Perreaux DP32/DP100p

I am going to start my first, new-format long review with a hated nation's product. Proudly made in New Zealand is not something I am comfortable with in any sense, being a good South African.

After all, whilst there may be more to life than rugby, I for one cannot fathom it. The All Blacks are the enemy and we should not deign to dignify them, or their miserable little country, with more than a disdainful sniff and perhaps a throaty *harumph* thrown in for good measure.

Nonetheless, being the dedicated sort of reviewer that I am, I decided to allow my prejudices to be suspended (*if only temporarily* - Ed) in the name of music.

I was almost immediately punished for this heinous crime by means of the latest addition to the Kelly clan bounding in from the garden and dislodging one of my much-loved, many-hours-listened-to Vivid Audio V1 speakers from its perch and onto the edge of the hi-fi stand. It unfortunately missed a bemused Dane in the process, and ultimately shattered in much the same way that Humpty Dumpty did.

> Just like their lock forwards, these New Zealanders are built impressively tough

Typical, I thought. After a few deep breaths and suppression of the urge to throttle said puppy, I set up my second favourite speakers of all times – my baby Xavian Mias. And let the Perreaux get on with things.

I used my new Yammie Blu-ray player as my source component, delivering its sonic wares in the analogue domain via conventional RCA inputs. This was the initial listening session I try to do with all high-end components: I scribble down a couple of notes during these, of highlights that immediately grab me.

A week or so later I decided to do some serious listening. This time, I used the DP32's digital-to-analogue conversion capabilities, connecting the Yamaha directly to the pre-amp via optical to get a feel for the digital side of things.

From the outset, the Perreaux pair impressed mightily. The units are slim in design, but one can feel the quality, the

tactile sensation and sheer weight behind the pair.

Just like their lock forwards, these New Zealanders are built impressively tough, and certainly the rear of the units (where all the cabling action happens) is a nice place to be. Everything there is reassuringly solid, logically laid out and well-labelled. For reference, both pre and power are balanced throughout, right through to a balanced digital input.

The front of the pre-amp is more touchy-feely, with soft-touch switching doing all the heavy lifting of selecting inputs, while the top-notch rotary volume control feels as if it operates on bearings made from silk and lubricated with baby oil.

The back-lighting of the individual inputs is simple and effective in letting you know where you are, and the on/off/standby button is duplicated on the amplifier, being the sole option for this unit. The two-tone brushed aluminium upper and black lowers, with the Perreaux name being the only insignia, is common to both units,and lends an air of class. They're not what one would call 'flashy'.

With the pre-amp locked and loaded onto its digital signal input from the Yamaha Blu-ray, I sat back and, as they say in the classics, "let 'er rip."

My initial notes comprised of a couple of comments: . "Detailed, pacey, reserved. Warm, rich, lush, full. Sublime trebles and very open sound stage. Good cover across the frequency range - bad recordings?"

This, along with other notes spanning about a page and half, are pretty much what I chucked out.

I'd love nothing more than to say the Perreaux pair was terrible, like the rugby team of their country of origin. But of course I'd be lying.

You can't ask this kind of money these days for 'old-fashioned' stereo amplification and produce rubbish. You'd be out of business or on a government tender faster than greased lightning. So I was expecting a decent level of performance.

But what I got exceeded expectations. The Perreauxs have a noise floor that is just about inaudible. They deliver music with such conviction that you simply don't realise just how loud they are playing, and you can get into speaker trouble in short order with them.

That power amplifier apparently has a rating of 100 watts, but in this case, 'sufficient' is the appropriate measure. The only indication I ever got that the amp was actually doing some work was when I felt how much it had warmed up during the listening session. That's a compliment of no small magnitude.

The pair continued to impress me with detail. 'Detail' is the word I use to try and convey a sense of a cohesion put together by the pair, in that because every wave form is being looked after, the result is that music sounds realistic.

VITAL STATS

DP32

Frequency response ..... 20 Hz - 20 kHz
Signal-to-noise ratio ..... 140 dB
Inputs ..... 1x USB (asynchronous 24/192) 1x AES/EBU (XLR)
2x digital coaxial (RCA) 2x digital optical (Toslink)
1x balanced/line-level (selectable) 1x line-level RCA (selectable)
Outputs ..... 1x balanced (XLR) 1x line-level (RCA)
Dimensions (WxDxH) ..... 431 x 305 x 67 mm
Weight ..... 8 kg

DP100p

Power output ..... 100 watts (into 8 ohms) 145 watts (into 4 ohm)
Frequency response ..... 20 Hz - 20 kHz
Signal-to-noise ratio ..... 120 dB
Inputs ..... 1x balanced (XLR) 1x line-level (RCA)
Dimensions (WxDxH) ..... 431 x 305 x 67 mm
Weight ..... 12 kg

PRICE
DP32 ..... R23 200
DP100p R20 900

VERDICT
These New Zealanders really can play. A tribute to the best of stereo, they prove the point that stereo still rules the high-end roost.

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OUR RATING: 84 / 100

Associated equipment

Yamaha BDA-1010 Blu-ray deck
Sony CD XA50ES CD player
Yamaha RX-V767 receiver
Marantz NA7004 network audio player
Thule Spirit integrated amplifier
Xavian Mia loudspeakers
Vivid Audio V1S loudspeakers
Paradigm Ultra Cube 12 subwoofer
Sound Structures Reference sliding stand
Sound Structures Reference speaker stands
Tributary Silver speaker cable
Tributary Silver interconnects
Cardas Interconnects

Software

Pink Floyd - The Wall (EMI CD)
Pink Floyd - The Division Bell (EMI CD)
Karl Jenkins - The Armed Man (Virgin Classics CD)
Shawn Colvin - A Few Small Repairs (Columbia CD)
Dire Straits - Money For Nothing (Vertigo CD)
Bryan Ferry - Dylanesque (Virgin CD)
Timeless II - Various Artists

It's the silence between the notes, the reverberation on the piano sound board, the timbre in the cello. It's the zing in the cymbals, the zip in the snare drum, the nicotine in the throat box of Leonard Cohen. The detail lies in the ability of good kit to engage you by playing music that leaves nothing out, and adds nothing in.

As one would expect though, bad recordings here are ruthlessly exposed. Employing my iPod as a source, playing back both lossless and lossy music files, it was immediately apparent that the Perreaux duo is so good that there is nowhere to hide.

If you think you can run your iPod with a typical 128-bit sampling rate through these, you are simply going to be disappointed. There is no mincing about here. This is the high-end of audio, and sub-standard sources simply will not cut the mustard.

But if you're in this league, your music server should be lossless in any event, and when fed such formats, the Perreaux pre/power is very much more in its element.

Of Note

A pre-DAC combo

The Perreaux DP32 pre-amplifier is not only that, but a digital-to-analogue converter as well. In other words, all you need is a digital source.

With the way things are going these days, the New Zealanders have pretty much catered for everything digital: from optical to coax to USB. Feed it a digital signal, and the DP32 will latch on, sync, translate and deliver a superb analogue signal to the power amplifier.

The bits and bolts are that it is a USB DAC pre-amplifier equipped with a 32-bit DAC, together with fully balanced analogue audio circuits. It also has an AES/EBU digital input, and if that weren't enough, it also offers balanced XLR analogue inputs, along with asynchronous 24-bit/192 kHz USB audio streaming.

In essence, this makes the pre-amp compatible with everything that is stereo-compatible, so you need lose no sleep over your format selection. The idea is an excellent one and renders the older-style, separate DAC largely irrelevant.

Given that stereo kit has to compete for space with surround sound components, a unit like the DP32 makes a whole bunch of sense - especially when one is dealing with an on-board DAC as good as this one is.

PERREAUX

Using the on-board DAC directly, I felt as if the digital harshness from low-bitrate MP3s was perhaps treated a little more forgivingly than by the already excellent Marantz, but it's too close to call. That alone gives you an idea as to the nature of the beast - there are few digital decoders I have heard that come close to the Marantz's ability to fill in missing detail.

Going back to traditional CD however, reminds one of performance. Sure, I will concede that there is not a lot to choose between lossless digital and CD, but the gap that is there, is shown up when you are dealing with high-end kit that can exploit almost every single digital bit.

The result is a smoother, easier listening experience - a listening experience that sounds fuller, owing to the increased detail, and one that hits your emotive ear harder than 'normal'. This pair owes no explanation to anyone - it is simply very, very good at producing music.

Ultimately, the result is a simple one, perhaps best illustrated by the rugby analogy. It's a sport where performance is very much determined by team effort.

In the case of the Perreaux twosome, we have a team united in its focus. Its raw native talent is captured and harnessed and honed by practice into a devastatingly effective performance.

In all honesty, I could not find fault with the Perreaux pre/power combo - these two units are made for each other, and of course made for music. I loved my time spent with them.

William Kelly