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JADIS

ORCHESTRA DiP

An integrated valve amp that delivers the best of both worlds to the iPod buff

PRICE £3,450 **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.jadis-electronics.com

Some hi-fi enthusiasts might argue that the idea of a valve and iPod combination is as sensible as popping down to the hardware store for a bubble for a spirit level. But, with increasing numbers of people listening to music from iPods and iPhones, it's inevitable the two will come together – and, in the case of the Jadis Orchestra DiP, with suitable panache, too.

The original Jadis Orchestra amplifier has been around for years, but can now be had in an up-rated version with iPod docking facilities. Dubbed the Orchestra DiP, it's said to have some of the improvements found in the Orchestra Reference, minus the latter's tone controls. It's a valve amp featuring four 6CA7EHs (the US equivalent of the EL-34) and offers a 40-watt output. Facilities are limited to four line inputs and one set of loudspeaker outputs.

There's an input selector, plus volume and balance controls and volume level can be remotely controlled using the supplied handset. Build quality is very good, with much of the circuitry hard-wired, yet with a total of six valves, the amp runs fairly hot.

The iPod plugs into a special dock on top and starts-up automatically when the amplifier is switched on. The amp powers the iPod and also recharges its battery – albeit only with the amp switched on and the iPod switched off. But, can you really use an iPod as a hi-fi music source? And would the sound exhibit all the subtlety and finesse of a Guy Ritchie guns 'n' geezers movie? Not so.

SOUND QUALITY

Music sounds smooth, clear and natural, with good dynamic range and fine detail. Of course, much depends on the compression used for the original download – the lower the better. Playing The Beatles' *Free as a Bird*, the iPod sounded less forward and detailed than the CD. Bass seemed a touch compressed, while the soundstage had a 'flat' quality. The CD was more holographic with superior stereo.

The iPod sounded 'quieter' than CD – less dynamic and less strongly projected. However, some of this difference was undoubtedly due to our iPod track being compressed. With lossless it would've sounded far better.

The iPod reminded us of a typical entry-level CD player from the early 1980s – very acceptable, if not exactly inspiring. While we hugely favour the Arcam DV135 on CD – no real surprises there – the iPod is fine once the ear adjusted to what was on offer.

Sonically, the Orchestra DiP is greater than the sum of the parts. It's one of those low-powered valve amps that punches well above its weight. It produces a big sound that's rich, warm, full-bodied and

strongly profiled. Jadis recommends using the Orchestra DiP with loudspeakers of at least 90dB sensitivity. Certainly, the higher the sensitivity, the less you risk pushing the amp into areas where absolute power limitations matter. But, the amp does not shriek when pushed hard.

Bass is very deep and full-sounding – those 6CA7EHs produce satisfying weight. The treble is smooth and clean, with a nice midband and the overall sound is clear and open, with an attractive rich tonal bloom – warm, detailed and surprisingly powerful.

The Orchestra DiP doesn't hard-clip when pushed. Many amplifiers, especially transistor types, get very nasty and break-up completely if you reach or exceed maximum output. Even pushed hard, all you hear on this one is a mild coarsening. We tried heavy choral music with prominent female voices and loud synthesiser pop and, even at difficult climactic moments, the sound held together extremely well. Only a hint of congestion and a little compression gave the game away.

We mention this because, coming from a Musical Fidelity kW-750 power amp, a 40-watt valve amp like the Jadis might have seemed a touch under-powered. But this is one instance where the spec only tells part of the story.

The Orchestra DiP hides its limitations remarkably well. Given efficient loudspeakers, the amplifier sounds like its coasting and handles

difficult demanding music with impressive nonchalance.

The tonality of the Orchestra DiP also helps disguise sonic weaknesses in the iPod, minimising any lack of tonal richness and warmth. A brighter more lucid-sounding amplifier would highlight the lack of sonority.

There seems precious little doubt we'll see future amplifiers with iPod-docking facilities. The additional cost is not easy to calculate, as the Orchestra DiP appears to share some of the build and circuit improvements in the £2,599 Orchestra Reference, minus the tone controls, so, it adds about £350.

We're not one for music on the move, but we welcome a source with long continuous playing times – as there are many times when this facility would be very useful. Judged purely as an audio amplifier, the Orchestra DiP is a superb performer. The basic Orchestra

offers excellent value at £2,000, and the Reference is worth considering for improved sound and tone controls. The Reference is probably the one to go for if you can live without iPod docking. But, being able to use your iPod as a music source is going to be a seductive option for many. ■

Jimmy Hughes

See the Awards 2008 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* for the original review of this product.

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