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AUDIO PREVIEWS

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AWARDSIGHTING

DECEMBER 2007



BRYSTON 28B-SST

Reviewer: John Potis

Analog Source: Merrill-Scillia Research MS2 table, Hadcock GH Export arm, Ortofon Kontrapunkt H & Garrott Bros Optim FGS Cartridges, K&K Audio MC Step-up

Digital Source: Accustic Arts Drive 1/Audio Aero Prima SE DAC

Preamp: Bel Canto Pre2P

Power Amp: Art Audio Carissa, Bel Canto e.One REF1000 and Canary CA 330 Mono Blocks, *Opera Audio Cyber 211 monos* [on extended loan], Musical Fidelity A5 Integrated

Speakers: Tidal Audio Pianos, Hørning Perikles, Thiel CS 2.4, Ohm Acoustics Walsh 4 with 4.5 mk.2 upgrade; *Mark & Daniel Apollo II* [on review]

Speaker Cables, Interconnects and Digital cables: JPS Labs Superconductor 3

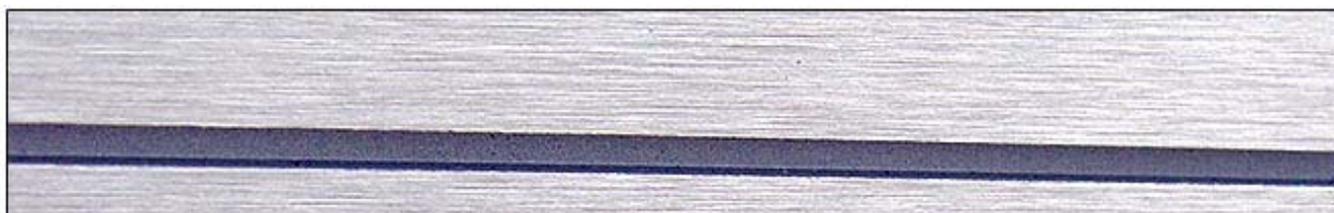
Power Cords: JPS Power AC, Analog AC, Digital AC, Aluminata and Kaptovator

Powerline Conditioning: Balanced Power Technology 3.5 Signature Plus with ZCable Cyclone Power Cord

Sundry Accessories: Sound Mechanics Performance Platform, 2-inch Butcher Block platforms with Quest for Sound Isol-pads, Vibrapod Isolators and Cones, Ultra & Heavy ZSleeves, Viablue QTC spikes under speakers, Auric Illuminator, Ginkgo Audio Mini-Clouds

Room Size: 12' by 16' with 9' ceiling

Review Component Retail: \$7500/ea.





Could it *possibly* be that anybody reading this isn't already well familiar with Canadian audio manufacturer Bryston's existence? In my own experience, the brand is so omnipresent and well established that I tend to overlook Bryston in favor of the completely new and unfamiliar - until someone offers me an opportunity to audition a \$15,000 pair of 1,000-watt flagship amplifiers that is. Nevertheless, a brief history of the company won't hurt.

Bryston dates back to 1962 although at the time stereo equipment manufacturing was yet to register on their radar. Christened as an acronym to combine the names of the three founders Tony **B**auer, Stan **R**ybb and John **S**toneborough, Bryston was originally formed to produce blood analysis equipment. In 1968, the Canadian company was purchased by NASA engineer John Russell Sr., a then recent transplant from the US. Soon thereafter, Russel's own son is said to have set to work designing the first Bryston amplifier. Equally well-known today as a supplier to the high-end consumer and to the professional recording industry, one of Bryston's many claims to fame is a 20-year warranty; a reputation for first-class customer service; and a history of virtually bullet-proof designs. I can personally attest to the excellent warranty. I've owned several Bryston components and taken advantage of their service on three separate occasions. *Not once* was the Bryston product at fault. Repairs were necessitated by accidents of my own doing. Fortunately, clumsy reviewers make up a small portion of Bryston's customer base. The brand is held in extremely high regard by professionals everywhere based on respect for build quality, performance and reliability. Bryston claims manufacturing techniques and materials more typically associated with the military and aerospace industries and the longevity of their products would seem to bear it out.

Very new to Bryston's amplifier line is the 28B-SST. It represents their all-out assault on the state of the art. Each of these 95-lbs mono amplifiers, rated at a kilowatt into 8 ohms, is said to truly pump out between 1,200 and 1,300 watts before clipping. If that wasn't enough, what really caught my attention was Bryston's claim that these amplifiers reach full sonic splendor with the very first watt used. *That* was interesting. As a former owner of their 500-watt 7B-ST monos, I can attest to the fact that they were bruisers if you needed their power. When used with my Magnepan 3.6Rs, a 4-ohm speaker with very difficult impedance and nasty phase angles well known to torture lesser amplifiers, they were a God-sent. They sounded robust, musical and perhaps most importantly, would run all day on the Maggies and barely break a sweat.



However, when used with speakers not presenting torturous loads and low efficiencies, the 7B-STs hid much of that brawn. In one of my very first reviews for 6moons, I wrote about how into high-efficiency speakers, the 16-watt Art Audio Carissa actually sounded more in command than the 7B-STs. It was obvious to me that the Brystons never got out of first gear and into their power band. When I read that Bryston was now promising massively powerful amplifiers with the kind of low-RPM torque that would sound as good in first gear as semi-trucking heavy kit at highway speeds, I wanted to hear them for myself.

Though my wife has been doing it for years, when two huge boxes boldly emblazoned with the Bryston logo showed up at my door, I was forced to question my sanity - if only briefly. According to FedEx, each box tipped the scales at 105 lbs. But once I'd opened up the first sturdy cardboard box and peeled away the first layer of pliable and infinitely reusable foam packing, I spotted not only the front-mounted rack handles but a pair sprouting from the rear panel as well. Grasping the left front handle with my left hand, the right rear handle with my right and lifting with only my back in a quick twisting jerk, I removed the amplifier from the box. Second verse, same as with the first and both amplifiers were liberated from their shipping confines. While still in their cardboard boxes, these amplifiers are difficult to deal with. Yet thanks to the front and rear-mounted handles, they're very practical once liberated. I once read a reviewer complain about the weight of a remote control being too much and thought that perhaps it was time to get out of the listening chair and into some exercise. If that's you, get help with the 28s. If you're in reasonable shape but in a secluded mountain-top hideaway miles away from the nearest neighbor, chances are pretty good you'll handle these. Those between either scenario should use their own judgment.



Finding a home for them in the listening room could be a challenge, however. At a full 19" wide by a bit over 8" tall and almost 21" deep, these babies take up some real estate. And there are of course two of them. But one thing you won't want to do is hide 'em away. In a testosterone-driven nerdy audiophile kind of way, these are beautiful amplifiers. The faceplates are a full 3/4" thick with a beautifully bright-brushed luster and the handles are as gorgeously sculpted as they are pragmatically useful. While they do include the rear-mounted 12-volt trigger to be remotely powered up, the buttery-smooth push-on power buttons would be my preferred *modus operandi*. Even the LED that glows amber-orange while the muted amps stabilize turns a gentle light green of the perfect luminance. You can plainly see it in the light but it remains gentle in the darkened listening room. Lastly, the 28B-SSTs produce a fair amount of heat even at idle so even though they are said to be stable even at melt-down temperatures, you'll probably want to provide them some ventilation.

By the way, color options are black and silver and the amps are available in a 17-inch wide version without handles - all at the same price.



I guess most end users would find the generous amount of connecting options located on the rear of little interest particularly if their dealer did the installation. But they could weigh very favorably on an acquisition decision nonetheless. First, there are single-ended and balanced inputs, with the former providing an input impedance of 50K. Each leg of

the balanced input presents 30K with pin 1 ground, 2 positive phase and pin 3 anti-phase. Additionally, the amplifier is switchable for either 23 or 29dBs of gain. Your choice of gain will depend upon the cumulative voltages of your source components. The optimum setting will be the one that allows the widest range of your preamplifier's volume control. If full rotation of the volume control doesn't provide the desired volume, you'll need to use 29dBs (1 volt sensitivity) of gain. If you can't get past the 9:00 position, select 23dBs (2 volt sensitivity) for finer adjustments of the master volume.

Bryston's binding posts are a bit different. They are sturdy and accept bare wire, bananas and spades. However, if you use spades you'll notice that they are completely shrouded to keep the amplifier from shorting out should one speaker lead work its way loose and against the wrong post. Bryston suggests spades with an exterior width of 5/8ths of an inch and an inner opening of 5/16ths. To facilitate bi-wiring, Bryston provides two pairs of posts.

Also on the rear panel is a master circuit breaker intended to be in the 'Off' position during installation and then left to 'On' thereafter. As a magnetic circuit breaker, it's an easy matter to reset should it trip during use - once the problem has been rectified.

Bryston reports that the 28B-SST isn't just the most powerful amplifier they make, it also incorporates certain design refinements which result in purportedly improved overall performance. Stuart Taylor, Bryston's chief designer, created a new input circuit incorporating 32 output devices for a capacitance of over 160,000 micro farads. IM and THD+ noise are said to be below 0.005%, 20-to-20 *at full output*. S/N ratio is greater than 110dB. Damping factor is over 300 at 8 ohms and power bandwidth is noted as 1Hz to over 100kHz. Each 28B-SST consumes 215 watts at idle and 1486 watts when outputting 1000 watts into 8 ohms.





Pop the hood and you'll find two balanced amplifiers operating in series. In the old days, this is how the 7B-ST was constructed too - as two balanced amplifiers. But you had the option of series or parallel operation. In parallel, the 7B-ST could drive extremely demanding loads while on less demanding speakers, most thought that it sounded better configured in series. The 28B-SST doesn't offer this option (nor does the modern 7B-SST) and is strapped for series configuration. Loads shouldn't fall below a nominal 4 ohms though in practice, most such speakers and many rated higher will fall below -- sometimes well below -- the 4-ohm figure. This shouldn't be a problem however since the 28B-SST is claimed stable into 2 ohms.





All this adds up to one whale of an amplifier. On paper anyway. What really matters of course is how a pair will acquit itself in the listening room. Will the first watt *really* sound as good as the last?



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