

BRYSTON



DEFY  
THE  
ORDINARY

The previous  
7B ST  
Amplifiers  
have been  
a part of  
my  
Reference  
System  
for years

ENGINEERED  
FOR  
MUSIC

# BRYSTON

## REVIEW

BLAST FROM THE PAST

### BRYSTON 28B MONO AMPLIFIER REVIEW - ITALY



I think I know quite well Bryston electronics. I've owned the BP25 preamplifier, I reviewed the BP26 preamplifier and the 28B SST power amplifiers,

while the 7B ST amplifiers are part of my reference system, with good reason.

Let's talk about this Canadian Company, that's been in the professional and high fidelity audio markets as a leader for over 40 years. I mentioned the professional audio and in this regard, given the confusion that reigns

## The Word Professional Is Not Always Mean High Quality



among audio enthusiasts, it is perhaps appropriate to clarify.

We can find, in music stores, power amplifiers that state extremely high output powers, regardless of prices that usually do not exceed a few hundred euros. This has triggered some “invasions of the barbarians” on some forums around the world, which made look like idiots all those who aim at the traditional hi-fi market. While it is nice to see that there are many people willing to lose entire days on the web to help you save large sums of money, on the other side we can suspect that the need to find each day the magical device, doesn't help to give a correct opinion to the readers.

A few years ago, at the beginning of “the race to professional”, during my visit to a shop which, in addition to high fidelity market, deals with audio services for concerts, I asked, and I got to borrow a small and powerful amplifier; 1500 W per channel, Class H. Wonder! It even was light, and I took it home gladly. I do not remember the brand, honestly, after so long, but I think it was a German company with production in China, of course. I already owned the Bryston 7B STs that when I wanted to exaggerate with the volume, tended to clip with the speakers I owned at that time, a couple of MBL 101D, 81 dBs sensitivity. You can understand that when I saw and amplifier with the double of the power and the cost

that I think it was between 300 and 400 Euros, I was happy

As soon as I went home, I checked that everything was in place, I noticed the presence of the two LED VU-meters, and turned it on. I heard immediately the two noisy fans but, I told myself, maybe if I do not listen to extremely high volumes, maybe I can find a way to slow down their revs, in order to reduce that noise. I begun to listen and I heard a glassy sound, horrible beyond any limit. Well, - I thought - it's because it's cold. I had been waiting for a while but the sound didn't change. Bad even in the low range, it turned unrecognizable my beloved speakers. Understandable, perhaps, by an amplifier of such a low cost and very high power, I thought.

Talking about high power, let's see how it works when the amplifier needs to push very hard my MBLs. I turned up the volume without fear, checking the red clipping LEDs ... I got a maximum sound pressure well below the pressure I usually got with my Brystons, stated by one third of power. And while I was meditating on everything, one of the MBL tweeters passed away with a bad noise, because of a clipping and imposed to the speaker a trip to Berlin, Germany, to be changed. You can imagine what I think, from that day, about the cheap, “pro” amplifiers, praised on the forums by those who look down on you, because you spent 100 times as much. in order to listen well to your music. But since I do not write anymore on forums, I don't answer directly, and leave them in their false belief that somebody reinvents the wheel almost every day.

Of course, the word “professional”, as it's not always synonymous of high quality, it doesn't always meant the opposite. In many cases, the high quality and good sounding professional appliances, reach the price ranges of hi-fidelity components. Maybe a little less, if the production numbers make it possible to cut costs, but the figures are not very different. I'm thinking about FM Acous-

# I HEARD A BEAUTIFUL SOUND - IMPECCABLE

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As soon the  
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THE DEMO  
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tics, as an example, which manufactures professional audio electronics and is placed in the higher price range of the market but, as they say, is an exception to this rule.

Back to the Bryston review. This is the 28B (Cubed) power amplifier, the last born of the Series that has seen in the last 20 years the ST, SST and SST<sup>2</sup> (squared) models., As I said before, I have in my system the 7B STs, two mono amps that have less than half the power output of the model 28, a 1000W RMS on 8 Ohms (but which are actually 25% more, as we will see later) and 1800W on 4 Ohms. Years ago, at the launch of the 28 B SST, I had the opportunity to write about their sound on the magazine in which I worked then.

I heard a beautiful sound, impeccable, but that does not tempted me that much to replace my 7B STs, due to a slight deviation from the legendary neutrality of the Bryston sound. They sounded a bit closer to the typical audiophile tastes, presenting a

sound a bit more "hi-fi" in the negative sense of the term, a too "polished" sound to be fully comparable to what I was looking for. So, although with a little regret, I sent them back to the distributor, of course I wrote in a more than flattering way, they were great sounding amplifiers, and everything ended there.

Recently, as soon the B<sup>3</sup> Series became available in Italy, I was curious to hear the differences with my ST but also with the SST Series, after missing the "Squared" series, that I didn't audition at home. The Italian distributor agreed to send the "Squared" to my listening room. To tell the truth, I had asked for something less demanding for my back, but the message I received on my smartphone: "I will amaze you with special effects" made me lose a few hours of sleep. And I was right: the courier delivered some days later a pallet with two big and heavy boxes and the dreaded number: "28B". 42 kg each, plus packaging.

# BRYSTON CUBED - A MUCH BETTER LOOK

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The measured power into 8 Ohms is frightening: 1235 W instead of the 1000 specified. If this is not serious ...

THE DEMO IS EVERYTHING

Would you have sent them back? I don't, and I kept them. Of course I called my colleague and friend Domenico Pizzamiglio, that helped me to pull the amplifiers from the packaging. Great idea, I must say, the two rear handles of the 28s, which are almost indispensable to lift these heavy appliances without the risk of breaking your fingers through the heat sinks.

Let's describe the 28B<sup>3</sup>. On the front there is a thick aluminum plate (silver or black, on request), with two large horizontal grooves, while the huge printed brand, the inscription with the name of the model and the power switch, are located within a prominent frame on the front. A much better look, to my taste, than the previous Series. On request, you can have the front plate with two handles and 2" wider. 4 big feet hold up the heavy structure, which, however, has the advantage of not having too huge dimensions, in contrast to many competitors of equal - or less - performance. The sides are made up with the heat sinks. In this regard, it must

be assumed that the these amplifiers work in Class A till a good power output; after a few hours on, even at idle, I could no longer touch the amplifier sides, because of the really high temperature.

On the back side we notice the two large handles that, as we have said, are essential for the handling of the amplifier, the balanced and unbalanced inputs that can be selected with a switch. Then there are 4 beautiful output binding posts, allowing bi-wiring, the main power switch, to leave always on and the connections for the remote powering, in addition to the IEC socket for the cable power. Among the pictures, you will find the test board of one of these amps. The measured power into 8 Ohms is frightening: 1235 W instead of the 1000 specified. If this is not serious ...

The other measures are highlighted belong to an high-class equipment. We publish some photos of the inside layout, from which you can see the gigantic size of the toroidal power transformer (next page) and a filter-



# BRYSTON - WITHOUT ANY LISTENING FATIGUE

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The speed of the piano notes in "Home" is lightning fast and well supported

THE DEMO IS EVERYTHING



ing capacity up to 160,000 uF for each mono amplifier.

We will now speak of the Brystons sound, which were included in the following system: Turntable: Basis 2001 tonearm: Graham 2.2, cartridges: Lyra Kleos, phono preamplifier: Einstein "The Turntable's Choice", CD / SACD player: Yamaha CD-S3000, multimedia player: Oppo 105 D, preamplifier: MBL 4006, power amplifiers: Bryston 7B ST mono loudspeakers: JBL 4350B, interconnect cables: MIT Oracle MA-X Proline, MIT Shotgun S2 RCA, XLR Super Transparent, Transparent Super RCA, Way PH B 2.2 Ref XLR phono cable, loudspeaker cables: MIT Magnum MA, Vovox initio, USB cable: SL-Matrix USB MIT, power cables: MIT Shotgun AC 1, Black Noise Pearl and others DIY, mains distributor: Lector Edison 230/8, mains filter: Black Noise 2500.

"Blue Train", by John Coltrane (SACD Blue Note), it's a listening that does full justice to the skill of Rudy Van Gelder, who recorded the master tape (1957) and later edited this SACD remastering. The feeling of being present in the recording room is palpable. The complex patterns of the double bass performed by Paul Chambers are managed without any effort, and all the instruments are in perfect balance..

Another example of exceptional sound recording comes from Michel Petrucciani Trio, the Trio in Tokyo CD

(Dreyfus Jazz), sparkling in the 24-bit remastering, which is a nice step up from the original CD edition. A good system will make the effect to take you to the Blue Note to listen live what we unfortunately can't enjoy anymore, since Petrucciani passed away about 15 years ago. A note on one thing of which I will tell you more later: transparency. Transparency above all. These 28B<sup>3</sup> are transparent to any sound at low micro dynamics levels, and at the most excited orchestral fortissimo. In the introductions to the songs, I can distinctly hear the noise of the audience, noises that were almost hidden previously

The speed of the piano notes in "Home" is lightning fast and well supported by the JBL's compression drivers. The drum solo in the song that follows, actually listened to a volume equal to that of a live battery, is thrilling (also thanks to the fact that Steve Gadd is, in my opinion, among the best drummers in the world).

About drummers, I decided to listen to an old vinyl: "Spectrum" (Atlantic), by Billy Cobham. In this recording the drummer plays a Plexiglas drum kit and the "plastic" sound that emerges is clearly shown by our Brystons, that also still perform once more an incredible transient speed, and I have no difficulty in admitting that I have never heard so well this old vinyl, which is on the shelves in my house since 1975. The bass was impressive, more extended than with my reference, but never out of place or inaccurate. All this, combined with the excellent technique of the American drummer and the other performers, makes this record a must-listen. The volume is very high, but without listening fatigue.

While I was working on this review, I happened to read on Facebook a message by an audiophile who com-

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plained about the sound of "Trespass" by Genesis. He wrote, in truth, about the CD version, while I own the original pressing vinyl and the SACD remastering. I picked up the vinyl and put it on the Basis, to see if that were the case and take the opportunity to listen to an album that was almost forgot on my shelf. I do not know what damage they did in the CD remastering, but it seems strange that the result can be bad as expressed by that friend. It seems to me that the recording is indeed beyond the average of the rock productions at that time. The two big Brystons, sent to my JBLs an impressive sound, rich in detail. Peter Gabriel's voice is delicate and biting at the same time. Yet, another, exciting performance of the two Canadian amplifiers, that withdraw into the shadows and let the emotion flow.

The Brahms' 4th Symphony played by the Columbia Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bruno Walter (Sony Classical SACD) is a triumph of strings, winds and percussion, in a wide and well developed in depth soundstage, with a great respect of the instruments colours. The direction of Walter gives to this performance a unique interest, even after 57 years from the recording. The analog master tape background hiss pass by unnoticed even in the pianissimo, so much is the pathos that this performance provides. The Brystons can play with the smoothness of a single ended triode amplifier, as violently as the musical message dictates, always with the utmost transparency and an iron control on the speakers' drivers motion. No distortion, no listening fatigue (of course, they can drive every loudspeaker in the market), no harshness in the sound, a really subtle grain, that I couldn't hear it. Nothing seems to stand between music and listener.

Even the "Misa Criolla" by Mercedes

Sosa (CD Universal) in the remastering of 2010, highlights particulars unknown previously. Flute and guitar suddenly emerge from the absolute silence with strength and realism. The beautiful voice of the Argentinian contralto is moving, and I'm worried at the thought than these 28Bs will have to leave from my home early.

What else to add to the performances I've just told you? We must review by subtraction, as when you find yourself listening to the top champions. These Bryston 28B Cubed sound with no color, no filters, they don't add and they not hide anything. They don't cut the harmonics and they don't squeeze dynamics. They don't suffer any speaker load, they will not be in trouble behind the lowest sensitivities, or the larger rooms. And, let's be clear, will not be in trouble even before the most critical ears. The price? Insignificant detail, if you can afford them. There's a lot of stuff around, that costs more and doesn't sound as good.

**These amplifiers are THE MUSIC, no lies, no hy-fi sounds, no inventions or fascinating but false fireworks. The music. Full Stop.**

Unfortunately, I can not keep them, because they are too powerful for my 97 dBs sensitivity speakers, but there's a thing I can do. And I did it: I ordered the smaller brothers 7B<sup>3</sup>. Without a listen? No problem, I know Bryston since many years now, and I know they will sound the same way. We'll talk about them when they'll be here.

It took over 10 years of listening to a lot of stuffs, to replace my old Bryston 7B STs, and who could do it, if not Bryston?

Angelo Jasparro