily driver,** I would suggest that even WE 300B owners consider a set of these, if you don't want to put so many hours of non critical listening on your very expensive tubes.

I haven't heard every single 300B there is, but for now, I'm comfortable recommending the Sophia Electric Princess 300B as the best compromise between sound performance and good value so far. ●