

August 2005

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## Expert Assessment Of The Raysonic SP-100

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I love integrated amps. One less pair of interconnects to worry about, one less power cable, and an opportunity to provide an ideal electrical match between the preamplifier output stage and the power amplifier. And I also like saving shelf space. All this before we even consider the cost savings involved. In fact I have always owned an integrated amp, never separates. The most recent examples have been the YBA Integr? Plinius 8150 and Perreaux R200i. Of course I am forgetting several Meridian preamps used directly with active speakers, but that's another story.



Toronto based Raysonic have recently introduced a pair of tube based integrated amplifiers. Designed in Toronto and built to a high standard in China, these two amps differ in their choice of power tube. The \$1,899 50 wpc SP-120 employs four KT88s to do the heavy lifting, while today's review examines the \$1,799 40 wpc EL34 based SP-100. Both amps use twin 6SN7 tubes for the driver stage and twin 12AT7 tubes for voltage gain, and are almost identical in appearance. Circuitry is ultralinear "Class AB." A massive toroidal power supply and two very substantial output transformers contribute to the 43 pound weight. Careful when you lift it. All the weight is at the back!

The fit and finish is exemplary, with the exception of the cheap plastic remote. Controls are at a minimum ?just a choice of four inputs and volume control, with the volume level and input number shown on a large central LED. On the side of the unit is a power on/off and the rear has substantial RCA connectors for the four inputs and high quality binding posts for a single set of speakers, with your choice of 4 Ohm or 8 Ohm taps. Life doesn't get much simpler.

I'm not going to judge this amplifier by how it compares to other tube based amps. I'm a great believer in judging all equipment, be it an iPod one week or a Mark Levinson the



next, by the same standards. How close is the sound to what I can hear in the concert hall or jazz club. My reference amp is transistor based, the Perreaux Radiance 200i and I will make no allowances.



Fortunately, I don't have to. This inexpensive amp puts up a strong performance, and I've been enjoying my time with it. It doesn't have the ultimate resolution or deep bass authority of the reference, but it is eminently musical, uncolored, and vibrant and it projects a big sound. It was a good match for the Wilson Benesch Act 1 loudspeakers, which take quite some current to satisfy. The Act 1s sound more comfortable and lively on the 8Ω binding posts. Where the Raysonic comes up short is in the area of dynamics. It doesn't have the dynamic range I've come to love in the Perreaux, and having just come back from the Toronto Jazz Festival, listening to Joshua Redmond and Kenny Garrett, I can assure you live music has the most amazing dynamics that even the Perreaux cannot match. My ears are still ringing!

You'll need that remote control if you want to make quick changes to the volume level, since the rotary dial needs three complete revolutions to cover its range. The remote can cover the range quickly, but it does need to be used from directly in front and pointed in the right direction. With this amplifier, you don't need to change the volume that often ?it sounds good even when playing at low volume levels.

Another strong point in its favor ?it provides a great match for my AKG K1000 ear speakers (headphones to everyone but AKG). The K1000s can sound a little thin in the bass and peaky in the treble with many transistor amps, but showed an improved balance with the SP-100, on a par with the reference. A headphone output would be a great addition to this amplifier, unless of course you have K1000s, which are driven directly from the speaker outputs. The Perreaux gives a higher resolution sound, but the Raysonic is more relaxed and better balanced through the frequency band. This eliminates any long term listening fatigue. There is simply no background noise with this amplifier, even with the volume turned up to maximum and my ear close to the tweeter. This allows the music to flow and to sound its best, even without the widest range of dynamics. Well done Raysonic, a remarkable achievement in a tube amplifier!

I've been listening to a lot of different music through the Raysonic, and not just because I needed to just to assess the sound for this review. I could have stopped after the first few discs because my conclusions are the same on just about every track. Not every piece of equipment that passes through my house can claim that distinction.

## And The Music...

First up are the Bach *Cello Suites*, in a fabulous performance by Pierre Fournier [Archiv 449711-2]. Why is it so many of the world's great cellists are French? Fournier's tone is a little less red-blooded than the reference, but thrilling and musical and faithful to the rather nasal string tone I remember from live performance. Fournier was an old man when I saw him, many years ago, at a Promenade Concert in London's Albert Hall. This would be one of my *desert island discs*.

Another favorite, from a very different world, is Cuban pianist Rubén Gonzales [Nonesuch 79477-2]. Again the dynamic range is dialed back a bit, and the resolution is not especially high, but the pacing, energy and tone color are all exemplary and the image is coherent.

"You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" from *Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section* is warm and relaxed with wide stereo separation. Percussion is clear and extended and by no means aggressive. Transient snap is quite good but not exceptional. The tenor sax tone is tight, the bass is well captured and again there is a good sense of pace. Again the image is wide but this time there is a bit of hole in the middle.















"Alfie's Theme", played by Sonny Rollins on the soundtrack to the movie *Alfie* [Impulse IMPD-224] is a particularly fine achievement sonically and musically. The Perreaux nails this track, excitement, tone color, subtle details, burnished brass and all. The Raysonic rather pales in comparison here. The music, once raucous, is now tamer, more beautiful, less of a match to the rough-edged character on screen. I put this down to the loss of resolution and explosive dynamic range the Perreaux has in abundance.

The Raysonic fares much better in Arthur Rubinstein's superb recording of the *Funeral March Sonata* by Chopin, recently re-released on the JVC XRCD label JM XR24008]. The piano sound is marginally less open than through the reference, but the full tonal beauty of Rubinstein's playing is evident. Nobody produces a more beautiful sound from a piano, but there is still a sharp difference in what you hear through these two amps. The Perreaux gives you menace and clear gradations of weight between the sections, while the Raysonic, which doesn't do menace, better captures the full weight and wide tonal palette Rubinstein has to offer.

So while the Raysonic behaves predictably, disc after disc, my enjoyment varies widely with the importance a full dynamic range and high levels of detail have to the music. Thumbs up to Mozart's *Piano Concerto No 23*, played and conducted by Daniel Barenboim [EMI Classics CMZ 67878] and Bruckner's *Symphony No. 6*, conducted by Otto Klemperer [EMI CDM 7633512]. Thumbs down to The Katona Twins playing Piazzolla [Channel Classics CCSSA 19804] and the startling "Summertime" from *The Best of Billy Stewart* [MCA 088112369-2]. The Mozart in fact wins the nod as the best sound the Raysonic has to offer. The piano is meltingly beautiful, the orchestra warm and open. The woodwinds are nicely captured, and the whole piece has an organic feel, with a touch of intimacy.

## A Winning Blend

For a \$3,000 amplifier, this would be a good performance, but for well under \$2,000 I think Raysonic have a winner here. In a perfect world, I would increase the gearing of the volume control, offer a more substantial remote, redesign the tube guards, and I would make the bias user adjustable. But these are minor quibbles. There's a lot to like here. Next up from Raysonic are the lower powered but more upscale SP-30 and SP-50. I'm looking forward to auditioning these soon.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	
High-frequencies (3,000Hz on up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape width front	
Soundscape width rear	
Soundscape depth behind speakers	
Soundscape extension into the room	
Imaging	
Fit and Finish	

Self Noise	
Value for the Money	

## Specifications

Type: Stereo integrated tube amplifier

Output Power: 40 watts per channel

Input Sensitivity: 350 mV

Input Impedance: 100 kOhms

Harmonic distortion: < 1%

Frequency Response: 20Hz to 40kHz

Signal / Noise Ratio: 88dB

Input: 4 line level inputs

Finish: Stainless steel with gold accents

Speaker output terminals: 4 Ohm or 8 Ohm

Dimensions: 17.3" x 13" x 7.7" (WxHxD)

Weight: 43 lbs.

Price: \$1,799

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