



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



# Top-down thrills

*Bryston's C-Series upgrades have reached its top preamp and most affordable power amplifier*

**PRODUCT** Bryston BP26 DA and 2B SST C-Series

**TYPE** Stereo preamplifier/DAC and power amplifier

**PRICE** (BP26 DA) £3,600; (2B SST) £1,950

**KEY FEATURES** (BP26 DA) Size (WxHxD): 43x5.7x28cm each (two boxes – preamp plus power supply) • Weight: 9kg each • Analogue inputs: four single-ended, two balanced • Digital inputs: two S/PDIF electrical • (2B SST) Size (WxHxD): 43x12x40.6cm • Weight: 12.7kg • Inputs: single-ended and balanced • Power rating: 100W per channel (8 ohms) • Bridging switch

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 4441044 @ www.bryston.ca

Canadian amp meister Bryston has recently revamped its range, forming the comparatively shapely new C-Series.

Back in *HFC* 275, we detailed the remarkable capabilities of the B100 DA, a 100-watt integrated amp with the option of adding onboard digital-to-analogue conversion. Now we've got the range-topping BP26 two-channel preamp, which also offers the ability to take digital signals and is partnered by a full-width external power supply for maximum separation of signal and power.

The BP26 comes in a variety of guises. The base model, including an MPS2 power supply, costs £2,600. For an additional £1,000 you can add an onboard DAC, as fitted to our review

unit (hence the 'DA'); alternatively, vinyl users may wish to specify an internal phono stage (£450 for MM or £900 for MC). It's an expensive preamp, but that flexibility is useful and build quality is exemplary – it's made to last as long as the 20 year guarantee would suggest. Compared to the BP25 that preceded it, this preamp has lower distortion, a "significantly improved" noise floor and "essentially nonexistent" crosstalk between inputs. These improvements are, to no small extent, brought about by the MPS2 high-current power supply, which has four outputs with individual 12volt triggers and can be purchased separately to upgrade a BP25 preamp.

In standard guise, the BP26 offers seven line-level inputs: two balanced pairs via XLRs and five single-ended pairs accessed by unusually long phono sockets. You can't get a BP26 with both a phono stage and a DAC fitted at the same time, but if you must have everything, the outboard BP1.5 phono stage fits the bill, and it runs off the MPS2 power supply. As far as can be discerned, there are no other components in the range that will run off this supply, although presumably there are future products planned that will take advantage of the other power outputs.

The onboard DAC has two inputs, both S/PDIF coaxials, and will accept PCM bitstreams up to 108kHz/24-bit, which in practice means that you can plug in **anything** from a DAB tuner to a DVD-Audio player. However, you won't be able to play the highest oversampling (192kHz) DVD-Audio discs, but they're pretty rare beasts.

Unlike the B100, this preamp comes with a remote control as standard. It's a brick of CNC-honed aluminium with volume, mute and absolute phase controls. Input selection is a manual, walking over to the preamp, affair. The only feature that has not been carried over from the BP25 is the mono/stereo switch, which will be missed by some.

Bryston's least expensive stereo power amp – the 2B SST – remains a big, bulky, 100-watt beast after undergoing C-Series treatment. Aesthetically speaking, some of the hard edges on the casework have been subtly rounded, but the sound is much the same as its non-C-series predecessor – which is no bad thing!

The amp is said to be conservatively rated at 100 watts into eight ohms and 180 watts into four. It also has a bridging option so that you can use it as a monoblock for one channel, ramping its output ramps up to 350 watts.





**“The BP26 represents a significant upgrade on its predecessor, which has been an HFC reference component for some time.”**

Compared to the previous 2B SST, it has new output devices and increased power supply capacitance, plus lower noise and distortion. Usefully, gain can be adjusted and remote on/off achieved with a 12volt trigger – something you’ll find on all C-Series components and very useful in multiroom and multichannel systems. That said, for best results it pays to keep these amps on permanently, if maximum sonic gratification is your goal.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The BP26 represents a significant upgrade on its predecessor, which has been an HFC reference component for some time, delivering cleaner high frequencies and a greater sense of openness. It’s not a subtle change: the BP25 was a good, solid and consistent preamp but it had an electronic edge. This has now been removed from the sound, making music seem more natural and organic. The timing has likewise improved, but one can now follow nuances with greater ease and enjoy the ebb and flow of music in all its subtlety.

Adding the 2B SST power amp brings a ‘pro’ character to the sound. The most distinct element is the bass, which is demonstrative and weighty. The sense of timing introduced by the preamp is not undermined by the power amp, the pairing managing to combine muscle and agility with little sense of strain.

Imaging is particularly well served, with the

sense of scale varying quite dramatically from one recording to the next. On test, the pairing ensured that Lambchop’s *Is A Woman* disc threw sounds way beyond the speakers, maintaining the full character of notes while doing so. There was a slight restraint in terms of image depth but none when it came to height and width. Dynamics were also well presented – the brass section on a mono Mingus album had an energy and vitality that’s rare, backed up with suitably shiny tone.

The digital-to-analogue converter is more impressive than the one in the B100 integrated amp. It won’t surpass the potential of a player that costs nearly as much as the preamp as a whole, but it’ll do remarkable things for a mid or budget priced CD player. Most significantly, it drops the noise floor, which means more relaxed and better resolved sound with a greater sense of acoustic space and clearer low-level detail.

Bryston’s extensive redesign work has clearly paid off with these components, delivering far more than minor cosmetic changes. The noise floor has been lowered to the point where new musical detail can be heard way down in the mix and across the band. There are low frequency tunes on the Jaga Jazzists album that had not previously been apparent, even

with active speakers. With other tracks, the bass can be a bit keen. This is partly due to a lack of symbiosis between the 2B



SST and the B&W 802D speakers we used, but also a reflection of the lack of harmonics at low frequencies.

The preamp is inevitably the star of the show. Its resolve is easily among the best at this price and without the onboard DAC it’s even more competitive. However, the chances are your CD player’s own DAC will be bettered by that in the Bryston, and if you have another stereo digital source the advantage is doubled. We were quite taken aback at the removal of background ‘hash’ from some very capable players.

Bryston is a solid brand and its amplifiers make a solid sound. The 2B SST C-Series power amp is no exception; but the BP26 preamp is quite simply a revelation. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



**VERDICT – BP26 DA**

- SOUND >> 94%**
- FEATURES >> 90%**
- BUILD >> 94%**
- VALUE >> 88%**

**CONCLUSION**

Bryston’s top-of-the-range C-series preamp is a true reference-class component. The high-quality onboard DAC is a useful option, too.

**HI-FI CHOICE >> 91%**

**VERDICT – 2B SST C-SERIES**

- SOUND >> 87%**
- FEATURES >> 80%**
- BUILD >> 94%**
- VALUE >> 83%**

**CONCLUSION**

Bryston’s least costly stereo power amp is revealing, powerful and well built, but it lacks ultimate refinement compared to the preamp.

**HI-FI CHOICE >> 85%**