



Hifi & Records

The Magazine for High Quality Music Reproduction

BRYSTON BP 26: "World Class has been reached"

Breakthrough

Test: Bryston BP 26 Preamp

With the new BP 26 Preamp the Canadians are offering a preamp which tonally reaches the level of the first class SST Power Amplifiers.



How rapidly time passes. It's hard to believe that three years have already passed since our presentation of the last incarnation of the Bryston preamp. At that time the "new" BP 25 preamp replaced the "old" 25 preamp which had been manufactured unchanged for many years.

A similar long construction period was enjoyed by the ST power amplifiers of the Canadians, which were only replaced at about the same time as the 25 by the "SST" series. The sensationally superb 14B SST power amplifier was added as a proud and mighty Bryston flagship. The quality rise from "ST" to "SST" was enormous and certainly the reason that this power amplifier series is continuing to be built as heretofore unchanged. Why is that different with the preamp? In July 2002 I attributed a considerable quality increase in the BP 25 preamp compared to its predecessor as follows:- "This preamp took a decisive leap forward, it clearly became more lively and more transparent, without losing its well known basic tonal charm, which is obviously a part of the concept of this preamp. No trace anymore of a leisure gait ... Now the House of Bryston offers, besides a really first-rate sounding preamp, also a genuine world class power amplifier at a very reasonable price."

However despite the excellence of the BP 25, it just wasn't "world class." The "SST" power amplifier simply played in a different league. No more and no less- period. Nevertheless since I do not make the claim to be the only one who hears properly, there was perhaps one or another person at Bryston who reached a similar audible conclusion, and then this or that person perhaps asked this or that developer to once more "trim" the Bryston preamp in order to shorten, or perhaps eliminate, the difference between the quality of the power amps and quality of the preamps. So it was perchance. It even sounds plausible to me, especially since mere face-lifting was never Bryston's way of life. And indeed face-lifting took place much more significantly from the BP 25 to the new BP 26, than from the "early" BP 25 to the "late" BP 25. Both the front panel, as well as the remote control, enjoy an increase in mass, i.e. weight. The front panel became thicker and now conveys true "High-End" feeling, and the remote control became overall larger and despite that, or perhaps because of that, lies better in one's hand. The operating knobs were also reworked and are now more rounded, but the size of the preamp has remained the same.

The external MPS 2 power supply provides the greatest evidence of change. What was for years just a little box with a mousy impression, is now a separate component with the same size as the preamp. Placed one on top of the other – the steel cabinets permit this thanks to their electromagnetic shielding properties – both components together convey the impression of a full-blown preamplifier, which just by its appearance already makes the heart of every high-ender beat faster.

Bryston equipped the power supply cabinet with a (for preamp technology) visibly over dimensioned 200 VA toroidal transformer, and hearty filter capacity of 68,000 Mfd. Not bad. Input buffering takes place in the preamp itself, i.e. right where it is most meaningful. A total of four power output jacks are provided, but since merely one is used for the BP 26 preamp, it must be assumed that we are dealing here with a central power source for future Bryston components. There are rumors about a CD player, but even then capacity remains for two additional components. Perhaps an active crossover network or an external phono stage or DAC?

Our test sample already had the phono stage on board. Its build-up conforms to the well known and justly highly praised quality of the Bryston phono module with its incorporated MC transformers. As an alternative to the phono stage there is a D to A converter, which strengthens my suspicion that an external phono stage supported by the ample power supply could be planned. Or perhaps an external D to A converter, in case the phono stage is already on board the preamp. And thus we would have already used up all of the four outputs of the power supply.

Furthermore the remaining topology of the preamp with its completely balanced construction seems to be extremely familiar, if one has looked inside one of the preceding models. One really has to look more closely if one wants to discern the differences. For example there is a refined circuit board layout with shorter circuit paths and a double layer substrate. But what one can only detect by looking exceedingly closely, and in direct comparison with the BP 25, is the use of newer, supposedly significantly better semiconductors. From a measurement point of view the new semiconductors are supposedly responsible for once again considerably reducing intermodulation distortion – a discipline in which the Bryston preamps and power amplifiers were always ahead of the game. But also the area of signal-to-noise-ratio has been “thinned out” in favor of the smallest useful signals which are so important in the matter of spatial replication. The critical crosstalk between the input sources prevalent during the preceding decades has been lowered to such a degree by Bryston that it may be considered to be virtually non-existent. Last but not least each BP 26 preamp, unit for unit, is hand assembled with great care and then burned in for one hundred hours before it starts its journey to the customer. In addition there is the legendary 20-year transferable manufacturers warranty. This warranty in of itself is indeed nothing new at Bryston, however one cannot point often enough to this unparalleled feature, especially since the warranty service in Germany is handled by the competent and accommodating staff at Sun Audio.

Everything appears to be very ship-shape, and indeed it is. But there remains clarification of the crucial question, how does the new Bryston preamp sound? Does it offer the wished for leap ahead into the class of the SST power amplifiers? **Apparently the most recent incarnation of the Bryston preamp cannot and does not refute the charm of its warm basic tone, and why should it? A leap forward in the area of transparency can indeed be reported. No, not the announced “large” leap forward of the later BP 25 preamp from the former closed in, thick, tonal representation of the earlier BP 25 but rather a “GIGANTIC” leap into the middle of the illuminated world of sound of the SST power amplifiers, which permits one to listen into the most minute details of the musical happening, and which also exposes the last cranny of the stage.** One can already discern the gain of information from the voice of the newscaster, which now arrives from where it must come from, namely the larynx, and not from a ribcage enlarged down to the belly.

The audiophile for whom this is not enough evidence, should quickly reach for one of her/his favorite records. For example, for the Schubert compositions for violin and piano with Pamela

and Claude Frank on Arte Nova. Not really a paragon of recording engineering know-how, but nevertheless soundly recorded, and with musical lows, so that one can confidently set aside the oversupply of so called star violinists and wonder pianists. **With the Bryston 14B SST power amp and the Revel F32 speakers the BP 26 preamp presents, thanks to its high resolution, daughter and father Frank with true live feeling on a level which suggests a rare shiver of voluptuousness. Now the world around one can simply cease to be, after all there's Schubert, and the new Bryston component.**

Now where does the BP 26 reside in reference to its predecessor or even to my personal favorite the Mark Levinson 320S? In the case of the ML 320S the listener is almost pulled into the Schubert World of music. Now not only the world can cease to be, but also the entire universe, since the Levinson digs still a bit deeper into the most miniscule information in the recording. But it is also perfectly clear that the new Bryston BP 26 preamp is unquestionably nearer to the ML 320S than to its predecessor, the BP 25.

Conclusion

It has been achieved. Now there is finally also a preamp from Bryston on the high level of the actual SST power amplifiers. Hence the time has finally passed in which the demanding owner of a Bryston power amplifier had to "go outside" in order to make complete use of its tonal capacity. Congratulations to the Canadian tonal magicians who once again understood to devote enough time to refine an already carefully thought-out preamplifier concept until WORLD CLASS had been achieved.

Reinhold Martin

Laboratory Report

Frequency Response: Bryston BP 26

Distortion: Bryston BP 26

Signal to Noise: Bryston BP 26

Bryston BP 26 Preamplifier balanced

Amplification factor	16.5 dB
Maximum Output Voltage	31.5 Volts
Input Impedance	-k ohms
Output impedance	141 ohms
Distortion (THD+N)	0.0016%
IM-Distortion (SMPTE)	0.004%
IM-Distortion (CCIF)	0.0005%
External Voltage	-81.4 dB
Noise Voltage (A rated)	-92.9 dB
Channel Difference	0.12 dB

DC-Exit-Offset

<0.2 mVolts

At least two zeros behind the decimal point for the distortion values, large signal-to-noise ratios, and gigantic reserves with the maximum output voltage:- Bryston, as expected, has not omitted anything with its new top-of-the-line preamplifier (we obtained the measured data respectively from the balanced Input and Output). However one must also acknowledge that the BP 26 preamp sits on an equally high level when viewed from a technical measurement perspective.

Bryston BP 26 Preamplifier

Dimensions: W x H x D (incl. Power Supply)	44 x 13 x 32 cm. 17 x 4.5 x 11 inches
Warranty	20 Years - 5 Years on DAC
Price	3.500 Euro (with phono 4.500 Euro)
Distributor	Sun Audio Schneckenburger Straße 30 81675 Munich, GERMANY
Telephone	089 – 47 94 43

CAPTIONS

Separate components of the Bryston BP 26 preamp:- Signal processing takes place in the upper cabinet, while in the lower one there is plenty of room for the current supply.

The Bryston BP 26 preamp accepts both balanced as well as unbalanced sources. The power supply can also supply additional Bryston components.

Translated from the German by Peter Ullman