



# Bryston BP26 DA

*Bryston proves it knows how to turn a good preamp into a great one*

PRICE £3,600 CONTACT PMC, 43-45 Crawley Green Road, Luton LU2 0AA ☎ 0870 4441044 www.bryston.ca

Earlier in the year, we took delivery of Canadian amp powerbroker Bryston's latest example of its range-topping preamplifier alongside its 2B SST power amp. The BP26 preamp replaced the long-running BP25 and added to it in all respects in the process. So impressive are the results of this comprehensive revision that we decided to revisit this solidly built preamp on its own for *The Collection*.

The BP26 DA version has full digital input capability and is partnered by an external power supply in full-width casework for maximum separation of signal and power.

BP26 is available in a variety of guises. The base model, including the big MPS-2 power supply, costs £2,600. Adding a phono stage (the BP26 P) adds £450 for moving magnet or £900 for MM and MC (this is known as the BP26 MC), while the DAC board adds a grand to the base price. This makes it a highly flexible if not inexpensive preamp, but – as the 20 year guarantee would suggest – build quality is exemplary. Many of the improvements that the BP26 boasts over its predecessor are brought about by the MPS-2 high-current power supply, which has four outputs for use with other Bryston components and can be purchased separately to upgrade a BP25 preamp. The MPS-2 costs £1,000 in its own right, but this brings the previous BP25 preamp considerably closer to the performance of the latest BP26.

An analogue BP26 offers seven line-level inputs, two balanced and five single-ended pairs, but adding the DAC or phono options takes up one of these pairs – you cannot specify a BP26 with both a phono stage and a DAC onboard. If you want both, the separate BP1.5 phono stage also runs off the MPS-2 power supply (the MPS-2 can handle up to four products). The onboard DAC has two S/PDIF coaxial inputs and will accept sampling/bit rates up to 108kHz/24-bit, which in practice means that you can plug in anything from a DAB tuner to a DVD-Audio player.

There's even a headphone jack on the preamp – a rare thing today. The preamp is available in black or silver finish, both of which live up to the exemplary build quality of the preamp, and Bryston products in general. The remote follows suit: it's a classic Bryston brick of CNC honed aluminium that offers volume, mute and absolute phase controls.

## SOUND QUALITY

That the BP26/MPS-2 combination represents a significant upgrade over its BP25 predecessor is clear from the off. It delivers cleaner high frequencies and a greater sense of openness, which in practical terms means a more relaxed and enjoyable sound.

This is not a subtle change. The BP25 was a good, solid and consistent preamp, but it had an electronic edge which has now been removed from the sound, leaving it far more natural and organic. Timing has likewise improved to the extent that you can follow the nuances of playing with greater ease and enjoy the ebb and flow of the music in all its subtlety. Even though it can be upgraded thanks to the MPS-2, the BP26 is clearly a worthwhile upgrade in performance in all respects.

Imaging is particularly good, the sense of scale varying quite dramatically from one recording to the next with some doing a remarkable job of breaking the boundaries of speaker placement. There is a slight restraint in terms of image depth but none when it comes to height and width. Dynamics are likewise available in full effect, with all the energy and vitality that the music deserves.

**“The resulting sound is more relaxed and better resolved, with a greater sense of space.”**

Using the onboard digital to analogue convertor does remarkable things to even a good mid-priced CD player. It is certainly more impressive than the very similar one fitted to Bryston's B100 integrated amplifier... and that was already pushing the performance envelope. The way the BP26 DA's DAC drops the noise floor is quite uncanny, the resulting sound being more relaxed and better resolved, with a greater sense of acoustic space and clearer low-level detail. There are low frequency tunes on our oft-used Jaga Jazzists album that had not previously been apparent, even with active speakers.

The BP26's transparency is easily among the best at this price and without the DAC onboard it becomes all the more competitive. But unless you own a damn fine CD player, one that costs in the region of two grand or more, this option is well worth the asking price. If you have a DAB tuner or digibox with a digital output, the advantage is doubled. The best way to find out is to take your player along to a demonstration – if you don't hear a big improvement, we'll eat our collective hats. But even if you decide your digital player doesn't need a good DAC-ing, the standard BP26 preamplifier is a wonder in its own right. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

See HFC 278 (April 2006) for our original review of this product