

Bryston 4B-3: Bryston Expands the Square

Bryston 4B-3 (Cubed) Power Amplifier

Source: Bryston

Rating: It wouldn't be here if it didn't rate way above average

I have followed the developments of Bryston products for about 30 years, reviewed most of them and therefore decided that, at age 80 and mainly retired, I'd take one more look and listen to the new 4B amp of the recently introduced series which Bryston calls Cubed.

Before I get to the nitty-gritty, I'd like to mention that I have been called a shill and proponent for Bryston — and that I am not. I am, however, after fifty-plus years in the audio industry, a staunch ambassador for the industry. Anyhow, rumours are what they are and likely began because I have reviewed Bryston products since about 1987, shortly after I had begun publishing The Inner Ear Report. I have reviewed the 3, 4, and 7Bs, before they were SST and Square models. And I have lived with a pair of 7Bs SST Squared for a few years in my system, listened to the amps with a great variety of loudspeakers and, thus, am intimately familiar with their sonic signature under all sorts of conditions. Having said this, I also like to mention my reviewing philosophy — my system of thought based on my twenty-five years of experience investigating all things audio. It begins by acknowledging that all amps have signature, colour, voice and flavour — that's personality, hue, timbre and emotional impact. The new amplifier utilizes Bryston's recently developed circuitry design which has changed — actually improved — many of its earlier sonic elements. These changes may well be apparent with all new models in the Cubed Series, but this report is solely about the 4B. I am, however, looking forward to an audition of Bryston's top-of-the-line 28B Cubed coming at a later date.



Technology anyone?

All I want to say about the amplifier's technology is that it —as in all Cubed Series amplifiers — incorporates a brand new circuit design of the input stage — the "Salomie" input stage, named after its designer and patented by Bryston. According to Bryston, this new (Salomie) input stage is more linear than that of any amp they had produced before this series. The 4B's power rating is 300 watts/channel into an 8 ohm load, 500 w/ch into an 4 ohm load and 900 watts in bridged (mono) mode. (I also ran the amp into a 16 ohm speaker load which would be around 150 w/ch).

Bryston claims a lower noise floor, and that may well be so, but I always thought that didn't need to improve. Does it help? I'm guessing it does, not because I can hear this, but it is likely the reason why in pianissimo (very soft) as well as in dynamic (energetic) musical passages the sound has become more relaxed, more natural in the presentation. For a lot more information simply click on http://www.bryston.com/products/power_amps/4B-3.html

The Sound

The new amps' overall sonic element is now smoother and more organic in nature than all previous models, including the SST Squared 7B which I have listened to for a few years. Compared with the 7Bs, the new 4B's upper midrange is gentler and more melodious — less aggressive sounding when one listens to brass or other potentially hard-sounding instruments. However, detail remains realistically potent, without exaggerated presence — a real treat for those of us looking for the organic presentation of sound. The amplifier qualifies for the audio industry trade's jargon in describing sound. It offers many of the characteristics of a premium amplifier, such as warm, detail, transparent, dynamic and, to me the most important — musical. This is apparent on a very wide range of music I used for the evaluation. Brass, in the earlier design could be harsh at times; in this new amp, it has the bite all right, but now without the hit between the eyes — and that, my friends, is a major improvement, even over the 7B SST Squared model I had in house for a long time. Strings — part of all large orchestras — do have what I perceive as just the right touch of their natural hardness sans added edge or harmonic shortcomings. In fact, orchestral music has organic power, detail and superb spatial information which allows pianissimo passages, solo instruments and dynamics to coexist and blend well on a rather realistically wide and deep sound stage. Even though the old 7Bs did this better, I did not feel short-changed in my set-up. This amp (the Cubed 4B), though not top-of-the-line and relatively inexpensive, is possibly the best choice for those looking for maximum emotional impact from their playback source of the music.

For most of my auditioning sessions, I used a **Wytech Ruby** preamplifier, the **Bryston BDP 2** player and **BDA 2 DAC** and my **Ethera Vitae** loudspeakers, all wired up with **Nordost** cables — the upscale ones, but not the Odin.

Summary

The amp has that certain something that's desirable when listening to reproduced music; that's textural relaxation and a sort of easy going force that gets the music listener's attention. The end-result is, in my opinion, a superb amplifier that just so happens to be solid state. It's got some of a good tube amp's personality — its musical signature — whereby it nearly matches some of the tonal elements of a good single-ended tube design, here with the punch power of a really capable SS amplifier. I find that it delivers more elegance and better harmonic completeness than its predecessors. I like the way it handles timbral purity and presents detail and sound-stage perspicuity of fine jazz, blues and classical music recordings. The Cubed 4B broadens the scope of usefulness -- greater choice of speakers -- with real-world power, to perform where traditional micro-powered amps won't go. It allows listeners to assemble a sound system of high calibre that has everything one requires to enjoy the music. The 4B Cubed is one of the few amplifiers of which I know where careful listening and a good system set-up can transport one from the doldrums of merely good to the rank of excellence.

MODELS

Bryston 4B-3 (Cubed)

RATING



PRICE

\$5,695.00 each (US & CDN)

Dimensions

MANUFACTURER

Bryston Ltd.

CONTACT

BRYSTON LTD.
677 NEAL DRIVE
PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO
CANADA
K9J 6X7
PHONE: 705 742-5325

a