

May 2010

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World Premiere

Raysonic SP-200 Integrated Stereo Tube Amplifier

Can it speak softly and carry a Big Stick?

Review By Phil Gold

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How time flies! It has been five years since my first review of a Raysonic integrated amp ?the [40 watt SP100 as seen at this link](#). This new amp, the SP-200, weighs half as much again, puts out over twice the power and is a darned sight better looking. Gone are the sharp edges and gaudy gold trim. Now we have a beautiful rounded monochromatic chassis for the SP-200, and Raysonic has reissued the SP100 in Mk II form with similar cosmetic upgrades. So now Raysonic amps really look the part ?people may guess they cost well over the asking price. And that asking price is just \$2990 for the new SP-200. Once again we have three large towers at the back of the top plate ?two large output transformers flanking one enormous power supply. All the weight being concentrated at the back makes the amp difficult to carry, but how often will you move a 66 lbs component? The front mounted controls are a joy to use and give a most luxurious feel to the unit. Instead of a knob to control input you now have a dedicated button for each source. Select CD and the button illuminates. Better yet, select Mute from the solid aluminum remote and the mute indicator lights up and the source button light goes out ?a very nice touch.



The back of the unit is laid out equally well with a choice of high quality binding posts (for four ohm and eight ohm speakers) and four sets of unbalanced input jacks, plus a power socket. For a change, the input jacks are well spaced so anyone using oversized interconnect plugs (like those on my EMM Isopath cables) is in no danger of shorting the leads together. Perreaux, are you listening?

Toronto-based Raysonic Audio design their amps in Canada but build them in China. The product range covers ten integrated amps, five CD players, a preamp, two power amps and reference monoblocs as well as an all in one unit featuring amp, CD player, tuner, iPod dock and toaster oven (scratch that). Th SP-200 is the most powerful integrated amp in the Raysonic range, followed by the SP-300 at 90 wpc ?go figure their naming convention!

The SP-200 uses four 12AU7 tubes and eight KT-88 tubes in an ultralinear Class AB configuration. Minimal negative feedback is applied. The eight power tubes, Raysonic branded KT-88s, can be individually biased by a technician with a voltmeter (*once a year if necessary*, the manual says). I think it's time Raysonic made provision for automatic bias adjustment, as some rivals do, or include an integrated meter so that users can make their own periodic adjustments. Raysonic back the unit with a 1 year limited warranty, 90 days for the stock tubes.

To complete the system I used the EMM Labs CDSA SE CD/SACD Player and Totem *The One* speakers on Target stands. Power cables were Nordost Valhallas, interconnects the aforementioned Isopaths and Atlas Mavros bi-wire speaker cables. I used the 4ohm taps for these gutsy low impedance speakers.

I got a big surprise when it came to the listening tests. Despite using a different source and speakers, my listening notes were almost identical to an amp I'd reviewed years ago, proving just how significant the amp is to the overall sound. And

you guessed it - the amp I'm talking about was the Raysonic SP-100. There were minor differences in the depth of the soundfield and of course the maximum sound pressure levels, but this is the strongest family resemblance between two amps from the same manufacturer I've ever experienced. I think that's a good thing. The designer knows exactly what he is looking for and can scale that sound up or down the range while adjusting the power output.

The SP-200 is a colorful, warm and easy to listen to amp, excelling in the midrange. The treble is not so much down in level as down in resolution. You might say the same about the bass. Imaging is fairly good, better in the left / right axis than for depth. But both the image and the level of resolution tend to collapse at extremes of musical complexity and volume, like in the climax to Brahms *Fourth Symphony* [CCS SA 28309]. The main fault then is a lack of dynamic range.

Listening Tests

Haydn *String Quartets* on original instruments [Astree E8786] give us lovely string tone. The cello is lighter-bodied than the reference, even with wall reinforcement for the Totems, which don't normally need any reinforcement. The background is silent with no hint of hum. While down a level in excitement, the imaging is solid and the tone realistic. Few amps are as successful as this one in bringing out the beauty of Rubinstein's playing in Chopin's *Funeral March* [JM XR24008], although missing in action is that wonderful feeling of power and passion the Bryston 4BSST reveals.

Sony Rollins cooks up a storm on *Alfie* [IMPD 224], with smooth refined brass but muted guitar and piano detail. The bass line is hinted at rather than fully resolved, although it remains pitch accurate and fast. Piano is soft and sweet rather than clear and articulated. On the plus side, each instrument is solidly located in space and appears fully independent, a result of that massive power supply I imagine. While the plucked bass swings tunefully, the sax seems tight, missing the air the Bryston provides.

MA on SA, a test disc from Crystal Cables, provides an excellent test of dynamics and here the SP-200 comes up short. Track 2 from *A Night in Budapest* sounds quite ordinary on this amplifier -- a jazz duet between piano and bass, but in fact it is one of the most extraordinary jazz recordings I know. By compressing dynamics here, the amp has drained all the magic out. Chopin's *Barceuse* shows similar compression - the playing is still lovely and spacious but on a much smaller scale than it should be.

Lilisondi Kinara's *Bambatulu* shows how quick the amp is, how well it does with funky rhythms, but again the energy level is down. Di Kinara's voice comes off brilliantly, soft and intimate. When the musical material is concentrated in the midrange it works best, but falls off in resolution and image depth off with strong bass or high hat percussion. Partly this is to be expected with tube amps, but as I mentioned in my previous Raysonic review, I don't make allowances. An amp should be even handed across the frequency range and throughout the dynamic range, or its not doing its job, be it glass or silicon-based.






The Well by Jennifer Warnes [SCD 2034] shows how enjoyable this amp can be. Timing is strong, the image stable, you've got all the elements working together. The forward recording compensates for the SP-200's rather set back perspective for an ideal soundspace. That wonderful Coleman Hawkins album *The Hawk Flies High* [USSACD 2030] is another successful example that suits the amp to a 'T' and *Kind of Blue* [CS 64935] by Miles Davis confirms how well the SP-200 fits well-recorded small scale jazz. Everything is as it should be and I had a hard time stopping mid-track.

The Beatles *Love* album [Capitol 0946379810 23] provides quite a letdown. The strings on *Eleanor Rigby* are aggressive, the four voices merge into each on in *Because* while *Get Back* loses its driving power. There's just too much energy on this record and the SP-200 just cannot cope. The Bryston is a revelation next to this. So the experience varies enormously from disc to disc. Piano highlights the dynamic deficiencies, and massed voices quickly show the limits of resolution. But the amp does a great job on female vocals, guitars, drums, woodwind, lower strings etc.

Summing It Up

There you have it. Here is an amp that is very fussy about the musical material you play. I can forgive a certain lack

of ultimate resolution as long as the timing is strong and the imaging three dimensional, but I am very demanding when it comes to realistic dynamics, and for that I may have to look elsewhere. Not everyone shares my predilection for full scale dynamics. In that case there is a lot to admire in this beautifully turned out tube amp. It has enough power and grip to drive most speakers as loud as you would care to listen in a decent sized listening room, and it will keep you very warm into the bargain. Those tubes operate very hot.

	SP-100	SP-200
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 Room		
Imaging		
Fit And Finish		
Self Noise		

Value For The Money



Specifications

Type: Vacuum tube stereo integrated amplifier
Output Power: 100 watts per channel into 4 or 8 Ohms
Vacuum Tubes: Eight Raysonic KT88 and four 12AU7
Transformers: Extended range C-core output transformers
Input sensitivity: 770 mV
Input Impedance: 100 kOhms
Harmonic Distortion: < 2% at full power, < 0.5% at 50 watts
Frequency Response: 8 Hz to 62 kHz (+0-1dB)
SNR: 96dB
Inputs: Four line level inputs via RCA jacks
Finish: All aluminum - black or silver
Speaker Output Terminals: 4 or 8 Ohms
Remote Control: Volume, mute and source
Dimensions: 17.7 x 14.6 x 8.7 (WxHxD in inches)
Weight: 66 lbs
Price: \$2990

Company Information

Raysonic Inc
P.O. Box 46565
Toronto, Ontario M1T 3V8
Canada

Voice: (416) 318-6038
Email: Sales@RaysonicAudio.com
Website: www.RaysonicAudio.com

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