



image hifi

2/2007 (March/April)

Bryston B-60 SST C-Series

Price: 2500 Euro

Text: Michael Vrzal, Photography: Rolf Winter



B60 C-Series

Little "Bryston" (the person) will soon be ten years old. The youngster owes his first name to his audiophile father. (*Translator's Note: in 1997 a newborn child was indeed named "Bryston" after the Canadian electronics company.*)

A US magazine colleague documented the story in line with a 1997 CES trade show report. The joyfulness in the Bryston demo room was very exciting at the time because a two month old infant (Bryston) was presented with a not quite age appropriate gift --- the company's own B-60 integrated amplifier. By now the B60 should be sufficiently broken in and therefore ready for release – if daddy is willing to let it go ... The astonishing point about this story is the fact that when Bryston (the boy) is finally allowed to use the above amp by himself, he will still have an in-warranty product in his hands. The warranty will only expire when puberty has been largely overcome and the danger of youthful misuse has been averted.

20 years of warranty – what a statement! How come that until now not even one competing company of the Bryston firm has copied this?

The warranty, is the seal of approval of the manufacturer, his commitment to quality. Certainly no product comes into the marketplace without a warranty. Our basic right for products which fulfill their purpose for more than a moment are assured by our legal system. But is that all? Only two years of required operation liability? And then? We discover that the manufacturer did not consider the long term maintenance of spare parts profitable, that expensive skilled employees financed the exit of the firm out of the high wage country by losing their jobs, and that nowadays no one knows anything about the old stuff. Mind you, I am not talking here about the exclusive audio segment. It defines itself ultimately by its quality demands and is also considered with - rarely expected - problems as reasonably above average. But a 20-year warranty black on white, easier than that the essence of the High End can hardly be communicated.

With the B-60 amp I would not even be surprised by a lifetime warranty. Its meticulously designed configuration lends the shallow integrated amp a sympathetic touch of "tool charisma." The cosmetic updating undertaken with the actual "SST" revision is a perfect success, since it emphasizes pleasant "rounding" rather than emphasis on "eye candy." Nevertheless I find the concept appealing:- a B-60 SST amp with the thick front panel containing a retractable carrying handle as a component of a "HiFi-Ambulance" ...hey why not?

A brief comment:- Let's agree for the following on the designation "B-60 SST." Strictly speaking "C-Series" should be added, but the addition refers merely to the new cosmetic appearance. Despite this the designation does not have to be twice as long, or? Back to the subject at hand. The reliability of (every?) Bryston component, which became a trademark of the company long ago, is simultaneously a curse and a blessing; nothing exotic, no extravaganzas - no High End flair. How mistaken one can be.

I could now bore the reader with technology, but I won't do that, instead I'll provide the following advice:- **The Bryston homepage is a treasure trove for anyone who wants to know precise details. A treatise about the advantages of toroidal transformers, or perhaps the circuit diagram for the B-60? Certainly. I suggest the Newsletter section, reading material for days, no weeks, and very digestible.**

Let's look at the integrated amp. On the right side there must be the previously mentioned toroidal transformers. Now let's take off the aluminum cover. Correct, in the right third is the double mono power supply circuitry, in the middle and left is the preamp section almost completely covered by the (optional) phono printed circuit board, behind it is the power output stage whose graceful heat sinks contact both the top and the bottom of the housing and thus effectively distribute the accrued heat. Good potentiometers, practically exclusively discrete parts, rugged connector materials - fine but somehow unglamorous. For goodness sake, what did we expect?

In order to provide a better understanding it should probably be mentioned that the Bryston Company was founded by a former NASA engineer, and originally concentrated on studio technology. Studio equipment is by definition bulletproof, just ask our editor-in-chief. But other studio staff also listen very carefully, and with that we're back to our main theme. Under the subject bulletproof are the features "soft-start" function, a direct current compensating power input filter, comprehensive protection circuitry, a clipping indicator, the 100 hour factory burn-in test, and the inclusion of especially long life electrolytic filter capacitors. In accordance with the smooth transition to the High-End philosophy one finds carefully selected parts, genuine dual mono construction, separate circuitry for the remote control sensor, and last but not least details such as an audiophile power cable from Sun Audio. Apropos Sun Audio:- The German distributor has over the years made not insignificant contributions to Bryston designs. The DC compensation after the power input, used in all Mark Levinson products, can be attributed to Mr. Bernhard and Krauspenhaar.

The complementary-symmetrical build-up of the signal carrying circuitry is a major, if not the main, characteristic of the Canadian electronics. This circuit device has nothing to do with the prevalent symmetry used especially in studio applications (catchwords:- inverted and not inverted signal). Complementary-symmetrical build-up is based on the principle of treating the positive and the negative half wave of each channel in an exact mirror symmetrical configuration. Expressed in "popular scientific" dialogue:- PNP and NPN transistors work hand in hand. Although this raises the requirements of the parts selection, it results optimally in less distortion, which, in turn, benefits band width and "speed." As a consequence the Bryston sound comes very close to Class A designs, but certainly without their strong harmonic distortions. In light of the specified damping factor of 500, and two times 100 Watt output at four ohms there exists perhaps something like an anabolic situation.

Let's put the top cover back on, everything fits. Nothing about the B-60 SST appears even slightly esoteric, let alone half-baked. If anything here leaves the path of practicality it is the personalization of the actual amplifier generation, i.e. the "SST" in the name, "ST" for the developer Stuart Taylor, and the other "S" for the most recent version. With this the Canadians acknowledge the gentleman who has been responsible for the high-quality Bryston sound for almost a quarter of a century.

Here's a tip for the proper setup: It pays to check the amp prior to actual usage, as well as any component, for freedom from wobble. It is not unusual, as anyone halfway proficient in geometry knows, it's almost preprogrammed, that a rectangular cabinet does not sit firmly on four feet. With three more or less expensive feet one is on the safe side with the Bryston amp, and additionally one can enjoy a noticeable gain in acoustic order.

Before we commence properly let's quickly recognize the headphone jack of the B-60. Together with my Grado earphones the volume control reaches the three o'clock position for the appropriate sound level. But there matters stop. The Bryston B-60 does not reach the sovereign sound depiction of a separate headphone amp, but instead it beautifully balances out the tendency of the Grado sound in the bass to crispness, and especially excels with naturalness amid voices. Fine.

Oh, still something else:- At the moment our test setup is analog wise to a certain extent in an interregnum state. All of those readers who are anxiously awaiting a review of the internal phono stage I ask for patience and leniency. The Bryston B-60 SST amp will not leave Berlin until the new source component has arrived and has been properly installed, and the involved completely discrete and complementary symmetrical MM phono stage, with its two stage high precision equalization, has revealed its acoustic color. In any case the acquired results gained from this testing can be read about in the next issue of *Image hifi*. We promise.

Sound:

One cannot miss the fact that the "chocolate side" of the shallow integrated amp is the great low frequency reproduction. After two seconds the acoustic memory announces jazz:- Hello, this bass is redefined. Hearing a "Walking Bass" out of the Band turmoil has never been easier. That the low notes are in no way placed in the room randomly but rather create a mood with a sense for rhythms and groove is surely also helpful. Because it's fun, the following certified bass heavy material landed in our CD player:- "St. Germain", "Tourist", and "Junge, Junge." Now as we noticed that the precision does leave a bit to be desired, a set of three ceramic ball feet were installed. The result conformed the expectations:- The bass shifts into the next gear, the overall precision increases. We'll continue our work in this manner.

Classical music brings us a big step closer to the tonal characteristics. The Bryston amp which so outstandingly unravels the bass, is also a great organizer of the higher frequency ranges. Where instruments appear in natural acoustic spaces, it presents the spatial proportions in exemplary clarity. The people who would like this characteristic presented to them in a spectacular manner had better reach for some of the above music sources. When the mastering engineer at the control board has decided to let delicate vibrations extend beyond the loudspeaker cabinets (again the "St. Germain" CD), then the Canadian integrated amplifier projects a singularly holographic sound picture into the room. Very impressive! At the same time muscular as well as graceful, the Bryston B-60 SST brings its entrusted music to life. I wish that my Dynaudio monitors were still here because the B-60 would be an engine that my highly demanding Danish loudspeakers would truly relish.

Tonally the Bryston B-60 presents a decidedly true depiction of the original source, and the acoustic fingerprint, as usual, is provided by a piano recording. The percussive impact of a grand piano shows its metallic heritage as presented by the Canadian. Curiously this tendency toward preciseness in the case of a violin tone had hardly been noticed before, and then as a pleasing gain in brilliance. That tonal differences, i.e. better or worse, can never be meaningfully evaluated is once again exemplified here. Do my Naims (preamps) now play more holistically and more warmly? Or less precisely? The Bryston B-60 presents itself as the alternative, the final preference will be determined by the style of music and the utilized loudspeakers.

In any case, the Canadian "flat man" knows how to effectively impress. The power supply, judging with one's ears, appears to be very successful, and the aluminum "pizza box" acts like the "big boys." There is no doubt that close attention was paid during all of the circuit designing in order to suppress noise. Despite the high packing density practically no smidgen of noise and whatsoever no hum residue can be heard through the coupled loudspeakers. At the same time listening to music through the B-60 has nothing aseptic about it, the amplifier knows how to engross as long as the source delivers engrossing material. "Studio genes" obligate commitment after all.

Someone once said that the original B-60 is not an amplifier for people who are afraid of music. Quite right:- The handy, easily underestimated, little Bryston could indeed scare ethereal fancy fellows, but it will, with certainty, bring open minded characters closer to the heart of music making, to life. By the way, that matter of certainty one may indeed take quite literally, yes, you know already:- 20 years ...

What we like:

The round about worry free feeling during the acquisition of a Bryston component.

What is missing:

The omission of the fine aluminum remote control with the standard product. Too bad ...

What surprised us:

How much personality is contained within the chaste aluminum box.

What you should do:

For fun let the "little one" loose on larger integrated amps.

Translated from the German by Peter Ullman