

hi-fi+

Issue 39
£4.50

REPRODUCING THE RECORDED ARTS

Core Values...

Serious integration with the Jadis DA88S

SONUS FABER
AUDIO ACOUSTICS
MARTEN
PROAC
AVALON
TRIANGLE
FOCAL-JMLABS

NAIM
SUGDEN
EUPHONIC RESEARCH
CONSONANCE
MAGNUM-DYNALAB

MONTREAL SHOW
COLUMBIA JAZZ





The Jadis DA88S Integrated Amplifier

by Roy Gregory

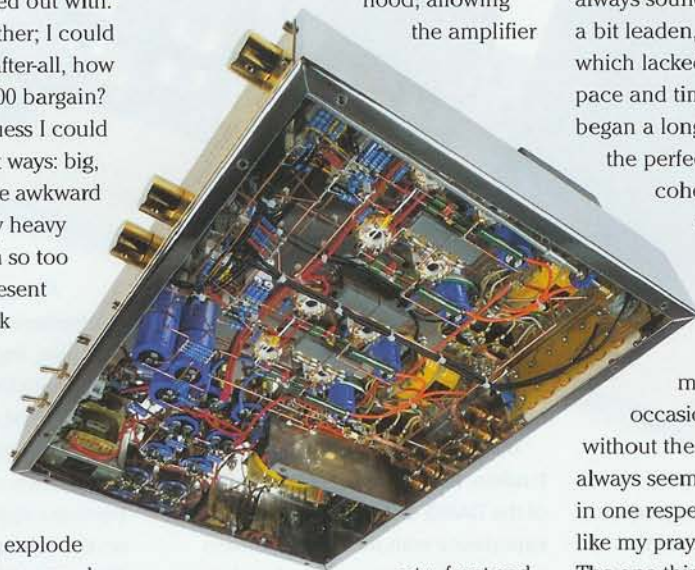
“What’s a conundrum – and what’s a five-letter word for it?” asked my 11-year old niece.

Well, I could have answered “Jadis”; what else do you call a deeply respected high-end manufacturer who still builds every amplifier themselves, in the same way that they always have, eschewing hi-fi fashion by pursuing the same sonic goals they started out with. I could have gone even further; I could have answered “DA88S” – after-all, how else do you describe a £6000 bargain?

Now that I’ve asked I guess I could describe it in many different ways: big, awkward looking, even more awkward to handle and unbelievably heavy all spring to mind. But then so too do magnificent, vibrant, present and powerful, and the black humour and blue air that have accumulated whilst manhandling the beast into its new home will evaporate just as soon as you hear the very first notes issue forth. Or rather, explode into the room. This amp has so much body and gusto, energy and sheer musical enthusiasm that you could be forgiven for assuming there are two amps in the one box (it’s certainly big enough). Well, in a way you’d be right. Running four KT88 output tubes a side for 60 Watts of very serious Class A power, this is to all intents and purposes something akin to a pair of JA80 mono-blocks built into a single chassis.

But akin is the word for this is no straight chop and swap job. Whilst the DA88S is about as dual-mono as most amps ever get, the two channels do share a common mains transformer.

Mind you, it’s quite a transformer. Likewise, the output transformers are quite a bit smaller than those in the 80s, although they’re still wound in-house at the Jadis factory, just outside Carcassonne. However, the most important differences are right out front. There’s an extra valve lurking under the perforated hood, allowing the amplifier



extra front-end gain (always a problem if you rely on a single ECC82 input tube). Whereas the JA80s always struggled to reach their rated output, the DA88S is an absolute monster, grabbing hold of speakers and driving them with an authority and grip that belies its modest power rating. To the left of the valve housing is a large and, truth be told, a rather ugly heatsink, nailed down with the single transistor that delivers solid-state regulation of the HT supply. It’s a much meatier arrangement than the one found in the 80, but one that if I was Jadis I’d hide away, along with the sextet of reservoir caps,

under another perforated cage. It would be neater and give a far less lop-sided appearance.

Now, if I’m honest, I always preferred the JA30 to the 80. The smaller amp, despite its power limitations, has a musical rightness and top to bottom continuity that is both beguiling and compelling. In comparison, the 80 always sounded lumpy, disjointed and a bit leaden, especially in the bass, which lacked the fleet of foot agility, pace and timing of the little 30. Thus began a long odyssey, searching for the perfect speaker, one with the coherence, bandwidth and above all efficiency to mate with the 30s I’d fallen in love with.

It was a tortuous path and one that left me longing on many an occasion for just a little more grunt without the grit and clumsiness that always seemed to accompany it. Well, in one respect at least it finally looks like my prayers have been answered. The one thing the DA88 has in spades, as I’ve already mentioned, is power.

In all other respects the DA88S is pure Jadis. The casework is the usual mix of chrome chassis and gold faceplate, with all controls on the front panel. There’s the usual On/Off switch and the Standby/Operate right next to it. Three chunky rotary knobs allow you to adjust volume, balance and select from the five line inputs. A single LED in the middle switches from red to green as you select full power. The rear panel offers five sets of phono sockets for the line inputs, as well as a further pair for the single tape output. ▶

► There are also two pairs of five-way binding posts per channel, arranged at right angles to the inputs and devoid of labeling, just to keep things interesting – remember how much this thing weighs and thus what swapping channels entails! One other thing to note is the short sentence buried in the instructions informing you that the DA88S is a phase-inverting design. This means that you should reverse the polarity of your speaker leads at either the amp or speaker terminals. Make sure that you do, as it results in a sweeter, tighter, more immediate and more focussed sound – none of which differences are particularly subtle. Just select a nice, acoustic vocal if you don't believe me.

That's pretty much your lot as far as the outside goes – so no remote-control for those of you who deem such trivia essential. In fact, to dismiss the DA88S on such grounds displays a breathtaking misunderstanding of its entire purpose and *raison d'être* – but more on that in a moment. Remove the bottom plate and you'll find the preferred construction of hard-wired signal path and power supply components. Heavy straps on the underside of the output transformers allow you to reconfigure the impedance taps, although the amp arrives set for 4-8 Ohms which should suffice for most sensible situations in which it finds itself. All the user has to do is carefully install the tubes in the designated sockets and fire it up. As a cathode-bias design the amp is effectively self-adjusting, although it teeters on the power limit for the successful

application of the approach.

I used the DA88S with both my usual Living Voice OBX-R2 speakers and the Reference 3A Da Capos. However, it didn't take long to discover that it was a spectacularly good match for the ProAc Response D38s also in for review, and risky though such a strategy is, it was this combination that made up the bulk of my listening. I hooked it up with the Nordost Valhalla cables and fed it from the Wadia 861SE and VPI TNT6 front-ends.



Whilst I'm normally wary of relying on using two review products in tandem, I made an exception in the case of the DA88S on the basis of previous experience with the other speakers mentioned, which revealed such a case of *déjà vu* that I was immediately confident of the amp's overall character and sound. Talk about a blast from the past. This was like my first exposure to the JA30s all those years ago. How best to explain the difference between this and most other listening experiences? The two Chinese films, *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers* seem to divide audiences, viewers developing a strong preference one way or the other. Well, if the stark, bleached landscapes and ascetic philosophy of *Hero* is reminiscent of high-tech, high-end solid-state, the Jadis represents the

House Of Flying Daggers. Its music is a sensuous deluge of intensely vibrant colour and energy. *Hero* is all about stillness and study – the Jadis dives right in! Play 'The Echo Game' from the *Flying Daggers OST* and you'll see just what I mean. The opening drum-roll reverberates within a colossal acoustic, each additional instrument building, layer on layer into a thunderous crescendo that simply begs you to advance the volume control far beyond the sensible, wrapping you in the sound. The range of colour, the individuality in the choir of vibrating skins, the sheer energy and human effort they represent is quite intoxicating, yet you'll give in before the DA88S does.

Energy, drive and sheer musical enthusiasm are what it feeds off.

Like many soundtracks,

Flying Daggers is more about atmosphere than coherent musical structure; impressive as it is, it is also a little two-dimensional, a kaleidoscope of individual episodes. Downshift to something more intimate and emotionally complex and it soon becomes apparent that the Jadis is no one-trick pony. The delicacy of 'Doghouse Window' (Stephen Dawson and Diane Christiansen, *Duets*) hangs on the fragile relationship between the two voices, a balance of soft contralto and shrill, almost falsetto voice that the amplifier captures perfectly. However, equally important is the understated precision of the sparse accompaniment, the nylon strung guitar and subtle percussion allowed space, time and room to breathe, the cymbals in particular beautifully defined down to the last decay that dies away under the curtailed lyric. Brass is almost always a pale imitation of reality on a hi-fi system, yet Josh Berman's mournful trumpet ►

► break hits just the right tone, all restrained power and constraint.

Of course, if you want to hear brass let rip then look no further than that old standby *Farmer's Market Barbeque*. The big-band power and energy simply pours out of the speakers, yet it never swamps the subtle improvisation and prompts that flow from Basie's piano, the all-important sense of structure and ensemble that makes this such a great performance.

simultaneously is unusual indeed. It's also vital to our ability to truly immerse ourselves in the performance. It's what Harry Pearson refers to as continuousness and I'm coming to appreciate that it's the most vital quality of all.

I can sketch this amp in broad hi-fi terms if I must. It is open, sweet and unforced, powerful and dynamic. The tremendous sense of musical poise and flow feeds the soul even as it slightly smoothes the sharpest of musical corners. The bass is thunderously powerful and perfectly placed, even if it's a little soft around the edges.

The treble rolls, but not so that you'd really notice and the result is a cosy warmth and

intimacy to the soundstage. The tonal palette is broad and vivid, the soundstage likewise. All these things are true, but in isolation they miss the point.

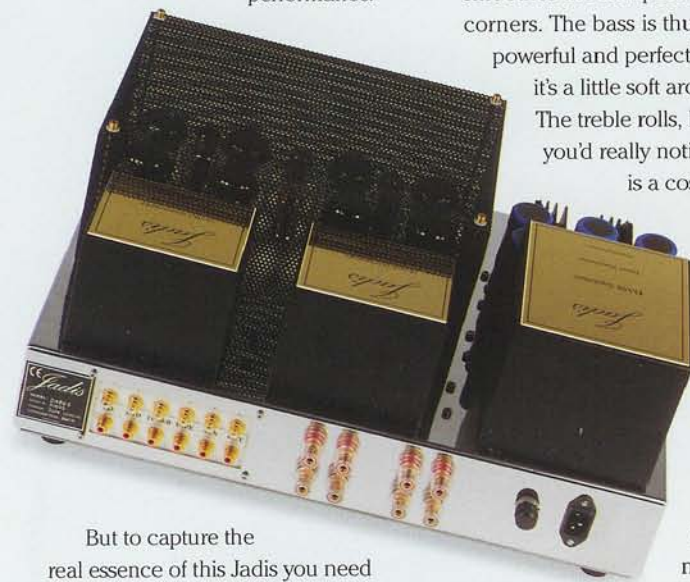
The Jadis is

about the whole. – the sense, the experience, the response to the musical performance. Move on to the third movement of the Dvorak and it tells you that Piatigorsky can't match the grace and technique of Starker in the awkward, angular Cello part. Nor does Munch match the mastery and drama of Dorati. But it tells you this in passing, without destroying the performance. It's a masterful performance in itself, a lesson in deftness of touch and balance that many an amplifier should envy.

I don't find any of the lumpy discontinuity or ambivalent timing here that marred the JA80s for me. Instead the DA88S is closer in character to the 30, and if it can't match that amp's exquisite delicacy and agility, it ain't far behind, whilst delivering a lot more firepower into the bargain. Don't get the idea this is

a fit and forget solution. It requires, even demands, care and respect from the user, in both matching and feeding. It might be a bargain but like other bargains it needs partners of equal quality in order to really shine. That and a listener prepared to set precisely the right volume for each disc, the one that balances power and presence against intimacy and life. It's in there somewhere, although with really efficient speakers you might well want more subtle graduation at the bottom of the volume control (or attenuators on the inputs).

For the listener looking for a consummate musical all-rounder rather than the merely hi-fi spectacular, look no further. Dedicated followers of fashion will rail at a perceived lack of detail and resolution, but those who take the time to listen will realise that in reality, in musical terms, they're missing nothing at all. Install, sit back and enjoy; as deeply unfashionable as it may seem, it's the Jadis way. ▶+



But to capture the real essence of this Jadis you need something with real musical and dynamic range, a spread of emotional vocabulary. The Piatigorsky performance of the Dvorak *Cello Concerto* on RCA Living Stereo fills the bill admirably, the amp easily able to scale the dramatic and powerful heights of the full orchestral crescendos, yet at the same time preserving the playing of the soloist, the integral balance between cello and orchestra. Play the second movement and you'll hear the ability of the DA88S to deliver sudden dynamic shifts in density and level with convincing power, grace and presence. But equally you'll also appreciate the natural sense of pace and delicacy, timing and placement that Piatigorsky brings to the solo line in the *Adagio*, a lilting, aching quality for which the Cello knows no equal. This ability to operate at both ends of the musical spectrum so successfully and even

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Push-pull integrated valve amplifier
Tube Complement:	3x ECC82 2x ECC83 8x KT88
Inputs:	5x line-level
Input Sensitivity:	120mV
Input Impedance:	>100kOhms
Rated Output Power:	60 Watts Class A (4-8 Ohms)
Dimensions (WxHxD):	500 x 220 x 400mm
Weight:	40kg
Price:	£6000

UK Distributor:

Absolute Sounds Ltd
Tel. (44)(0)20 8971 3909
Net. www.absolutesounds.com

Manufacturer:

Jadis S.A.R.L.
Net. www.jadis-electronics.com