

2006 Editors' Choice Awards

amplifier for the money, it is an outright great amplifier.

Reviewed by TM, AVGM, Issue 7

YBA Design YA201

\$1649

ybadesign.com

The first product from YBA's value-oriented sub-brand, YBA Design, the YA201 is a polished 100Wpc performer. Even before you hear it, you'll flip over this amplifier's exquisite fit and finish and sleek industrial design, all of which set new benchmarks in its price class. Sonically, the YA201 delivers the downright seductive midrange for which YBA components are famous, plus a generous helping of transparency and good response at the frequency extremes.

Reviewed by CM, Issue 164

Cyrus 8vs

\$1795

soundorg.com

All-around musicality is one of the Cyrus 8-series' greatest strengths, with terrific musical timbre and that sense of rightness and naturalness that one hears in a live performance. The music "breathed" and had such a touch of sweetness and warmth, that reviewer JH thought at times he was listening to tubes instead of solid-state.

Reviewed by JH, Issue 158



Vincent SV-236 ▲

\$1795

vincentaudio.com

The well-built Vincent SV-236 integrated amplifier combines the best of two worlds by providing a vacuum-tube preamp driving a 100Wpc solid-state power amplifier. Listeners will appreciate the Vincent's combination of deep, powerful, authoritative solid-state bass and tube-fueled delicacy, shimmering detail, and almost surround-like imaging.

Reviewed by BW, Issue 156

Cayin Audio A 88T

\$1995

acousticsounds.com

This all-tube integrated is PS's favorite kind of audio component: wonderful performance at a reasonable price. Costing a mere fiver under two grand, this hand built honey boasts fit and finish that would do McIntosh proud, while its designer freely admits it was made to sound like Mc's fabled MC275. A no apologies necessary,

low-price alternative to the latter, it will drive any version of Quad electrostatics and fine mini-monitors with a sound that is sweet and seductive, yet also vibrant and dynamic.

PS (review forthcoming)

\$2000-\$3000

Pathos Classic One MK III

\$2750

musicalsurrundings.com

This is not only a fine amplifier, it is beautiful in every sense of the word. But if sheer dynamic scale and loudness are priorities, this 70Wpc tube model may not be for you. Instead, this is an amplifier that always gets the tone, timbre, and balance of music right, but only if played at natural levels and over reasonably sensitive speakers. Though dynamic scale is undeniably reduced, this is a negligible price to pay when the reward is reproduction of instruments and voices that sound so recognizably real.

Reviewed by PS, Issue 160

NAD Masters Series M3 ▼

\$2795

nadelectronics.com

Not since the coolly received Silver Series of a decade ago has NAD made such a no-holds-barred effort. Bristling with oomph, this pure dual-mono design boasts build-quality that shames some tonier brands. With 180Wpc on reserve it conveys an easy-going neutrality and cushiony refinement. Bass is as controlled and extended as any integrated NG has encountered. It may not have quite the air and bloom in the treble of the premium-spread überamps, but it comes scary close. Another bargain from the company that minted the term.

Reviewed by NG, Issue 163



Ayre AX-7e

\$2950

ayre.com

The AX-7 has all the hallmarks of the Ayre sound, but scaled down in output power. This beautifully made integrated has dimensionality, openness, image specificity, and transparency that rival much more expensive separates. Don't be put off by the modest 60Wpc output rating; the AX-7 sounds robust and has bass extension that belies its modest specification.

AX-7 reviewed by RH, Issue 134

Audio Research VSi55

\$2995

audioresearch.com

The VSi55 serves up a rich midrange, combined with smooth—but never dull—treble, and with the right speakers (those with smooth low-frequency impedance curves), its bass can be powerful and well-controlled. This amp also handles dynamics with greater authority than its power rating would suggest, while conveying a sense of the musical whole. Avoid using with ported speakers that have large impedance peaks in the bass (which can result in a thick, bloated sound). And be aware that the VSi55 trades away some of the transparency you would hear through a good transistor amplifier in order to give you the natural, relaxed, "holistic" sound of tubes.

Reviewed by TM, AVGM, Issue 1

\$3000 and above

Plinius 9200

\$3695

plinius.com

The 9200 is a thorough and timely re-imagining of the brilliant but aging 8150/8200. Still compact in size, it pumps out a healthy 200Wpc, and thanks to its strong Class A bias, the 9200 is sweeter and richer than ever. Even the all-new phonostage is quieter and more dynamic. Sonics have developed a beautiful patina. Bass doesn't sound as darkly ominous or extended as in years past, but control and definition are strikingly improved. A major leap forward for a reference integrated at its price—and perhaps any price.

Reviewed by NG, Issue 156

Balanced Audio Technology VK-300X

\$3995-\$5995 (depending on options)

balanced.com

Available in your choice of three different preamp stages—solid-state, tube, or 6H30 "SuperTube"—BAT's VK-300X is a great integrated amplifier. Although refinements occur with each upgrade, its basic sound is airy, detailed, harmonically well-structured, and very immediate. And with 150Wpc output, it will not only drive pretty much any speaker, but it will do so with dynamic authority as well as agility. Music Editor Bob Gendron's reference.

Reviewed by WG, Issue 138

Thule Audio's Spirit IA350B Integrated Amplifier

\$3995

thule-audio.com

The Danish Thule (pronounced "toola") integrated amplifier offers extended frequency response, rich bass, a subtle and startlingly