

# Virtuoso composition

System-matching maestro *Ed Selley* finds that this Cyrus/Vienna Acoustics partnership conducts itself in a most musical fashion...

The hi-fi industry lives on unwritten rules. One of the most enduring is the notion that if you want extensive functionality, your box count is likely to increase. Another is that if you want large amounts of power, the physical size of your system will also have to go up. Acceptance of these two statements is nigh on absolute, and has been for years. Almost as durable is the notion that big sounding speakers must be big themselves.

What then, are we to make of this system? Here we have three boxes that offer extensive functionality and a Herculean power output, yet collectively they could easily occupy one shelf of a conventional hi-fi rack. Not quite a brace of Krells, then!

It is capable of staggering results with almost every piece of music at almost every volume level...

They are joined by a pair of loudspeakers that themselves do their very best to subvert the laws of physics. The result is a visually elegant combination that may also be one of the most forward thinking systems on the market today.

## Coming on Stream

Cyrus has been building its equipment into smaller boxes than everyone else for decades now, but recently it's been even more inventive than most in blurring the boundaries of functionality that any given component should be capable of. There is no finer example of this than the £2,000 Stream XP which forms the brain of this system. This is at the

## COMPONENTS



### 1 CYRUS STREAM XP £2,000

Flagship of the Cyrus streaming range, the Stream XP mates a 24-bit/96kHz-capable network streamer with digital inputs and a preamp. Can be connected directly to the company's power amps for a more compact system.



### 2 CYRUS MONO X300 £2,500 (EACH)

Like the Stream XP, the X300 is the top of the Cyrus power amplifier range. A zero feedback Class A/B design capable of a claimed 235 watts into 8 ohms, rising to the all-important 300 as impedance drops.

### 3 VIENNA ACOUSTICS BEETHOVEN BABY GRAND £3,300

A diminutive version of the range-topping Beethoven Concert Grand, the Baby Grand makes use of the same XPP driver technology and heavily braced cabinet, but has slightly smaller dimensions overall.





**LEFT:** The gorgeous-looking Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand  
**RIGHT:** Top of Cyrus's power amp range is the X300  
**BELOW:** The 24-bit/96kHz-capable Cyrus Stream XP

amps. Exactly the same size to the millimetre as the Stream XP, these little silver blocks seek to subvert unwritten rule number two that with high-output power comes large boxes. As the name suggests, each X300 can deliver a claimed 300 watts into loads between four and eight ohms – or to put it more succinctly, the load presented by the bulk of modern loudspeakers.

Don't be fooled into thinking that they make use of the fashionable way of producing big power in a small place either. These are *not* Class D amps, but Class A-B designs running zero feedback.

It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that because it looks so similar, all Cyrus gear is largely the same. The X300s might be wearing the same uniform as the other power amps, but their internals are anything but ordinary.

### Roll over Beethoven

Partnering this sophisticated trio is the Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand. These slim floorstanders are distributed by Cyrus and are an ideal partner for its electronics. The Baby Grands make use of a specially developed thermo plastic called XPP for the midrange and bass drivers. The lower bass drivers are then braced with a 'spiderweb' for maximum stiffness. The result is an immensely light and strong driver, it's claimed. An unbraced XPP driver handles the midrange and a soft-dome tweeter developed with Scanspeak tops things off.

same time, an iPod dock, internet radio, DAC and preamplifier. Where once, you would have had a stack of components to achieve this functionality, here you're down to a single one.

This condensing extends beyond your electronics, too. The Stream XP is one of a few products I have tested over the last year that has helped convince me it is time to rip my CDs and stow them away. Historically a listening room would be host to multiple boxes and a wall of CDs to play on it, the Stream XP will free up space in the room as well as on the rack. It is so gratifyingly easy and satisfying to use, that even the most die-hard disciple of the silver disc will be thumbing through titles on the swish n-remote and thinking about ripping software inside of twenty minutes.

The preamp output of the Stream XP is connected directly to the other part of this space-saving masterclass, a pair of £2,500 Mono X300 power



The result is very much like the electronics. This is an attractive and relatively compact speaker that bristles with innovative technology. They are easy to place and if the sumptuous piano black lacquer isn't to your liking, there are a variety of wood finishes as well. With the Viennas in place, we have five boxes that seem determined to give a two fingered salute to the unwritten rules of hi-fi. Does it deliver?

### In concert

The best way to get a good idea of what this system is about is to play a recording that you know intimately. Not a flavour of the month, but something you have owned for years and always find yourself returning to. For me this is *Every Day* by the Cinematic Orchestra – as magnificent an album as any released this century.

The Cyrus/Vienna combo changes nothing and puts remarkably little of itself between the recording and your ears, but the result is still utterly profound. The detail retrieval and the ease with which this system presents every facet of the recording is something of a revelation. I guarantee that you will be made aware of a detail on the recording that you were previously unaware of. Given that I must have listened to the album in question, nigh on a thousand times, this is no small achievement.

To be clear, this is not some joyless, analytical machine that revels in a warts and all destruction of your favourite material, but an incredibly musical and genuinely satisfying combination that happens to

offer spectacular insight into material it plays. You cannot put this on for background listening as it constantly and effortlessly grabs your attention and holds it. It manages to sound 'right' across a vast swathe of music.

This is partly down to how well it covers the basics – the tonality that this system has is of the very highest order and it produces one of the most tangible soundstages I have experienced. The Viennas are wonderfully composed at all listening levels and are extremely even from top to bottom with no part of the frequency spectrum being accentuated.

This is also a great advert for high-power outputs. At no stage do you feel like this is a very powerful system, simply a very good one that happens to have the headroom to do anything you might want. There is no transient or dynamic swing that this system cannot reproduce with little apparent effort and seemingly no perceivable sense of strain.

Because the Mono X300s are so clean, there is little real sense of just how loud you can drive them. Unless your listening room seats fifty people and also doubles as a testing space for hot air balloons, I can't see you ever coming close to the limits of what these units can achieve. In my more limited listening space I didn't even trip the cooling fans of the X300s. This suggested that I was barely scratching the surface of what was possible. Indeed I'd liked to have pushed harder but the laws of the land wouldn't permit!

As you can use the n-remote to set the Stream XP up to play custom



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playlists and queue tracks on request, you can set this system the most irrational challenges. You can start with Chopin's *Raindrop Prelude*, move swiftly into Ray LaMontagne's *Till the Sun Turns Black*, make an abrupt turn to The Black Key's *El Camino* and finish up with Orbital's *The Altogether*, without ever leaving your seat.

Not only is this very convenient for the terminally idle amongst us, but it demonstrates the sheer breadth of talent this system possesses. It is as happy with the delicate keystrokes of the opening of Chopin, as it is with the huge electronic wall of sound from Orbital. It times beautifully, but never forces slower material. It can deliver a powerful thump in the thorax yet capture a plucked bass string with real delicacy and conviction. It genuinely is a fabulous all-rounder, in my humble opinion.

Don't be fooled by the modest dimensions; what you see here is one of the boldest and most innovative systems I've ever tested. It's the shape and size that it needs to be, rather what tradition dictates it should be. This means that there are few spaces it could not be fitted in to. The system performs many functions and does them with such *elan*.

Most importantly, it is capable of staggering sonic results with almost every piece of music at almost every volume level. So yes, I hope it shows that I came away most impressed! It's fair to say that the unwritten rules of hi-fi are rarely rewritten overnight, but to my eyes and ears at least, this Cyrus/Vienna Acoustics system has them thoroughly bent out of shape. ●