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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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magazine



Shock of the new

An integrated valve amplifier that embraces new technology

PRODUCT Jadis Orchestra DiP

TYPE Integrated valve amplifier

PRICE £2,995

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 53x26x22cm

• Weight: 20kg • Rated power: 40 watts per channel
• Inputs: 5x line level • Outputs: 1x RMS output (250mV sensitivity), 2x speakers • Docking facility for iPod • Four 6CA7EH output valves; two 12AX7 valves
• Bandwidth (-3dB) 5Hz to 60kHz

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We've covered valve and iPod combis before, but it's still a fascinating mix of old and new technology. It's a bit like getting on a steam train and finding one of its Pullman coaches has been kitted out as an internet café. What's the world coming to – is nothing sacred?

Undoubtedly, some will see a marriage of incompatible opposites – akin to a high-performance sports car with an extra fuel tank enabling it to run on paraffin. But, with increasing numbers of people listening to music from iPods, iPhones, and suchlike, it's inevitable the two will combine.

The original Jadis Orchestra amplifier has been around for some 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.

Jadis is an enthusiast specialist French manufacturer of valve amplifiers and CD players. Its profile is perhaps a bit lower than some, but its products are highly regarded for smooth natural sound quality.

The Orchestra DiP is 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. Volume levels can be remotely controlled using a supplied handset. With a total of six valves, the amp runs fairly hot. Build quality is very good, with much of the circuitry hard-wired.

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. The music sounded okay; smooth, clear, and natural, with reasonably good dynamic range and fine detail. Of course,

much depends on the compression used for the original download – the lower the better.

The iPod plugs into a special dock on top and starts-up automatically when the amp is switched on. The amp powers the iPod and recharges its battery – albeit only with the amp switched on and the iPod switched off.

Playing the Beatles' *Free as a Bird*, the iPod sounded less forward and detailed than the CD. The bass seemed a touch compressed, while the soundstage had a 'flat' quality. The CD was more holographic with superior stereo performance.

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



“The tonality of the Orchestra DiP also helps disguise sonic weaknesses in the iPod, minimising any lack of richness and warmth.”

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 surprises there – the iPod was okay once the ear adjusted to what was on offer.

SOUND QUALITY

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; 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.

But 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 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 certainly welcome a source with long continuous playing times – as there are many times when this facility would be very useful. So, the answer has to be 'yes'.

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. **HFC**

Jimmy Hughes



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Very good sound quality – smooth, rich and powerful; Can also be used directly with an iPod. All-in-all, very solidly made and a pleasing, but funky design.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★☆	CON Limited absolute power output – though subjectively the performance is more powerful than the rating would suggest.
VALUE ★★★★☆	

CONCLUSION
Anyone interested in a smooth, refined, yet dynamic-sounding tube amp should give the Jadis Orchestra DiP an audition. But if iPod docking is of no interest, check out the Orchestra Reference.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

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