



the Stereo Times

The Complete Audiophile Magazine

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The Vitus Audio SS-010 Integrated Amplifier

The Little Beast

June 2007



Associated Equipment:

Analog Front End

"The Source" Turntable
Alphason HRS 100
Tonearm
Benz Micro ACE L
Magnum Dynalab DT-5
AM/FM Tuner

Digital Front End

Classe Audio CDP102

Amplification

BAT VK31SE Preamp
BAT VK1000 Mono
Amplifiers
Clearaudio "Smart Phono"
Phono Preamp

Loudspeakers

Escalante Design Fremont
Penaudio Serenade

Cabling

Stealth Audio Petite
Dream speaker cables
Stealth Audio Metacarbon
and Air King interconnects
Argento Audio Serenity
Cables
Revelation Audio Paradise
Cryo-Silver™ Reference
RCA Cables

AC Conditioners

Modified APC Power
Conditioner



I've grown accustomed to big beefy amps providing the muscle that flows through my music system. For years I called the huge Electrocompaniet Nemo 600-watt mono amps my reference, and for most of this past year the Nemos were supplanted by the even bigger BAT VK1000s. My rather large (20' x 26') listening room has always made good use of mega powered amps, and Heaven knows that my Escalante Fremonts, with their direct coupled dual 12" woofers, really enjoy being driven by the big boys. So when the opportunity to spend some time with an amp from Vitus Audio came up, I was excited to say the least. After all, nothing embodies big, bold, beautiful power amps like the designs of Hans Ole Vitus.

In the beginning ...

I first saw the Vitus gear at the 2004 CES. I was immediately struck by their massive beauty and gorgeous sound, powering a room-dominating pair of Sound Lab Ultimate-1s. The quality of the metalwork and the attention to aesthetics and functionality were unlike anything I had ever seen. The whole system was linked



SELAH AUDIO THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

"The XT8
line array
loudspeaker
has reference
caliber
performance,
at an
affordable price."

Dennis Parham
Stereotimes.com



together by the equally impressive cables designed by Anders Grove who at the time was with Argento Audio. I kept thinking that the Rowlands, Krells, and Halcros of the world were going to be put on notice and that the Vitus gear would soon be ascending to the top of the US audio marketplace.

But a year went by and I was back at CES and back in the Vitus room and I realized that during the past year I had heard nothing about Vitus Audio. I hadn't heard about dealerships lining up to have a chance to carry this stunning line of products. There was no Vitus dealer in my hometown of Chicago. And even stranger, I hadn't seen any reviews in the "major" publications proclaiming Vitus' gear to be among the best money could buy, which is certainly what I thought of them.

I asked the main man himself, Hans Ole Vitus, "what happened?" He went on to tell me all about the dark side of the business and some of the pitfalls of not having good enough representation and the politics of audiophile journalism. I won't go into the details of this but I'm sure that many of you can read between the lines.

Fast forward another year and Vitus was back for the 2006 CES, but things were a little different. First, Vitus Audio has taken over distribution of their products in the U.S. and, Focus Audio, one of the few loudspeaker manufacturers whose design aesthetics are comparable to Vitus' are handling distribution in Canada. Vitus already has dealers in New York and Los Angeles and may soon have dealers in Florida and - be still my beating heart - Chicago! Second, gone were the trademark Argento Audio cables that Vitus demoed with in the previous shows. Anders Grove the original designer of the Argento cables was now producing the new Vitus Audio "Andromeda" line of cables. And third, there was a new prototype of a smaller, more "affordable" amp called the SS-010.

The SS-010

The SS-010 is the smallest amp in the Vitus line even though it weighs a whopping 77 lbs! Its smaller size may prove to be more of an attribute than a disclaimer compared to the other Vitus amps, the SS-101 stereo amp and SM-101 mono amps which are nearly twice its size. But don't let the fact that the SS-010 is smaller in stature compared to its siblings fool you, it is in no way a small amp. In fact, though rumored to produce only 25-watts per channel, the specifications listed on the Vitus website describe the power output as "Enough!" They ain't kiddin' folks. This baby is a flat out beast! I mean when I replaced the gargantuan BAT amps with this unit it was like David giving Goliath an ass-whippin'. The soundstage was more open, the images clearer and more focused, and the biggest shock of all was that the bass was actually better defined and deeper.

But wait, there's more!

Not only is the SS-010 a wonderful stand alone stereo amp, it can also be used as an integrated amp, meaning that you don't even need a preamp to use it. The unit offers two line level inputs: one



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balanced (XLR) and one unbalanced (RCA). Volume level and input can be selected from the front faceplate or via remote control. I did not have a remote to use during this review so I won't comment on its use.

As an integrated amp I'd have to say that the SS-010 is by far the best sounding one I've ever heard. But the fact is this unit was actually designed to be an amplifier with volume control capability that also gives you the flexibility of using preamps with balanced or unbalanced outputs. So I did most of my listening with my Classé digital front end going through a BAT VK31SE preamp and into the balanced input of the Vitus amp.

As I said before, the openness of the soundstage was one of the first things that I noticed when I put the Vitus amp into my system. This was extremely apparent on the first live recording that I listened to, Kenny Loggins' *Outside: From the Redwoods* [Sony]. As you can tell from the title, this entertaining concert recording took place at an outdoor concert venue amongst the redwood trees of Northern California. The Vitus amp helped to re-create the spaciousness of the surroundings while still rendering the fine details of the music. The ninth track, "Love Will Follow," is a duet with R&B singer Shanice. Her mellifluous voice oozes out over the audience and does not come across as breathy or splashy. Instead, her and Loggins' vocals are rendered with body and texture, which gives substance to the lyrics.

Another of my fave live discs is Kurt Elling's *Live In Chicago* [Blue Note]. I love this disc like I love deep-dish pizza, and considering that I come from Chicago, that means I love it a lot ... a whole lot. To borrow from ESPN's Stuart Scott, Elling's voice is "as cool as the other side of the pillow," and his rendering of the classic "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" is simply mesmerizing. This is where the SS-010's ability to throw a believable stage is important. This amp accurately reproduces the scale and detail of the performers and their instruments with the ambience of live space. The tempo changes on track five, "Night Dream" are also handled particularly well with this amp. The dynamics of the drum and piano solos are rendered flawlessly. And speaking of dynamic piano, it doesn't get



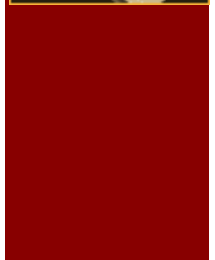
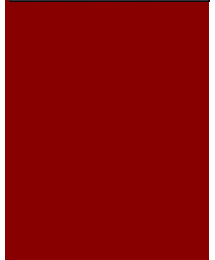
any better than Ahmad Jamal on Live At The Montreal Jazz Festival 1985 [Atlantic]. "Yellow Fellow," the fifteen minute long opening track is a true test of system dynamics, and the Vitus gives this in spades. Of particular note was the rapid-fire percussion work of Seldon Newton. The Vitus amp seemed to give this performance a shot of energy.

But easily the most striking facet of the SS-010's performance was its stunning bass performance. One of my favorite discs for testing a system's bass is Michel Jonasz' two-disc live concert, "*la fabuleuse histoire de Mister Swing*" [WEA 2292-42338-2 II]. The track "La Temps Passe" is a showcase for some deeply layered synthesizers and misseur Jonasz' decidedly pop vocal styling. The synthesizers often drop down to levels only detectable by the inhabitants of Dante's Inferno (now that's deep). But the Vitus amp allows the tones to keep their musical character. In other words, the bass sounds like its part of a piece of music and not just simply the residue of what was supposed to be music. That's pretty damned impressive for a 25 watter folks.

Conclusion

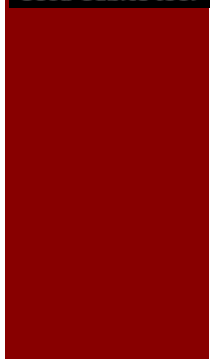
Let's understand something here. The Vitus Audio equipment is not your run-of-the-mill high-end audio gear. Hans Ole Vitus has built equipment that is aesthetically, functionally and sonically superior to most of what represents the high-end. I purposely did not dwell on any technological aspects of this amp because in my opinion, when you're spending this kind of money on equipment of this quality, only the emotional impact of the music it provides is of any relevance. Besides, if you really want to talk specs, give Vitus a call or shoot him an email. He is one of the most down-to-earth persons I've met in this industry. Believe me, there are many designers out there who make so-called high-end components who act as though their proverbial "poo-poo" is without aroma. This is not the case with Vitus.

And I'm not kidding when I say that this stuff will dramatically improve the visual appeal of your listening room. It's just that well built. In fact, when my girlfriend first saw the Vitus amp she turned and asked, "why can't all of your stereo stuff look like this?" But more importantly, it will heighten your appreciation for the very nature of music and particularly live music. Publisher Clement Perry, often speaks of a state of mind he calls "Audio Hell," where reviewers reside when they become exposed to gear that lifts them to a state of euphoria and then destroys them when they are forced to come to grips with the fact that they can never possess the gear that they love. As I prepare to ship the SS-010 back to Denmark, I know where it is that I will be residing for the next few months ... psychologically anyway. The Vitus Audio SS-010 amplifier is not



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Great Systems,
One Customer
at a time.

Used Cables too!



just highly recommended it embodies the spirit of this webzine's highest honor, a "**Most Wanted Component**" award.

Dave Thomas

Technical Specifications:

Vitus Audio Power amplifier SS-010

- Inputs: 1 x unbalanced (RCA) - 1 x balanced (XLR)
- Input resistance: 10Kohm RCA - 600ohm XLR.
- Outputs: 1 Pair pure copper binding posts
- Output power: 25 wpc Class A into 8 Ohms
- Sensitivity: 1.3Volt RMS
- S/N Ratio: > 110dB
- Openloop bandwidth: DC-800Khz
- Slew Rate: > 35V/us
- Distortion (THD+N): Better than 0.01%
- Dimensions: 135 x 435 x 410 mm (H x W x D)
- Total weight:77lbs

Price: \$13,000 USD

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