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BRYSTON BP26/3B-SST

These amps exude class in both looks and performance

For a number of reasons, Bryston is one of those names that tends to be mentioned with a certain amount of awe. One of these is the sheer power of its amplifiers (this one's a bit of a baby, the 28B-SST being good for 1,000 watts). But the look of the products also has something to do with it. Bryston is one of relatively few makes to have cracked both pro and domestic markets in style and the amps fairly scream 'professional,' but somehow without a complete lack of domestically acceptable grace.

The BP26 (as supplied for this review) had a DAC module fitted internally, which adds £1,000 to the price quoted above. A phono stage is an alternative add-on. It comes with an MPS-2 power supply which lives in an identical-sized box and can power up to four Bryston components. That's practical if you've got other Bryston components, but even if you haven't it can, at least, remove the mains transformer from the vicinity of sensitive amplifying stages. Everything is traditional in the switching and volume control department, the remote control (solid metal – nice!) operating a motorised potentiometer, plus mute and polarity inversion.

Inside the 3B-SST is a very busy assembly of circuit boards, considerably more circuitry than most manufacturers seem to find necessary. Complexity in audio is not necessarily a bad thing, though, and since Bryston takes the unusual step of publishing circuit diagrams of its amps on the company website we were able to admire some of the very cunning tricks that have gone into the amp. We certainly can't fault the way the unit is assembled, which is both efficient

and robust. Both pre and power amps have balanced and unbalanced connections.

SOUND QUALITY

Although the odd word of caution was written about specific aspects of these amps, the overall picture of their performance is decidedly encouraging. In essence, they seem to be very good at combining musical virtues with technical ones, so that the music holds your attention instinctively.

One of the cautionary notes concerns the high treble, which seemed to our listeners to be a little too excitable. That looked like a rather odd comment, leading us to suspect that it may simply be a question of the treble being that little bit more detailed than most. It is, in any case, undeniable that detail is plentiful, with really excellent stereo imaging proving the point most gratifyingly. Lateral placement of performers is precise and highly stable and depth is also resistant to changes with the music's dynamic ebb and flow.

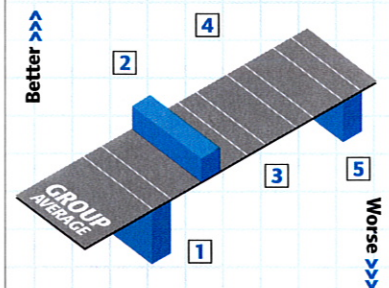
Ah, yes, dynamics: while the actual power on offer is par for the course, the feeling of unconstrained dynamics is one of the big attractions of these amps. They play quietly, but when something loud comes along there is absolutely no sense of restraint. Climaxes are full-blooded in a way that practically begs for extra-loud listening and it's particularly telling that vocals are effortless at high levels, not something one can always take for granted. Tonally, the bass is a shade less pronounced than some, though it is tuneful and well controlled and the midrange is beautifully uncoloured. These amps exude class in both looks and performance. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

Bryston takes pride in the high standard of technical performance of its amps, as well as a detailed measurement summary with each unit. Distortion is held to very low levels across the audio band, never exceeding -80dB and generally considerably better than that. Power output of 160W is delivered into one or two channels, thanks to full dual-mono construction of the 3B-SST (separate mains transformers for each channel). But we lacked the nerve to test Bryston's claim of a power bandwidth to 100kHz. Frequency response is about as flat as flat can be, less than 0.5dB down an octave beyond the audio band's extremes and the only slight surprise is noise performance which is a little behind the best. The BP26 operates from high internal supply voltages and can kick out substantial amounts of voltage, theoretically enough to blow up the input stages of some amplifiers – though you'd be deafened long before!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -35%
- 2] Frequency response >> +10%
- 3] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 4] Distortion >> 0%
- 5] Output impedance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	150W	162W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.005%	0.006%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)		±0.1dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	In many ways these amps are the epitome of the iron fist in a velvet glove school of hi-fi – undemonstrative most of the time, but capable of giving a startling impact to climaxes. Very detailed too.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	

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