

CX-4 - 20MHz Differential Version

Cryogenic **Low Noise** Amplifier



- Datasheet -

V. 2.8, October 2025

Features:

- Frequency Range approx. 1kHz to 20MHz
- Very High Input Impedance
- Differential Low Noise Input Stage
- Operation at low temperatures, e.g. 4.2 K and lower (options)

Applications:

- Quantum State Readout
- Single Ion FT-ICR
- Tuning Forks
- Schottky Noise Measurements



Attention: Electrostatic Sensitive Device (see hints)

Introduction

The CX-4 Differential Version is a highly sensitive voltage preamplifier, intended for low-temperature, low-noise applications. It comes in different versions, *this* datasheet describes the differential version reaching from about 1kHz to about 20MHz in the frequency range. The circuit can be used directly inside a cryogenic vacuum setup. Cryogenic GaAs (Gallium-Arsenide)-FET technology allows for deep-cryogenic operation, even in strong magnetic fields. The amplifier features a differential FET input and thus a very high input impedance. The ultra-low input voltage noise around 900pV/ $\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$ (at 1MHz) is outstanding in conjunction with a high-impedance input and represents state-of-the-art technology.

The amplifier module is delivered as print board-stack with aluminum lids and comes together with a mating room temperature biasing controller. In contrast to preceding versions, no Bias lines are required, the device is self-biased through the 2 signal output lines (SMA sockets). Solder pads or SMA sockets are used to connect the inputs. The device consumes only about 500 μW per channel, easing cryogenic operation.

Application Example

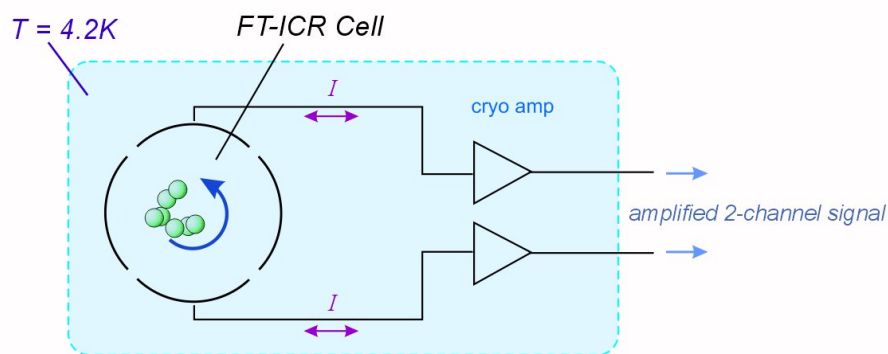


Fig. 1: Typical Application: High Impedance Differential Signal Detection in FT-ICR Cells

Input / Output terminals

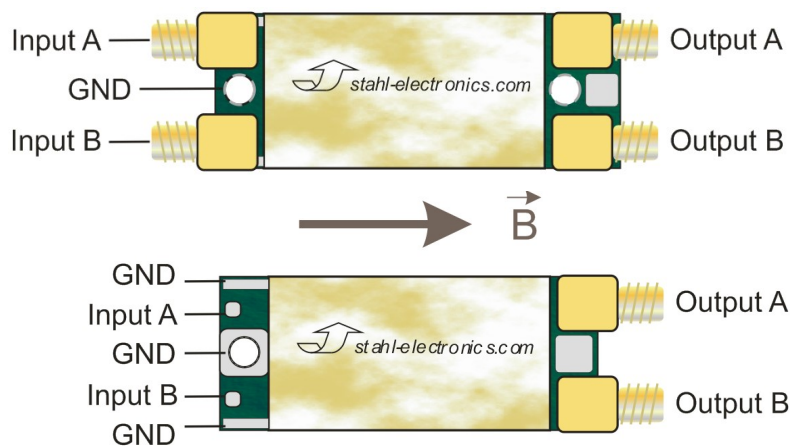
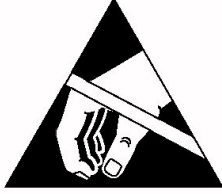


Fig. 2: Location of SMA and solder pad connections, please note remarks about B-orientation

The upper picture shows the input/output SMA version, the lower depicts the version with solder inputs.

Electrostatic Sensitivity



This device can be **damaged** by ESD (Electrostatic Discharge). It is **strongly recommended** to handle the device with appropriate precaution. Failure to observe proper handling and installation procedures can cause serious damage. This ESD damage can range from subtle performance degradation to complete device failure.

Practical Hints:

Whenever the device is picked up by hand, ensure that the ground pin or aluminium case is touched first before touching any other pin. Touching any other pin than ground first, **may destroy this device**. Similar precaution has to be applied when changing the location of the device: Most important the destinations ground has to be on the same potential as the devices ground (ground balancing). Therefore, connect both grounds first (using a resistor around 100kOhm, or simply by hand without gloves) before making any other connection or changing the amplifier position. Failure to perform ground balancing may easily lead to severe **irreversible damage** of the device. Always ensure to take thorough measures to avoid static charges building up in the vicinity of this device or laboratory equipment connected to it. Furthermore, **beware of non-grounded Soldering Irons**: Inexpensive Soldering Irons often have floating solder tips, which easily may **destroy** ESD-sensitive parts.

Connection to Room Temperature Biasing Controller

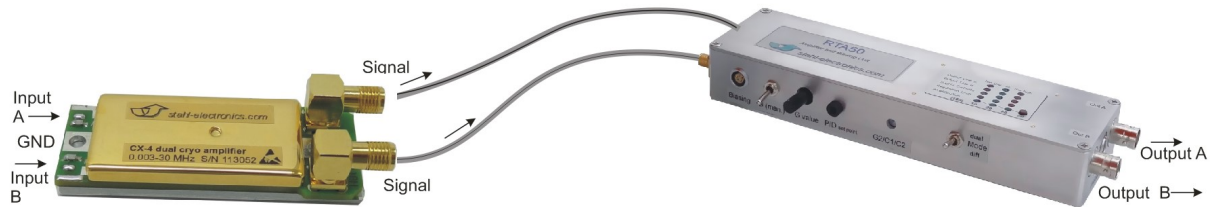


Fig. 3 Cabling to Room Temperature Biasing Controller Unit A3-5

As indicated in the picture above, the device is connected to its mating room temperature controller through two output signal lines A and B (SMA coaxial lines, 50Ω). They also provide power and biasing to the cryogenic amplifier. No extra cabling is required.

Absolute Maximum Ratings

Note: Stress above these ratings may cause permanent damage or degradation of device performance. Exceeding these conditions for extended periods may also degrade device reliability.

Quantity	Limits		Remarks
	min.	max.	
Input Voltage absolute value (AC+DC) AC		50 V _{pk} vs. GND, 3V _{pp} , f = 0 ... 25MHz	derating inversely proportional with frequency above 25MHz
Input Current		25mA _{eff}	continuous current through protection circuitry
Output Voltage	-0.3V	+3V	Under normal conditions no voltage source must be applied to the outputs.
Storage Temperature	3.5K	125°C	
Storage Humidity		65% @ 40°C	
Cool-down Rate, Heating Rate		+/- 20K / minute	Care has to be taken during cool down and warm up phases. A sudden drop into cryogenic liquids may destroy the device .

Table 1: Absolute Maximum Ratings

Cleaning and Baking

The CX-4 device may be gently and carefully purged from organic attachments by rinsing with a mild solvent. Ethanol or isopropanol are acceptable. It may be also dipped for a while into these solvents. Stronger solvents like acetone are not recommended. Due to sensitive internal parts (thin bond wires of approx. only 40µm Gold thickness), in no case pressurised air or pressured solvents must be guided into the inner parts of the device. Ultrasound cleaning is not recommended. Baking is possible up to 125°C and should not last longer than 48 hours prior to use at cryogenic temperatures.

Characteristic Data and Operating Parameters CX-4 – 20MHz differential in conjunction with mating Room Temperature Biasing Controller Unit A3-5

Parameter	typical Value	Remarks/Conditions
Freq. Range @ 4.2K for ±3dB deviation	1.2 kHz....20 MHz	±3dB range in conjunction with controller A3-5, customization possible
Gain linear voltage gain @ T = 4.2K, 4 steps (for elevated temperatures >4.2K see data at end of this document) Remark: linear voltage gain @ T = 300K	$\times 100 \text{ V/V} \pm 2.5\%$ $\times 300 \text{ V/V} \pm 2.5\%$ $\times 600 \text{ V/V} \pm 3\%$ $\times 1200 \text{ V/V} \pm 3.5\%$ approx. factor of 10 smaller than at 4.2K	$f = 1 \text{ MHz}$ $T = 4 \text{ K to } 15 \text{ K}$ over-all amplification including biasing controller, on 50 Ohm load
Common mode rejection	> 55 dB @ 1MHz	T = 4.2K, see also graph
Input Impedance vs. GND at either input DC, T = 4.2K ... 300K AC, 300K AC, 4.2K input capacitance either input vs. GND	$> 40 \text{ M}\Omega$ capacitively coupled >100kΩ capacitively coupled $\geq 5 \text{ M}\Omega$ 4.3pF ±1.0pF	$f < 1 \text{ kHz}$ $f < 200 \text{ kHz}$ $T = 4.2 \text{ K} \dots 300 \text{ K}$
Dynamic Output Impedance cryogenic stage @ 4.2K max. AC Output Power	$\sim 1 \text{ k}\Omega \pm 25\%$ 1 mW	$f = 1 \text{ MHz}$
Expected Impedance Biasing Controller Unit	$33 \Omega \pm 10\%$	max. AC Output Power 5mW
T = 4.2K voltage noise density current noise density	0.82 nV/√Hz 7 fA/√Hz, T = 4.2K	$f = 1 \text{ MHz}$, see noise graphs below $f = 100 \text{ kHz}$
Operating voltages positive supply voltage on signal line, typ @4.2K	+1.3 V	Positive supply voltage should be provided by a mating room temperature biasing unit
Supply Currents @ 300K...4.2K positive supply on signal line	400µA each channel	Typical power dissipation 1mW @ 4.2K
Operating Temperatures	T = 1 K ... 77K	The device is primarily designed for low temperature applications
Applicable external magnetic field B	B = 0 to 100mT, optional to 6T (contact manufacturer)	external field must be in parallel to the long-side of the device (+/-2°) at fields above B = 0.1T and oriented like shown in fig. 2 (not reversed)

Magnetic Properties	Device consists mostly of non-magnetic materials. Spurious amounts of ferromagnetic substances $< 5 \times 10^{-3}$ gr. are possible	In conjunction with FT-ICR cells, it is recommended to locate the device min. 5cm away in order to avoid magnetic disturbance
size CX-4	64.4mm x 23.9mm x 14.8mm Version SMA output 74.6mm x 23.9mm x 14.8mm Version SMA input and output	
Room Temperature Biasing Unit	approx. 210mm x 65mm x 34 mm	
Outgassing	(to be determined)	
Weight Cryogenic Unit Room Temperature Controller	approx. 25 gr. 400 gr.	
Power Supply for Room Temperature Biasing	Output +/-5V on Lemo Connector 3-pole 0B-style	Attention: external B-field at location, the mains adaptor is placed, must not exceed B = 10mT to prevent damage or fire hazard.

Table 2: Characteristic Data

Required External Circuitry

The mating room temperature controller (type A3-5), which is provided along with the cryogenic amplifier, regulates the bias current on the signal lines to be around 400 μ A. This ensures a stable biasing condition and well-reproducible amplification factor after multiple cool-down cycles. The controller provides AC amplification in discrete steps, usually set to x 100 V/V, x 300 V/V, x 600 V/V or x 1200 V/V of voltage amplification at 50 Ohm load (about twice as much on high impedance load). The A3-5 provides a fully symmetric, or, single-ended output, these two modes are selected by the switch on the side of the device.

The biasing controller A3-5 of the CX-4 serves also as a tool for error finding and debugging, see below. The differential operation is provided by building the signal difference between the two channels (see also figure 7). In this mode, signals being common to both channels are suppressed by typically 2 orders of magnitude with respect to their amplitude. Technically speaking, this further enhances the rejection of common-mode signals, apart from the performance of the cryogenic stage. The amount of rejection of common-mode signals, i.e. signal parts being equal on both inputs, which are supposed to be suppressed in this differential version, is characterized by the CMRR (common-mode rejection ratio), see also performance graphs.

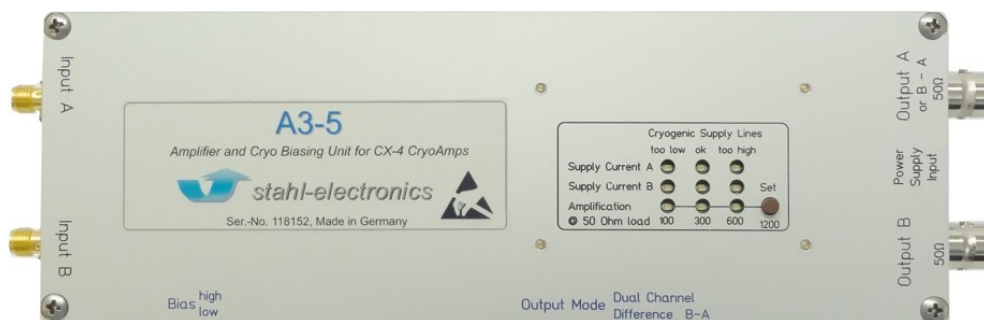


Figure: 4: the A3-5 room temperature controller indicates the status of the cryo amplifier and allows for setting the overall-amplification factor. The stated values of amplification factors refer to cryogenic operation and 50 Ohm termination at the controller outputs.

The *output mode switch* on the side of the device (not visible on picture above) selects between the symmetric ('fully differential') operation, and asymmetric operation, in which the signal difference is routed to output A only (output B not used).

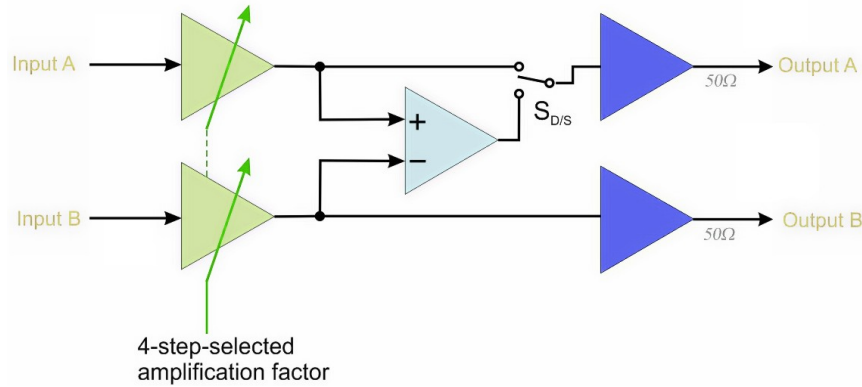


Figure 6: Schematic diagram of the analog signal amplifier circuitry inside the room temperature controller. The mode switch $S_{D/S}$ allows for choosing between dual-channel or differential operation, with a single BNC output. In the 'Differential' position, the voltage difference appears on the A-channel output (output B not used), in the 'Dual' position the device acts as fully differential amplifier with symmetric outputs A and B.

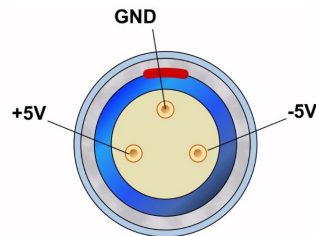


Figure 7: Power supply socket on the room temperature controller; nominally -5V and +5.6V should be applied, please use provided low noise supply module, whenever possible.

Monitoring section

This section consists mainly of a microcontroller and an attached LED (light emitting diode) status display. The microcontroller makes use of sensor amplifiers inside the A3-5 and observes the biasing currents and voltages once a cryogenic amplifier is connected. This information is processed, and the results are displayed on a LED-display, such that an overview of the cryogenic amplifier's status is obtained. Eventual problems in the cryogenic region are therefore easier to locate. In case all LED are on 'green status', the left LED near the power supply plug will also lighten up green.

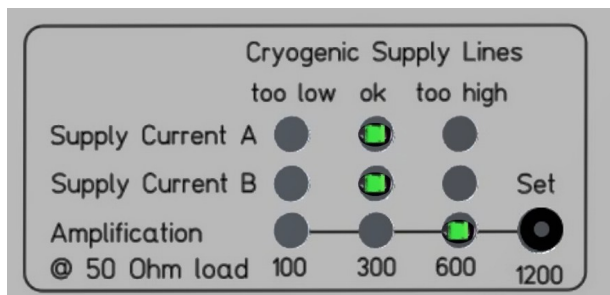


Figure 8:

LEDs indicate the status of biasing lines, assisting in finding problems in the cryogenic region. The bottom row represents the amplification factor, and the amplification selection switch. Pressing the switch increases the amplification factor, a long press resets to the minimum value. All 3 LEDs 'green' indicates the highest amplification factor (1200V/V at 50Ω load)

Connections inside Vacuum

Attention: When mounting cables and lines to the CX-4 amplifier, always observe ESD handling hints (page 3)

AC connections to Room Temperature

The signal connection from cryogenic to room temperature (Output A, Output B) should be implemented as coaxial lines, in order to minimize external interference and the possibility of unwanted feedback from the output to the high-impedance input. A cryogenic 50 Ohm-cable (SMA connectors) is preferable.

Input Connections and Grounding, Risk of Self-Oscillations

Using **high impedance FET** amplifiers, such as the CX-4, require proper **Grounding and Shielding** at the input side. A thorough grounding and shielding are essential to maintain good device performance and low noise characteristics, and to avoid the creation of parasitic oscillations. To ensure a “clean” electrical environment provide thorough ground connections especially around the amplifier input. All lines from the signal source to the amplifier's inputs should be kept as short as possible and of low inductance-style (no large loops or spirals are allowed).

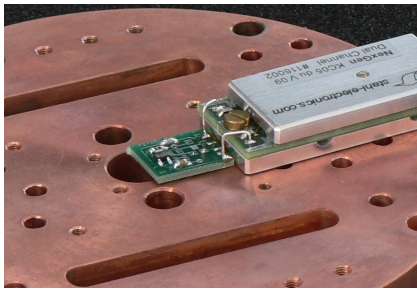


Figure 9: Illustration of connecting a sample to the amplifier's inputs. Very **short** wires represent the electrical signal connection while a Brass or Aluminum screw establishes a tight mechanical GND contact to a well-conducting substrate. In the cold state, the Brass/Aluminum screw will stay tight, other material may not.

Please note that insufficient grounding or shielding around the signal source may lead to a considerably increased noise level and furthermore increases the risk of self-oscillations. These uncontrollable oscillations appear typically at MHz- frequencies and are often an indication of insufficient shielding at the input.

External Magnetic Field

In case a static external magnetic field is applied (e.g. FT-ICR or NMR/MRI setups) the CX-4 amplifier **must be oriented** like shown in figure 2, i.e. with the long side parallel to the external field, max. 2 degrees deviation. Also, the polarity is decisive and thus the field orientation matters. This applies for magnetic fields higher than about 0.1T. In case magnetic fields larger 0.1T are used, please contact manufacturer for special chip alignment of parts inside the case. Figure 2 depicts the proper orientation and refers to the usual convention of B-field polarity definition, i.e. the field line arrow points from a magnetic north pole to a magnetic south pole. For instance, earth's geographic North Pole is a magnetic south pole; a conventional mechanical compass or Smart Phone App may be therefore used, to determine the magnetic field direction at a given experimental setup, at sufficiently safe distance from a strong magnet.

Input Circuitry

The subsequent figure illustrates the input protection circuitry for each input. DC blocking capacitors are provided in order to maintain a reasonable amount of admissible DC offset voltage being applied to the inputs without harm. These blocking capacitors C_{blocking} are located outside the upper aluminium

housing (see figure) and can be bridged / removed in favour of zero-ohm resistors for an optimised noise figure or in case a different coupling scheme is required. In case they are kept in place, the maximum allowed offset voltage at each input is $\pm 50\text{V}$ versus GND.

The limited pulse capability of maximum 1A_{pk} for less than 10ms duration has to be kept in mind, which is restricted by the maximum possible current through antiparallel protection diodes (see fig. 10a). This matters especially if the attached circuitry is operated in a switched or pulsed mode, or, exposed to high-power radio frequency bursts (like in FT-ICR or NMR experiments).

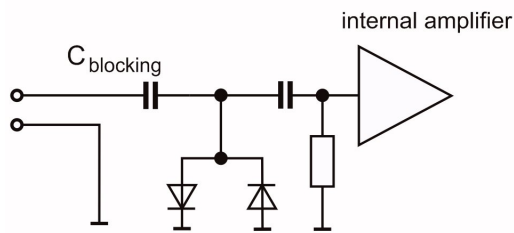


Figure: 10a

Input protection scheme (each channel)

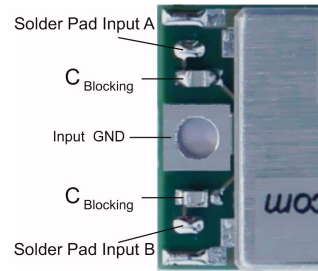


Figure: 10b

Location of removable blocking capacitors

In case the blocking capacitors are bridged, the input ESD-protection diodes limit the maximum voltage to about $\pm 750\text{mV}$. Behind this protection circuitry the subsequent amplifier stages follow capacitively (AC) coupled.

Thermal Anchoring

Mounting the device into a cryogenic setup demands for a good thermal coupling, which is essential to achieve the specified performance of the CX-4 series amplifiers at low temperatures. The substrate, on which the circuitry is placed, should be connected by the user to an appropriate heat sink or cold finger. It is recommended to use a high conductance thermal agent like “**Apiezon N**” to provide a good heat flow between the adjacent surfaces (apply only as very *thin* layer, to bridge possible vacuum gaps). We recommend using one of the 3mm-holes for mounting with Brass or (preferably) Aluminum screws on a cold surface, or cold finger. Using Brass or Aluminum material (rather than other metals) is essential, since it will contract stronger than for instance steel or copper, which have a smaller thermal contraction when getting cold. Note that using stainless steel screws can drastically impair the thermal connection, due to thermal contraction mismatch (i.e. screws getting loose) and quite poor thermal conduction at cryogenic temperatures.

When mounting the thermal connection, ensure to avoid mechanical tension of the remaining parts of the amplifier or other kind of mechanical stress. It is recommended, not to connect both amplifier ends with screws, unless the substrate to connect shows a similar thermal expansion like the amplifier's Aluminum (AlMg alloy) housing. Copper or Aluminium substrates serve well in this respect.

Commissioning in a Vacuum or Cryogenic Setup

After cleaning and baking (in case required, see also page 4) the CX-4 device can be mounted and wired up in a cryogenic vacuum chamber. It is very important to connect ground lines first for **ESD reasons** (fatal damage may occur by **Electrostatic Discharge**). The device may be checked for obvious mounting problems and eventually powered up with an Biasing Controller (A3-5).

Before power is applied to the device, one should carefully check the cable connections in order to avoid damage or malfunction. With a standard multimeter (DMM) one can perform a quick check of resistance.

Line designator	Resistance vs. GND	Remark
SMA Output A, or B	approx. $630\Omega \pm 25\Omega$ @ 300K approx. $605\Omega \pm 25\Omega$ @ 4.2K	The value shown on a DMM display depends on the measurement current and voltage in resistance measuring mode.

Table 3: typical resistance values of lines versus GND, measured with standard multimeter.

Cool-Down Procedure and Readjustments

After a complete check of the cabling (using a DMM in Ω -Mode, table above) and in case the latter is correct, one may temporarily power-up the device. The biasing currents on the two supply lines should be around 400 μ A, which will be indicated by green light on the room temperature controller display. Note that during cool down in a cryostat the device **must** be switched off. The reason are offset shifts, which may cause temporary malfunctions otherwise. Please turn the power only on, once the final temperature is reached or temperature is already below 45K. After cooling down one may recheck the resistance of lines (supply power completely turned off) to be sure the device is operational.

Note:

During cool-down/warm-up procedures always maintain a temperature rise or decrease of no more than +/-20 degrees Kelvin per minute. Note that exceeding this temperature slew/fall rate may damage the device due to formation of mechanical cracks. **Never apply thermal shocks to the device like dipping it into a cryogenic liquid.** Always stay below the limit of less than +/-20 Kelvin per minute.

Cool-Down and Warm-Up Cycles

Care has to be taken in the cool down and warm up phases. A fast drop into cryogenic liquids can irreversibly **damage** the device because of excessive mechanical stress, caused by rapid thermal contractions or expansions. It is mandatory to keep the rate of temperature change below +/- 20K / minute. A complete cool down from room temperature into a cryogenic liquid like liquid Nitrogen or liquid Helium should take at least 20 minutes (liquid Helium) or 15 minutes (liquid Nitrogen).

Care has also to be taken, in case the device is brought from the cold state rapidly into normal air because of humidity condensing on the cold surfaces. In case the device is still powered up with supply voltages, a water film on the surfaces will lead to **immediate destructive and possibly fatal galvanic corrosion**. It is strongly recommended to let the device dry thoroughly before next operation, eventually using a conventional hair dryer, after the device was brought out of vacuum. Beware of overheating the device in this procedure. The use of so-called "hot air guns" is strictly forbidden, since

their air stream temperature may easily exceed 150 deg Celsius, which can lead to rapid overheating and substantial, non-reversible damage of the device. Even using conventional hair dryers, they should be set to minimum heat output and the device temperature carefully monitored in order to **never** exceed 150 deg. Celsius.

Performance Graphs

Amplification and Noise Data

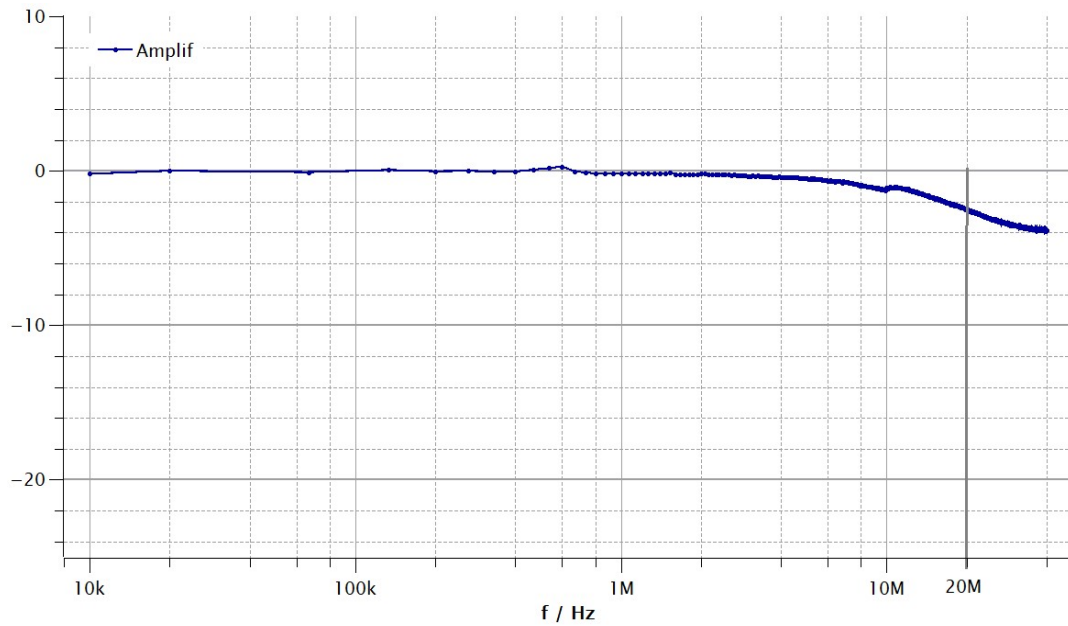


Fig. 11: Amplification at cryogenic temperature (5K) as function of frequency, expressed in dB relative to the amplification factor at $f = 100\text{kHz}$. The data set comprises the cryogenic amplifier including the biasing controller with 50 Ohm load. Note, that the differential amplification is depicted.

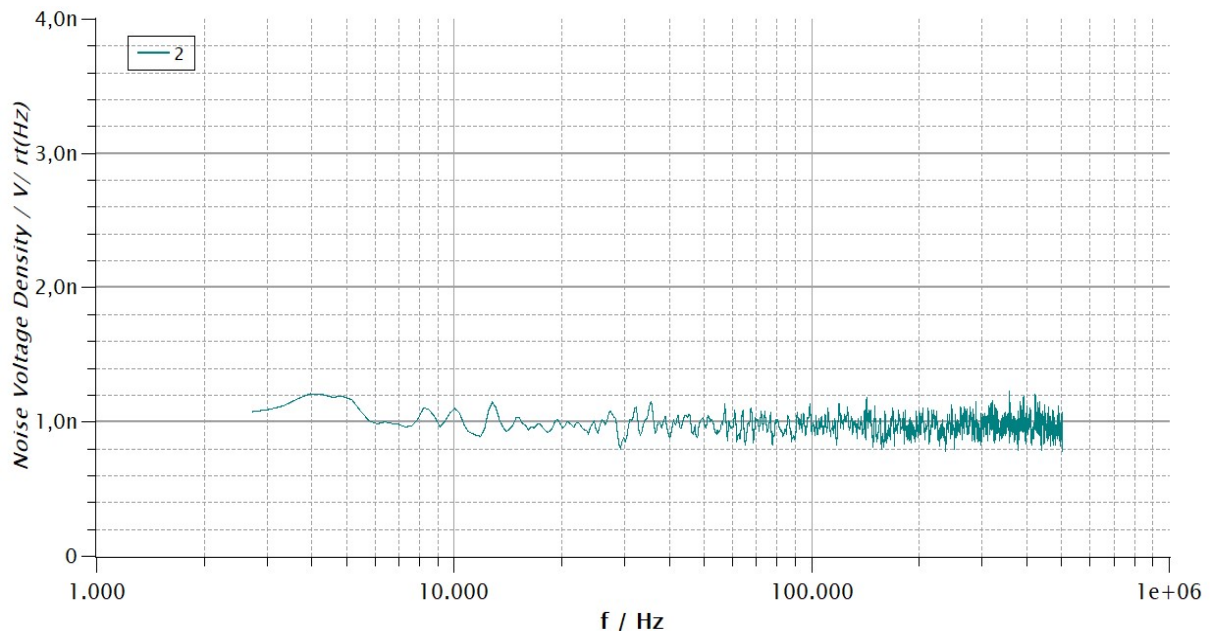


Fig. 12 : Input Voltage Noise Density at $T = 5\text{K}$, differential signal, detailed lower frequency range 3kHz to 500kHz

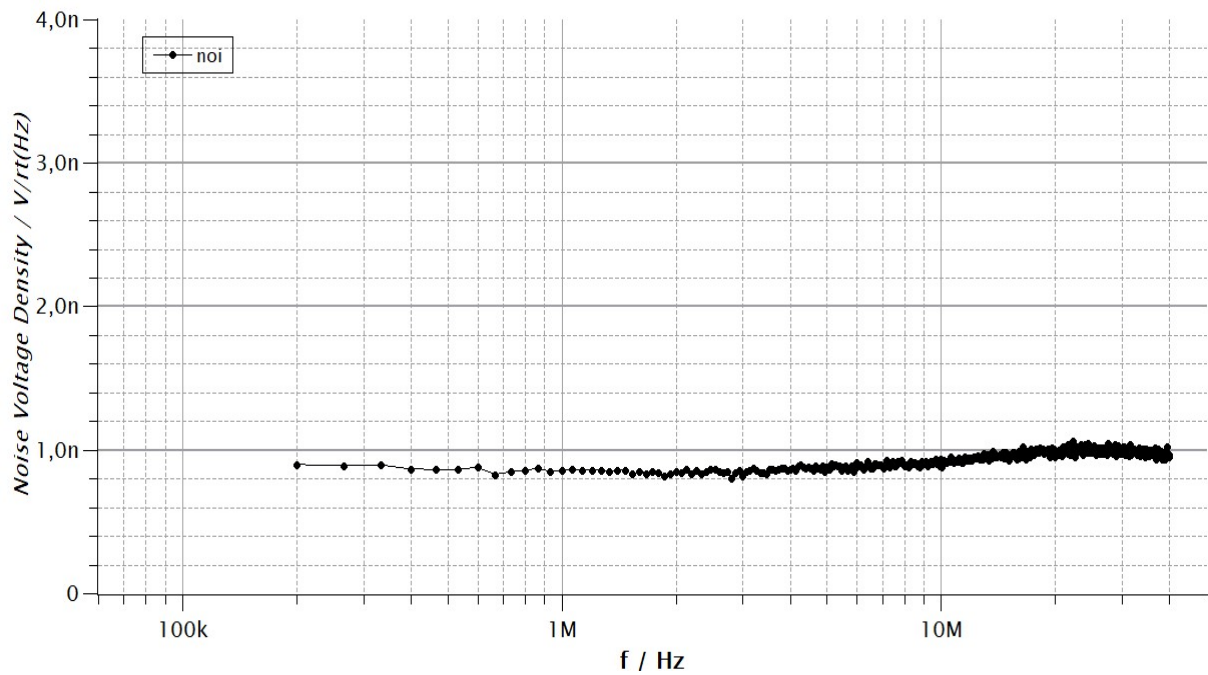


Fig. 13: Input Voltage Noise Density at T= 5K, differential signal, detailed lower frequency range 200kHz to 40MHz

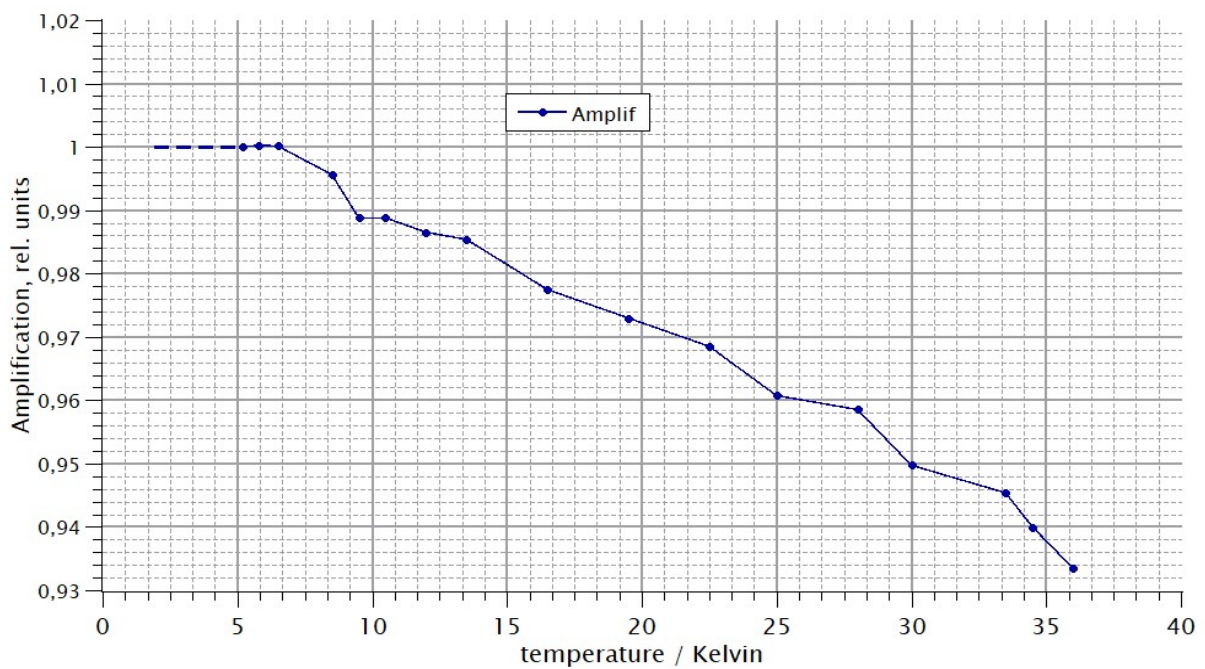


Fig. 14: Linear voltage amplification factor as function of ambient temperature, from ~4.2K to elevated cryogenic temperatures, value related to 4K operation.

Note that the decrease of amplification at elevated temperatures as shown above is not automatically being corrected, since the A3-5 room temperature controller is not aware of the real temperature of the cryogenic amplifier. The amplification factor settings (100x, 300x, 600x, 1200x) refer to the nominal operating temperature of 4.2K.

Dashed line in graph above: expected values below 4.2K.

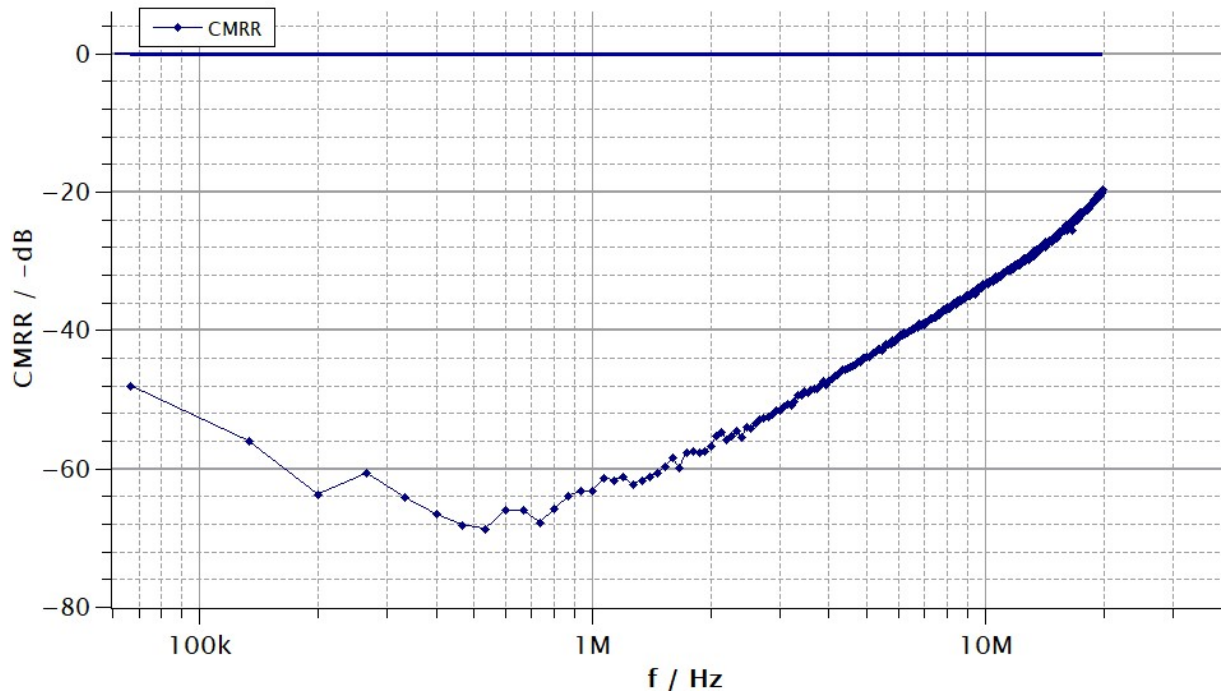


Fig. 15: Common Mode rejection vs. frequency, $T = 5K$. The graph depicts, how well a common mode signal (signal components equal to both inputs) is being suppressed. E.g. at 1MHz a common mode signal is suppressed by about 61dB, i.e. by more than a factor of 1000, in terms of voltage amplitude ratio. The graph depicts the signal chain comprising both the cryogenic amplifier as well as the room temperature controller.

Geometrical Outline

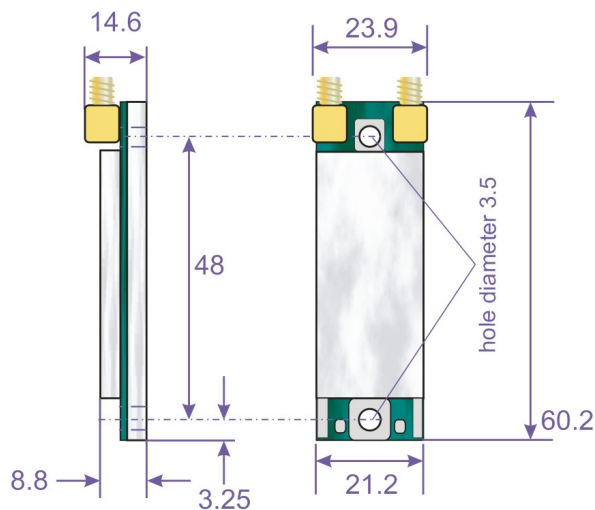


Figure 16: Outline dimensions 2-channel version with SMA output sockets (units: mm)

LED Indicator threshold values of A3-5 biasing controller

	too low	ok	too high	remark
Supply Currents	< 0.3mA	0.3mA ... 1.0mA	>1.0 mA	currents flow through A3-5 inputs and CX-4 outputs

Table 4: typical DC threshold levels, defining the range in which individual LEDs will lighten up.

Trouble Shooting

In case not all LEDs show green light, there could be the following reasons.

DC Supply current too low (line A or B):

- missing GND connection or
- SMA cable not attached (300K to cryogenic)

Supply current too high:

- short cut from signal line to GND
- disconnect cryogenic amplifier to prevent damage

If one of these error conditions occurs, check carefully all connections, eventually also the nominal resistances of the supply lines to the cryogenic amplifier according to the value listed above.

In general, note that the amplifier must be **switched off during the cool-down process**, until final temperature is reached. If there is reason to assume, that the power was accidentally turned on during cooling, one can restore the correct operating condition by warming up completely to 300K and starting again in the off-state (non-powered) the cool down procedure.

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