



MEMO: To all Bryston Customers
SUBJECT: Inner Ear Review Of Bryston BP26/MPS-2 Preamp

March 28, 2005

Bryston C-Series BP26 & MPS-2 Power Supply

Source: Bryston Ltd.

Price: \$3,195.00 US (DAC Option + \$1,000) - \$3,695.00 Canadian (DAC Option + \$1,200)

Rating: 4 Musical Notes

Bryston is Canada's oldest electronics manufacturer, in business over forty years. The company's business is twofold catering to both, the professional and the consumer electronics markets within the audio industry. As the audio business grew and evolved, Bryston developed multi-channel components for the studio, stage and home theatre. The multi-channel market - both the professional and consumer electronics segments - embraced Bryston products and made the company one of the premium players in the field. However, Bryston never ignored two-channel audio and, over the past few years, introduced modern, powerful and musically pleasing designs. The preamplifier under review is Bryston's most recent component, made for high-end two-channel audio. Although a new preamplifier, it features many traditional Bryston design essentials. Nevertheless, the new BP26 offers many improvements, beginning with the...

Appearance



The preamplifier is made up of two cosmetically matched components (available in black or silver), which sport brand new (and rather attractive) 17 or 19 inch faceplates. Both units are about two inches high, ten inches deep and 12 inches wide – slightly taller than the previously reviewed BP25 (Vol. 15 #4) main unit. The power supply, a small component in the previous model, is now the same size as the new BP26 preamplifier and a perfect match. Except for the toggle switch for (optional) DAC 1 and 2, the main unit's faceplate layout is basically identical to

the BP-25. However, whereas the older unit had the unpretentious look of but another component, the BP26 features a sculptured Bryston logo on the units' left, a more massive faceplate and an overall improved, contemporary look.

The controls in the unit's faceplate are arranged in logical order and include (from left to right) a tape monitor toggle switch and a rotating selector switch for seven inputs (including two balanced). The balance control is centered, followed by the volume control, a polarity toggle (for absolute phase) and the mute toggle. On/off switches for both units are located on the far right. The rear panel accommodates all inputs and includes two pairs of XLR (balanced) as well as two sets of RCA and one set of XLR outputs. The BP-26 comes with a quick connect remote 12 volt trigger input and output, switchable 'mute' triggers on each of the 4 outputs, a remote control for volume, mute and phase as well as a headphone jack.

Technology:

Some improvements in parts selection and circuitry changes have been kept hush-hush. However, some technical elements have been maintained to ensure low intermodulation distortion (less than .0015% from 20 to 20kHz) provide an amazingly low noise floor and eradicate crosstalk (signal bleeding from one channel to the other). All internal components plug directly into glass-epoxy circuit boards, thereby removing fluctuations in the signal path. Switches and connectors are gold plated for maximum, uncompromised coupling. Gold plated balanced and unbalanced input and output connectors are standard. Buffered inputs secure optimal electrical isolation, consequentially providing very low distortion and improved linearity from source components. The unit(s) boast ground planes to curtail crosstalk and noise throughout the internal circuitry.

All of the above is but one part of the preamplifier's design and, though important, we believe that the preamplifier's improved musical quality is a direct result of the upgraded, elaborate power supply. It is a high current output unit that allows attachment of up to four different Bryston components. Its noise floor and distortion rating is almost unmeasurable. Aided by a huge, new ultra-low-noise power transformer and 68,000 MFD of capacitance, the circuit design is mirror imaged and fully discrete. It is also immune to AC current and voltage fluctuations and provides the main unit with a constant bi-polar DC power of 37 volts. The BP26 preamplifier checked out at 0.00107% distortion with a signal to noise ration of 105.71dB unbalanced and 101.23 dB balanced. A 12 volt AC/DC screw terminal connector on the rear of the power supply provides the convenient remote start feature available on all Bryston amplifiers.

Our unit came with a (optional) built-in DAC, though a phono stage can be accommodated in the same space. If both are desired, an external phono preamplifier (BP1.5) with MM, MC, or both can plug directly into the same power supply. Bryston opted to stay with the same DAC offered in the BP25 - a top of the line device made by Crystal (CS43122), but quality controlled and hand-selected by Bryston. The DAC handles 192/24 and is a very conscientious design that secures signal integrity with an exclusive oscillator clock before the signal conversion is passed to the analogue output stage. It's based on a proprietary, discrete, patented Class A design with separated discrete op amps. The DAC offers 96kHz, 24-bit word capability with an input sample rate from 16kHz to 108kHz.

The Sound:

We employed the BP-26 with it siblings, the 7B-SST monoblocks (reviewed in Vol.15 #1) as well as the Wyetech Labs Sapphire monoblocks (reviewed in Vol. 16 #2). The systems were

auditioned with our Editor's Ethernite loudspeakers and a pair of PSBs (reviewed in this issue). Wiring was accomplished with Nordost and Straight Wire speaker cables and interconnects and source components included a CD player with digital out from Synthesis (to be reviewed) and a Magnum MD 106T (reviewed in Vol. 15 #4).

We tested the DAC in our review of the BP25, but checked it again by connecting the digital out from the Synthesis player to the DAC's input on the BP26. The Synthesis¹ built-in DAC - an Anagram device - was used connected to one of the BP26 inputs. ***Simply switching from one input to the BP26's DAC allowed us a direct and quick comparison. Selections from our usual CD collection from jazz, blues and classical music quickly revealed that sonic differences were less than dramatic, but clearly more musical with the Bryston's DAC in the circuit. The Bryston DAC performed the digital functions flawlessly but regenerated those digits into very musical analogue information. Though we used the same transports (Synthesis also uses a Philips) the sonic attributes of the Bryston were immediately heard: more harmonics, more 'bloom' and a touch better imaging.***

The older Bryston preamplifiers sounded a bit cut and dry, whereas the new BP26 introduced noticeably better tonal textures, harmonics and much sweeter sounding high frequency information. ***Here are the elements which differ and show improvements from the earlier design(s): Bass is not only resolute (as it was in the older model), but now delineates harmonics above the fundamentals - that's more musical and more pleasing, Midrange, the important frequency where most instruments and everything vocal takes place, was resolute in the older model. In the BP26, resolution is maintained, however, along with fundamental information, harmonics add a musical glow, almost sweetness to the sound - and this musicality doesn't come at a price, because inner detail, space and focus are preserved. The BP26's high frequencies are outstanding. They are more graceful in nature, more organic in texture and performed without a hint of strain. The effortless reach into the highs completes musical information from start to finish and always with that special glow we call musicality.***

Synopsis & Commentary:

Our contact at Bryston, James Tanner, informed us that the BP26 employs most of the original components of the BP25, although some small circuit and parts changes have been implemented, mainly to better adapt to the new power supply. However, the new MPS-2 can be used with some of Bryston's older preamplifier models - the BP20 and the BP25. This should be considered a sensible upgrade, as it will raise the performance level several notches - a very audible improvement for about \$1,200 US. With the new BP26 (and power supply) Bryston has entered the high-end, high performance segment of the market. While Bryston's earlier preamplifiers were good, the aphorism often was 'for the money'. This is no longer true for the BP26/MPS-2 preamplifier, although we admit that the price is still within sensible limits. The modest price of this preamplifier and its superb DAC doesn't suggest shoddy workmanship or mediocre parts - on the contrary, Bryston's production work is first rate and the components used in all their designs are of top quality. What has changed dramatically is the company's understanding of consumer demand to which they have responded with a component worthy of the term high-end.