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# Consonance Cyber 222 Pre-amp and 800 Mono-block Amplifiers

by Jimmy Hughes

The first impression was one of panic. Faced with three huge boxes, my initial thought was – where on earth am I going to put all this? Having mostly used integrated amps and fairly compact pre/power jobbies like the Chord, Consonance's massive Cyber 222 pre-amp and 800 mono-block power amps came as a bit of a shock. And while the boxes are generously over-sized to protect the innards, the innards are still pretty massive.

Now those among you with long memories may recall that, many aeons ago, I used to have a tri-amped active system with three Krell KSA-50s. Given all that – what the hell am I complaining about? But things have changed. Such youthful folly occurred in my carefree bachelor days, when I could do whatever I wanted and had only myself to please – literally and metaphorically! Now I'm married it's a different tune...

But whatever minor practical concerns I might've had when the amps were waiting to be installed, all such reservations were quickly swept aside once everything was up and running. The sound was truly sumptuous - big-boned, rich, warm and very weighty. The impression was one of considerable power and solidity. Bass in particular sounded very deep and powerful, yet extremely clean and articulate.

The real 'lows' were very extended, underpinning the music with

a firm solid foundation. Yet it was musical muscle, not flatulent flab. Bass instruments had real individuality and character. With the Cyber Sisters, the lower frequencies actually sounded cleaner and more articulate than they had with the lean 'n' mean trannie amp I'd been using previously – despite the increase in richness and voluminosity. Now that's a word I haven't used before – indeed, I'm

not certain it exists – but it perfectly describes this remarkable amplifier.

As usual, I've started this review in the middle, mentioning the outstanding bass quality first. Why? Because it's more fun that way, and (hopefully) makes you read the whole thing. But also because low frequency performance is absolutely fundamental. A good bottom end provides a solid foundation for the whole sound, and subjectively influences the mid-band and top-end.

Bass quality was certainly the thing that struck me first when getting to know the amplifier.

As valve amplifiers go, the Cyber 800 power amps are quite powerful. They're certainly the most powerful amps offered by

Consonance, who seem to prefer low-power single-ended designs rather than

high-output push-pull. That said, 78W is not that massive – at least not on paper. But you'd be wrong to judge a book by its cover. This amp has a really big sound; not just loud, but BIG.

We're talking Scale and Depth; Breadth and Width; the sort of sound that has Presence and Projection, creating impressive three-dimensional sound-staging that make it seem as though your loudspeakers have grown physically larger. There's a real sense of 'height' too, as though the speakers were a few feet taller. Don't ask me how or why this happens, but that's the effect subjectively.

Despite their large size, my dear wife did not notice the amps at



► first – a single blonde hair on my shoulder would have been very different – but as the first notes sounded out she spontaneously remarked on how good things were sounding tonight. I'm always pleased when she spots a change without my having to point it out. For me, the difference is so big, how could it not be noticed? But while the difference might not be subtle, it's nevertheless nice to have someone else confirm your opinion without being asked.

At I said, the amps produced an impressively big sound. At the same time, for all their Presence and Scale, I found the Cyber Babes sounded very comfortable and refined. There was power and presence, yet at the same time a smooth, relaxed and controlled presentation that was friendly and inviting. Here's an amplifier that can be played at low/medium volume levels without sounding reined-in and constrained. Yet, play it loud and the sound grows and expands.

It's definitely an amplifier that invites you to play loud. Outstanding smoothness and refinement, coupled with exceptional control and effortless ease, make it very impressive at high volume levels. Put simply, it doesn't flinch when you turn it up. And while power is clearly limited on paper, subjectively the Cyber Twins sound as though they have (almost) unlimited

headroom so far as peaks and transients are concerned.

The good thing in all this is that (in terms of actual decibels) the sound's not actually as loud as it seems.



You think it's louder than it actually is. Sonically, there's such presence and solidity, the music sounds very much in the room with you – rather than staying

locked in the speakers struggling to escape. The amp's dimensionality and projection give it a vivid immediacy at all volume levels. Another reason you want to turn it up is – it sounds so clean. One of (many) discs I played was Daniel Barenboim's



1974 CBS/Sony recording of Elgar's First symphony. I originally bought it on LP thirty years ago, and the upper strings always had a bit of an edge.

Although remixed for CD, the bright/ thin slightly harsh tonal balance was never totally eradicated. Until now, that is... Via the Cyber combination, the treble sounded deliciously bright and fresh – sharp and tactile, but rich and not at all edgy. Yet there was no lack of treble brilliance or high frequency sparkle – quite the reverse in fact. This speaks volumes for the cleanliness of the treble, but also that lovely rich full bottom end that creates ►

▶ a proper sense of weight and depth, giving the music a proper foundation.

Tonal balance is warm and rich, but also smooth and natural sounding. There's a lovely seamless quality from deep bass to high treble, with a deliciously full mid-band. Although the treble has a nice sharp tactile and

clarity – the presentation is attractive and inviting, allowing you to hear every detail without strain. Everything feels natural and correctly proportioned,



highly detailed quality, there's no sense of it being detached from the rest of the sound. It's beautifully integrated and beautifully refined. It tames all but

resulting in a sound that is detailed and informative, yet beguiling and relaxed.

So – was there/is there anything I didn't like? Funnily enough, yes... I don't care for the way the preamp always returns the volume to zero and the input selector to Mute when first switched on. Speaking personally, I'd prefer if it 'remembered' last night's settings rather than me having to start

all over again. You have to rock

of getting used to. It's motorised with click stops, but there's a sort of delay built in.

Sometimes you turn the volume up a notch and (seemingly) nothing happens – the loudness remains much the same. You then increase the volume another notch or two, and there's a noticeable jump in level.

Now, suppose this is a touch too loud and you turn it down a single notch – again, very often there's no discernable change. I like to set volume levels precisely and repeatably, and find the Cyber 222 doesn't offer the fine control I like. Nevertheless, it wouldn't put me off owning the combination – I could live with the problem! Indeed, it's a measure of the amp's excellence that this is the only thing I can seriously criticise.

Incidentally, the Cyber 222 offers remote volume control and input selection. To minimise noise it has a fairly large outboard power supply. Warm up times seem pretty minimal; the amps sound so great after five or ten minutes, that any further improvement is a bonus. The power amps get quite warm,

as you might imagine – though not so the preamp, despite having five tubes.

The pre-amp's valves certainly get warm to the touch, but not excessively so. When first switched on and still warming up, the preamp treats you to a flashing lights show – a minor conversation piece in itself. The power amps runs hotter, of course, though not excessively so. Tube compliment consists of 4 x 6CA7s; 2 x 6922s, and 1 x 5686 per power amp, with 4 x 6NS7s, and 1 x 5AR4 for the Cyber 222 pre.

The Cyber 222 offers four



the most laceratingly bright recordings!

Timing is excellent. The full solid bottom end provides clear fluid bass lines, giving the music rhythmic subtlety and flow. The amp's overall smoothness ensures cohesion and integration that aids

the selector knob back and forth to get it to select input 1, then turn the volume up to the required level.

The volume control takes a bit



quality and quantity. Finish and build quality are exemplary; the amps look and feel very solid and well-made.

In many ways, the subjective assessment of this amplifier's sound – as outlined above – describes my early impressions; the initial impact it had – albeit, recalled after a month or two. I was deeply impressed to say the least.

that remains poised, refined and controlled at all times, producing a big but relaxed and highly enjoyable sound. I quickly 'forgot' all about it – taking it for granted in much the same way one accepts (and under-estimates) the qualities of good live sound. It's a great amplifier; one of the finest I've ever heard. Whew! ➤+



► unbalanced line level inputs (no in-built phono stage) with a set of balanced inputs via XLR sockets. Outputs are unbalanced. The power amp has unbalanced inputs only. The Cyber 222 preamp costs £1295, while the Cyber 800 power amps cost £2995 the pair – so you're looking at a little over Four Grand for the combination. It's a lot of money, but exceptionally good value for what you get – both in terms of

But even more important, I found the combination very easy to live with and forget about. The first few days were very exciting. But it's like driving at high speed; very quickly you get used to it.

All too soon, the Cyber 222/800 combination became 'everyday'.

I quickly grew accustomed to it – as though all amplifiers sounded this good! Which means I will doubtless only realise how good it was/is when I box it up and return to something less special.

Sometimes, a product makes a big initial impression, only to annoy or aggravate you as time goes on. The very qualities that were so exciting and attention-grabbing at first, eventually become tiresome.

But this was not the case here; the Cyber 222/800 is a thoroughbred

#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

##### Cyber 222 Pre-amp

Type:	Remote-control valve line-stage
Valve Complement:	4x 6SN7 1x 5AR4
Inputs:	4x single-ended line inputs 1x balanced XLR
Outputs:	1x single-ended tape 1x single-ended pre out
Weight:	15 Kg
Price:	£1295

##### Cyber 800 Mono-blocks

Type:	Push-pull ultra-linear valve power amp
Valve Complement:	1x 5686 (each) 2x 6922 4x 6CA7
Input:	Single-ended only
Input Sensitivity:	700mV
Input Impedance:	100 ohm
Rated Output:	78 Watts/8 Ohms
Weight:	30 Kg ea.
Price:	£2995 pr.

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