

SECRETS of Home Theater and High Fidelity



Product Review

Bryston BP-26DA Stereo Preamplifier with Built-in DAC

Part I

November, 2007

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Introduction

Media Servers are exploding in sales, and wireless distribution throughout the house is the way to go.

Most of our music is on conventional two-channel (stereo) CDs, rather than surround sound, and wireless music servers reflect this by being two-channel in design, having Toslink and coaxial digital outputs, as well as two channel analog (RCA) outputs.

The problem with these wireless servers (so far), is that they are not audiophile-grade quality. There is nothing wrong with them, but the high end has just not caught up with wireless music serving yet.

Squeezebox is a typical example. For \$299 (USA) you get a box that receives music wirelessly from the media server, converts it to analog with a built-in DAC, or forwards the digital bitstream on to your own DAC. It also has a display screen to show you a list of music files to choose from.

At this price, it is really a good product, but you can imagine that it does not have top of the line DAC chips or discrete output stages running in Class A.

Specifications:

- Design: Solid State, Two Channels, Separate Power Supply
- Maximum Output: 30 Volts RMS Balanced; 15 Volts Unbalanced
- Inputs: Two Pairs XLR Analog, Six Pairs RCA Analog, Two RCA Coaxial Digital, One Tape Loop
- Outputs: One Pair XLR, Two Pairs RCA
- MFR: 20 Hz - 20 kHz \pm 0.5 dB
- THD+N: 0.0015% at 3 Volts
- DAC: Crystal Semiconductor; One Per Channel; 24 Bit/108 kHz Maximum Sampling Rate
- Dimensions: 6" H x 19" W x 11" D (Both Units Stacked Together)
- Weight: 30 Pounds Total
- MSRP: \$5,095 USA as Reviewed

Bryston, Ltd.

Of course, you could just send the digital stream to your receiver, but those are 5.1 systems. What if you want to play CDs through a high quality two-channel system in another room?

In general, high end stereo preamplifiers don't have DACs. Rather, they just have analog stereo inputs.

So, what can you do to insure that the highest quality signal goes through that two-channel system, receiving the signal from the wireless music server?

Bryston BP-26DA

Bryston, Ltd., a Canadian manufacturer of considerable renown, comes to the rescue here. The BP-26 is a high end solid state stereo preamplifier that has an option of including a stereo DAC, making it the BP-26DA. So, you can connect the coaxial output on the wireless music receiver, such as the Squeezebox, to the coaxial digital input on the preamplifier. There are two other versions, the BP-26P and BP-26MC, which have phono stages.

The BP-26DA preamplifier itself has a control chassis that is separate from the power supply (called the MPS-2). They are priced separately, but the BP-26 can't operate without the power supply. It is just that the MPS-2 can be used with several other Bryston products, so it is also sold with those products. Also, if you have the older BP-20 or BP-25, the MPS-2 could be purchased as an upgrade. The power supply has 68,000 μF of capacitance and is designed for high current output.

In the photo below, you can see the control unit sitting on top of the power supply. There are toggle switches to select from two coaxial digital inputs that feed the DAC. There is also a mute switch and phase reversal switch. A balance control lets you tweak the left and right channel volume. The power on/off toggle is on the power supply chassis.



The rear panels have a large array of XLR as well as RCA connectors for inputs and outputs, as well as the power supply jack (top left corner of the control chassis and bottom right corner of the power supply chassis). There are actually four power supply outputs, so you could, in practice, connect four Bryston products to this one power supply at the same time.



The two chassis together are heavy, which is a reflection of the large power supply. This is very important for delivering voltage peaks during transient demands that exist in many musical passages. In my opinion, you need at least 10 volts RMS analog output capability from a preamplifier before clipping, via unbalanced connections, to get the full transients, and that is a feature of high end products, not inexpensive mass market receivers. The BP-26 is capable of delivering 15 volts through RCA and 30 volts through XLR outputs.



The BP-26 comes with a very nice remote control that is typical of the current trend in the high end: all metal and quite heavy. It has buttons for volume, mute, and phase. Simple.

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