



The Amazing Bryston A2

MICHEL LEROUX

Bryston's recent incursion into the loudspeaker market, under the auspices of Vice President **James Tanner**, began with the well-received Model T, shortly followed by a number of equally successful variants, the Mini T, the Middle T, two subwoofers, a centre speaker, an on-wall speaker and an in-wall speaker. The Canadian company's models A1, A3 and A2 speakers derive from the T series in both their design principles and their manufacturing techniques, but feature reduced dimensions and

weight, along with lower prices. After hearing Bryston's impressive A1 towers at the latest Salon Son & Image, powered by Bryston electronics (the A1 features seven drivers per speaker, three for low frequencies, two for medium and two for high frequencies), we were curious to review the very affordable A2 model. Previously, Bryston's three-way Mini T had greatly impressed us (reviewed in the Vol. 14, No. 6 issue of the magazine): *"The Mini T introduces the listener to another vision of music, a wide-screen vision where imaging*

plays its role perfectly in the transmission of the musical message and musical emotion." With this experience, it was with desire and impatience that I awaited the arrival of the **A2 speakers**, with six transducers per speaker, two each for the bass, midrange and treble. The wait was worth it, because at \$2,790 a pair, speakers of this size and calibre are thin on the ground.

CHARACTERISTICS

Each of these three-way speakers is fitted with six drivers, two 6.5-inch units for the bass frequencies, two 5.25-inch Axiom midrange units and two 1-inch titanium Bryston tweeters protected by metal grilles. Measuring 39.5" in height, 9.25" in frontal width and 17" in depth (1003 x 235 x 432 mm), the non-parallel sidewalls taper to 7.25" at the rear, a design that substantially reduces standing waves inside the cabinet. Given the number of drivers and solid cabinet construction, the speakers weigh in at a substantial 62 lbs per unit (28 kg). They are fairly low in sensitivity, at 87 dB with a nominal 4-ohm impedance, require a minimum of 10 watts to drive, and accept up to 400 watts. The three-way crossover splits the signal to the mid and bass drivers at 160 Hz, and at 2.3 kHz between the mid and treble drivers. Frequency response is specified as 31 Hz to 20 kHz (+/- 3 dB). The design is bass-reflex, with three vents (two on the rear and one on the front), the inner surfaces of which are puckered to break up port resonances. The two sets of five-way, gold-plated terminals per speaker provide for bi-wiring and bi-amplification.

The speaker cabinets are constructed from high-quality ¾-inch MDF, with the inside surfaces securely braced at strategic locations, ensuring that no two panel surfaces resonate at the same frequency. The inert and rigid cabinet minimizes vibration transfer from the drivers. Knocking on the walls of the A2 generates a dull thud, a good index of cabinet inertness.

The speakers are designed and manufactured in Ontario by **Bryston** in collaboration with Axiom Audio, who build the drivers according to Bryston's specifications. The detailed requirements and specifications for the A2 demonstrate Bryston's meticulous attention to detail and their firm intention to build world-class reference monitors. The A2s are delivered with black grilles, spikes and padded feet. An optional system of stabilizing outriggers at \$280 per pair, in brushed aluminium and substantial spikes, provide a very stable, topple-proof foundation for the speaker. Available in black ash (vinyl) finish, natural cherry (vinyl) and Boston cherry (vinyl), the A2s can also be ordered with a variety of custom veneer finishes for a 15% surcharge over the base price of \$2,790 per pair.

TWO DRIVERS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Power handling is a key design feature of Bryston's speakers. The company requires that all of its models, from the T series to the A1 and A2, be able to easily accommodate substantial power without dynamic compression. Bryston's solution is to provide two drivers in parallel per frequency band so that the system can play louder with less effort than a single driver. The goal, according to Bryston, is

greater clarity and sound transparency. We note that the same design principal is used in Son & Image's reference three-way monitors, which use two 6.5-inch drivers per channel for the low frequencies.

INSTALLATION

Once the speakers are unpacked and installed in the listening area, the first impression is disconcerting, as you wonder how so much speaker can be manufactured for a mere \$2,790. Be reassured though, as the label at the bottom of their rear facade clearly states, that they are indeed designed and manufactured here in Canada. Let's see, or rather hear, how these floorstanding speakers can perform.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

- Turntable: Roksan Xerxes / Artemiz / Dynavector XX2 Mk II
- Digital transport: C.E.C. TL51X
- Converter: Oppo HA-1
- Integrated amplifiers: Chord CPM 3350, Brinkmann, Jadis DA88S
- Phono preamplifier: Benedict Audio / Dynavector P 75 Mk II
- Three-way speakers: Harmony Audio
- Cables: Bis Maestro / Vivat, Nordost Heimdall 2
- Power distribution bar: Maestro PowerBIS

LISTENING

What better music to gauge musical dynamics and sound staging than Beethoven's *Symphony No. 1X in D minor op. 125* by the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Herbert Von Karajan (Deutsche Grammophon two-box set). The strange introduction of the ninth symphony, full of mystery, both hesitant and glowing with a vigour spanning two octaves, contains an impressive level of dynamics between the quiet and loud passages that the Bryston A2s welcome and render vigorously, without flinching. The soundstage, like the Mini-T previously reviewed, offers a wide-open scene that plays its role perfectly in conveying the musical message and the emotion of this music. Here

THE BENEFITS OF USING DUAL DRIVERS PER FREQUENCY BAND ARE NOTICEABLE, AS THERE IS NO LOSS OF DYNAMICS OR IMPACT. CLEAR AND NON-FATIGUING, EVEN OVER LONG LISTENING PERIODS, MUSIC FLOWS WITH EASE AND POWER FROM THESE SPEAKERS.

again, we are presented with the 3D wide-screen image that won us over with the three-way Mini Ts. Balancing off-axis frequency response with on-axis response is a fine art and one that Bryston has evidently mastered. The results show in the impressive panorama and spatial representation of the orchestra, remarkable as much in its depth as in the consistency and stability of the stereo image as one moves around the speakers.

Staying with vinyl, let's move to another musical genre with the Japanese edition of Sade's *Diamond Life*, a version that I think sounds better than the original edition. Through the **Bryston Model A2**, listening is downright enjoyable both in tonal balance and depth of bass extension. Midrange articulation is spot on while high frequencies are finely rendered. Instruments are clearly delineated and distinct from each other and it is easy to clearly follow each musician's playing. The benefits of using dual drivers per frequency band are noticeable, as there is no loss of dynamics or impact. Clear and non-fatiguing, even over long listening periods, music flows with ease and power from these speakers.

AT A REALISTIC VOLUME LEVEL, THE BRYSTON A2S SHOW THEIR METTLE, REVEALING THEIR ABILITY TO KEEP THE LISTENER IN SUSPENSE AND IMMERSE HIM ACTIVELY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SOUND AND THE MUSIC.

In CD mode now with the jazz album *European Standards* by the Swedish group Jan Lindgren Trio on the ACT label. The track «Computer Liebe» can destabilize many a bass driver, as Mattias Svensson's bass playing on this track is intensely muscular. Svensson uses an effect resembling the wah-wah pedal of the electric guitar. At a realistic volume level, the Bryston A2s show their mettle, revealing their ability to keep the listener in suspense and immerse him actively in the experience of the sound and the music. There is no trace of dynamic compression or excessive effort to contain the impact of these three excellent solo musicians. Moreover, instruments take on realistic proportions and very natural timbre. During this latter listening session, I replaced the lightweight gold-plated jumpers between the dual binding posts by the dual terminations of the Vivat cables by Bis Audio in a bi-wiring configuration. With these cables, the high frequencies are handled by Eichmann banana type connectors, while midrange and low frequencies are through Eichmann spade connectors. Although the potential benefits of bi-wiring remain the subject of debate in the audiophile community, many speakers manufacturers offer this connection mode. Once connected in this way, the bass register of the A2 was significantly freer, with a slight gain in clarity across the mid and high frequencies.

CONCLUSION

To produce such a musically competent speaker for such a modest asking price is quite a feat. The Bryston A2s sound like and play music like speakers costing double or almost triple their price. Amazing!

The outriggers, at the asking price of \$280 a pair, are recommended, because in addition to providing a very solid and stable coupling to the floor, they also deliver a solid foundation for the sound. The multiple drivers used in the A2s, besides giving a great look to the speaker, deli-



ver a remarkable sound experience. The ability to play at realistic volume levels with ease and without any lagging or distortion depends in part on the multiple driver design but also the quality of design and precision manufacturing that goes into the A2. If the Model T referred to the T in Tanner, vice president of Bryston, does the A model derive from the second letter of Mr. Tanner's name? If so, should we be looking forward to a new model N, for the third letter in Mr Tanner's name? To be continued!

If we were in the market for new speakers, the **Bryston A2** would be at the top of our list. At the asking price of \$2,790 a pair and \$280 for the stabilizing outriggers,

the price to quality ratio of the A2 is simply incredible. In addition, they are designed and manufactured here in Canada by a company that has been around for more than 35 years. Oh, and did we mention that they're covered by Bryston's famous 20-year warranty? Discover them soon!

Bryston Model A2

Price: \$2,790 per pair. Optional stabilizing outriggers:
\$280 per pair

Manufacturer-Distributor: Bryston Ltd.

1-800-632-8217 • www.bryston.com