

B135 SST² Integrated Amplifier by Bryston

Generations go by... Bryston remains



By **Adrien Rouah**

«- Have you heard? Bryston has two advertising slogans?
-Really? What are they?
-‘Fuel for your senses’
-I like that one! And the second?
-‘Music for a generation’
-Music for a generation and fuel for your senses, that’s very good; But why two slogans?
-I don’t know exactly but music for a generation, in my opinion that should now be: ‘music for multiple generations’».

Reading the booklet included with the B135 SST² integrated amplifier, one might ask how this manufacturer manages to give an unconditional and transferable guarantee of 20 years on its amplifiers and speakers, and 5 years on its digital circuits. Of course, the answer lies in the modernism of manufacturing departments, in the use of powerful software and the automation of assembly lines. But **Bryston** also insists on the fact that their employees are very proud to manufacture products of exceptional quality that

are made to last. It is true that in today’s world where devices require frequent upgrades, repairs, or even replacements, **Bryston** stands alone in fully endorsing the responsibility of all their products, all backed by an exceptional warranty. It should be noted that the economic sense of this policy of excellence as well as the sense of social responsibility which is to build devices that will last bring about ensuring reciprocal satisfaction: that of the manufacturer who sustained his business -a half century for **Bryston**!- and that of the customer who will never feel abandoned, or worse, injured by a product created to break in less time than it takes to order a cup of coffee.

Physical presentation

At first glance, one immediately notices the simplicity of design of this device which conveys ease of use. A thick but graceful front faceplate along with sides embellished by radiator fins for the power transistors give you an overall simple and pleasant look made to fit into any decor. On the faceplate, there are eleven small pushbuttons, a main control for volume, mini green LEDs, an infrared remote receiver and a standard ¼ inch

earphone jack. The **Bryston** logo appears to the right of the amplifier with its characteristic laser engraving.

The *B135 SST²* shipped was a basic unit, i.e. without optional circuits - phono or DAC - nor remote control. The prospective customers may, depending on their requirements, increase the potential enjoyment of this component by adding a Phono Board and/or a DAC card and have totally versatile integrated amplifier. The remote will of course be a welcomed aide. Although it could be deemed essential to drive the *B135*, I also understand that the manufacturer does not want to accompany all of its devices with an identical remote; and the **Bryston BR2** is the one and only remote control unit for all devices of the brand. As for connections, everything is clearly laid out with a comfortable spacing between the left and right channel *RCA* jacks which are longer than usual will allow to easily use your choice of patch cables, even those of very heavy gauge. So, we have 6 pairs of *RCA* inputs, a pair of outputs and a loop reserved for recording. A *RS232* connector will allow the *B135* to be incorporated into a **Creston**, **AMX** or any similar control type automation system. Speaker terminals are of good quality and allow easy connections of spades, banana plugs, or bare wires. Our test unit was silver but a black anodized version is also available.

Technology presentation

With its 135 watts per channel of power available at 8 Ω or 180 at 4 Ω , this amplifier already has very interesting power for home listening applications. Connected to a pair of speakers of acceptable performance (89 dB), then another pair given to 95 dB / 1w / 1 m, I won't be short of power. Great output requires ample power supply, and so we have here two toroidal transformers for voltage and current output and another, smaller transformer, for the control circuits and digital management. The highly dimensioned filtering capacity as well as a separation of the power supply into two completely separate sections (we are in dual full mono mode), we can be assured of never running out of power. The *B135 SST²* integrated amplifier by **Bryston** is not just a *B100* with increased power output, but rather a totally

redesigned version of its predecessor. The pre-amp section borrowed from the **Bryston ST3** processor and the amplifier section uses technology from the *SST²* series. So here is the main feature of the achievements of the Canadian company that will draw on its own engineering resources to offer us new or cleverly updated models. In other words, **Bryston** products are improved by **Bryston** and not by borrowing a few new technologies here and there or a few new electronic components that would only replace others that are already very efficient. As usual, each unit comes with its own technical specifications and the corresponding measurements; harmonic distortion, intermodulation distortion, power and noise level. A sort of health check describing the device after a hundred or so burn-in hours.

Listening

Prior to the selection of music that I will propose for the drafting of this article, I listened to a selection of music by drawing random shelves. Whatever the genre, the recording type, the location, it is easy to understand why **Bryston** is so successful around the world. It is a realistic and dynamic, true to life sound that we get from **Bryston** products, and the *B135 SST²* is a good example thereof. Immediately, we are close to the musicians, in the acoustic environment of the room, with the artists. You might ask yourself "isn't that what ALL good components are SUPPOSED to do?" Indeed, but the **Bryston B135 SST²** brings this presence, this constant feeling of « live » sound. With **Bryston** products, we tend to not do the analysis of reference disks, but we instead listen to music! Our desire to discover and rediscover favourite tracks brings about a fresh perspective on our music.

Entering the heart of the matter - evaluating our *B135 SST²* - with *Lights In The Dark* by **Hector Zazou** which, both from the artistic and technical points of view, is exceptional. It is my ultimate reference for voice recordings and those who know this record will understand what I mean by "my eliminator track": a foolproof! But not a thundering performance test, I do not seek to push the devices to their limits. My ultimate goal is to make an audio device do what it's supposed to do:

get the most musical enjoyment out of it. Track 4 from this album illustrated immediately that the *B135 SST²* is a remarkable achievement that immediately gives its full extent and accuracy, with a rare sense of musical emotion. I am (fortunately) not fluent in Gaelic and that means that I can better focus on the signer's voice, which she works just like a fine musical instrument. In the second track ("*The Seven Joys of the Virgin Mary*"), the harp and trumpet give a dizzying dimension to this heavenly female voice supported by a choir. The accuracy is simply remarkable, without undue emphasis and more so remarkably without dimensional blur. With the seventh track, also entitled "*The Seven Joys of the Virgin Mary*", and despite the fact that the liner notes booklet specifies that **Brenda Mayock** provides all main as well as backing vocals, the presence of a man's voice seems quite present, even more than what I'm accustomed to hearing, with a really distinct position in my listening room.

A quick change in musical atmosphere with **Betty Bonifassi's** powerful vocals beautifully set to music that would strain any shy or reserved amplifiers. With **Bryston's B135 SST²**, you get no sense of shyness from the amplifier; it fully reproduces the mood of the songs and it is dark, noisy and flows exactly as these songs of labour must. The dynamic range of the amplifier is quite spectacular, especially in nuances from faint, low volume sounds to very strong, high output notes and accents. So it is when instantaneous high output is required that one realizes that it is highly recommended to have speakers that can follow the musical programme! The use of railroad track nails for rhythmic emphasis in a hammered cadence sounded like chains, and the angry voice of **Betty Bonifassi** was reproduced with honors by the *B135 SST²*. This amplifier can get angry when it counts!

After songs of labour, **Jordi Savall** offers the entertainment of the *Folias Criollas*. This SACD with old world instruments and the masterful interpretation of these Lords of music allowed me to fully realize the possibilities of the **Bryston B135 SST²** nuances and subtlety. I mentioned earlier some discs that serve as reference when it comes to scrupulously check the smoothness of some components, well here's one! Indeed, if I feel any



lack, if an instrument seems more indented or reclusive than usual, or worse, if I perceive a lack of definition on this album, I tell myself that I am in the presence of a device that may deserve my attention but a bit less in the asking price! And in the case in point, the image I get exceeds my expectations, and this is true of the *CD* and *SACD* versions. The difference is clearly visible in the soundstage which is particularly lively. The powerful and angelic voice of **Montserrat Figueras** brings the amplifier to reproduce fine nuance where it really shines and seems to feel really comfortable.

About subtlety, **Titi Robin** fills the ears with his double album **Kali Sultana**. I absolutely wanted to listen to this kind of music - Oud, violins, viola and cello, for strings, in order to be able to tell a few picky audiophiles **Bryston** components are now not only reserved to the professional field but music lovers will also thoroughly enjoy their performance. For the *B135 SST²* from **Bryston**, it is still the definition and nuance that moves the most. You can feel all the hard work of development that was put in by the people of this Canadian company during the two years required for the development of this component that is NOT a souped-up version of the *B100*. The two proposed discs were delightfully reproduced and thoroughly enjoyed and the **Bryston B135 SST²** is the perfect accomplice for the celebration.

Conclusion

"We build many beautiful things in Canada, it's a shame that we do not know about them". This often heard sentence hurts me because it is sadly true. But if the writer of this article is allowed to add his voice to say that around the world, in many studios, halls and other cinemas, Bryston is recognized for superiority in amplification components, made to last, guaranteed for 20 years and musically at the cutting edge of technology, perhaps it can be understood that all these professional music professional did not err in choosing Bryston. Your fabulous *B135 SST²* will be guaranteed for 20 years but the musical emotion that it will stir up will be for life. Guaranteed!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price : 4 695 \$

Warranty : 20 years, parts and labour

Distributor : Bryston Limited, Tel. : 1.705.742.5325 or 1.800.632.8217, www.bryston.com

Discography

Hector Zazou, *Lights in the Dark*, Erato Detour, 2 21662

Betty Bonifassi, *First album solo*, L-Abe, LABECD 2005

Hespèrion XXI, *El Nuovo Mondo Folias Criollas*, Alix Vox, AVSA, 9876

Titi Robin, *Kali Sultana*, Naïve, WN145166

