

INPUT

MENU

STANDBY

SELECT

Line 21



Vitus Audio 010 Amplifier

by Chris Thomas

It is no mean feat to jump two-footed into designing and manufacturing audio equipment. The two-channel market seems to be bursting at the seams despite the prophets of doom constantly telling us that it is forever shrinking. But to take that leap with your sights set firmly on the high-end and to have the conviction and belief that you have something genuinely new to offer is something else completely. Hans Ole Vitus, or just plain Vitus as he likes to be known, originally founded his company back in 1995 and was joined by long-term associate Anders Grove (who had been running cable manufacturer Argento) about a decade later. Vitus themselves describe Anders as “the weird inventor type” and that’s probably not a bad description of a man who apparently once constructed a speaker membrane from Quails eggs. That’s certainly weird enough for me.

Vitus is based in Denmark, where the company design and hand-build several very interesting and expensive audio electronics and some equally serious cabling named Andromeda. Back in Issue 29 RG reviewed the battery powered RP 100 phono and RL-100 line-stages from their Audio Statement series of products and was lost in admiration for what he was hearing. Now Vitus have produced a fascinating new amplifier in their Signature series and I have been fortunate enough to have been using it for the past couple of months and I have to confess that I too am smitten by the way their products make music. This amplifier, the SS-010, is a lot more affordable than the Audio Statement products and its unusual configuration is likely to broaden customer interest even more.

So, is the SS-010 an integrated amplifier or a power amplifier with a

volume control? Vitus himself reckons the latter because that was how it was originally designed, but that doesn’t really tell the whole story as it can function as both. In integrated guise it is limited to only two inputs (but that will be enough for most people) while the power amplifier section is only 25 watts. Not enough I hear you say. But wait and read on as this amplifier proves conclusively that not all watts are made equal and if this is really 25 watts, then that’s about all I need anyway.

You want to know what this little Vitus is all about? Then try and pick it up by yourself, all 35 Kg of it. You can do it, but I’d advise you not to. Enlist the help of a friend because inside that beautifully constructed case is the heart of this design, a transformer that (relatively speaking) must be the biggest I have ever encountered given the size of the component itself. Behind the use of that particular UI 1400KVA unit (UI denotes the complex shape of the transformer core) lies a story in itself as Hans Ole Vitus has some firm and unconventional ideas on the subject, having spent literally years researching and experimenting with every possible transformer technology available. Despite being used in a number of high-end designs, Vitus dislikes toroidal transformers and believes that the only advantages they offer are those of small size and lower cost, factors that are of no concern in the manufacture of his amplifiers. The custom Vitus transformers, it is claimed, offer the level of stability and clarity that they are looking for and do away with the need for external power conditioners. They have low capacitive mains coupling, low magnetic radiation and very low voltage drop. Far from being another manufacturer talking up

his own products his philosophy and intention is clear. He takes tremendous pride in using the best materials available, regardless of the costs involved, and this strict policy applies to every part of each design and that transformer is just one element of this thinking.

The SS-010 has two inputs, one balanced and the other single-ended and either can be used as a pre-in



when the unit is electronically configured as a power amplifier. This is achieved, as are all the other functions, through the very neat menu system which is accessed via the front panel buttons or the remote control unit. This particular amplifier was supplied with a Phillips Pronto unit that had been pre-programmed to operate the entire Vitus range, as the dedicated version was not yet available. When it does arrive I hope it will provide a broader window of acceptance than the Phillips, as you need to be virtually head-on to the unit to get it to accept commands. However, I fear not as the IR receiver is in the recessed portion of the front panel. The illuminated display offers you the ability to name each input, brighten or dim the display, select the distance between volume steps, bypass the pre-amp section completely (to ►

► use as a power amplifier) and to select whether the power amplifier operates in class A or A/B. When you power the amplifier from its standby state it defaults to the A/B setting which sounds very good indeed, but it performs appreciably better in pure class A, also achievable via a single input on the remote control.

In either output condition the power rating is 25 watts into 8 Ohms, only the quiescent current is changed. It takes about an hour or so after switching before it heats up and you will hear the amplifier in its full class A glory. Vitus have cleverly included the A/B setting for non-critical listening and to use as an alternative to the standby function to avoid completely powering down, to save on electricity consumption. I mention A/B as being for non-critical listening but in doing so I probably sell it short as it is no mean achiever in this mode, but the main reason to buy the SS-010 is for its sheer seamless top to bottom musical fluency and beauty as a class A amplifier. This is its whole *raison d'être*.

Vitus tells me that one of the speakers he used for developing the SS-010 was the Focal/JMLabs Micro Utopia Be, which coincidentally is the speaker I use at home*. So, it came as no surprise that through these speakers the tonal balance is just about as perfect as I have heard. I should add here that almost all the listening was done with a full Nordost Valhalla loom that was later substituted for a while by the Andromeda interconnect and speaker cables. But given the lengthy run-in times the Andromeda obviously need I decided to eliminate this as yet

* As an interesting sub plot to this review I discovered that Vitus actually offer a series of modifications to the Micro centred around re-wiring the entire speaker with Andromeda cable and I may well report on this intriguing prospect over the coming months.

unknown quantity from the equation for the moment and review them as a separate item at a future date. It should be noted here that all Vitus amplifiers are internally wired with Andromeda. I also don't want you to think that you have to use Vitus' own cables, superb as they promise to be, to achieve such great results.



At the centre of this amplifier's musical brilliance there is an inky black sense of tranquillity from which all music flows. An unforced, unprocessed stream of musical information of such stability and strength that its ability to deal with any tonal or rhythmic conundrum you may ask of it seems almost limitless. It has superb control but not that solid-state artificial, iron-fist grip that characterises so many high-end designs but a naturally structured ease and real world instrumental architecture.

This is helped enormously by an effortlessly large acoustic with tremendous depth, considerable useable bandwidth and truly rock-solid, unwavering multi-dimensional imaging. No single part suffers in comparison to any other, as this amplifier is as good at very high frequencies as it is at the opposite end of the scale. Musically it is as seamless as I have heard and is more colourful and textural than anything

other than the very best designs available. But it is the way in which it manages to incorporate all these areas of technical excellence into such rhythmic concentration and sense of movement and progression that really sets it apart. To talk about what it does and how it does it one really needs to quantify it in musical terms as the Vitus is one of those select few products that just lets the music happen without either forcing or

squeezing it out, nor providing a bottleneck to the quite wonderful flow of rhythmic subtleties and micro dynamics and shifts.

It is almost unbelievably smooth but don't let this fool you into believing that it is dynamically shy or remotely soft in nature. It is fast, dramatic, powerful and edgy when the music demands and can swing convincing transients, yet remain totally in control all the while. It's that custom-made transformer again, which seems able to deliver precise amounts of power with absolute precision to any part of the bandwidth when and where it is needed.

Resolution, though not the best I have ever heard, is generally excellent too. It never sounds overtly or clinically detailed but the closer you look, the more nuanced and subtle the music ►

► seems to be. I am always looking for audio systems that let me step deeper and deeper into the music and its structures and building blocks. I have an endless fascination with musicians and their relationships with their instruments. For me, it is the quality of the playing that really counts and the way in which musicians illustrate their own personalities in the shape of colour and tone through their amalgamation of taste, feel and technique. The Vitus brings all those things together in such an accessible and focussed way that it somehow seems to enhance the pure beauty of music to a point where the equipment is merely a tool and the music itself is the message. As I said, it just opens the window and lets the music happen with no sense of the mechanics of reproduction getting in the way.

So, configured as an integrated amplifier it is superb and as a power amplifier with the volume control disconnected it is just as impressive,

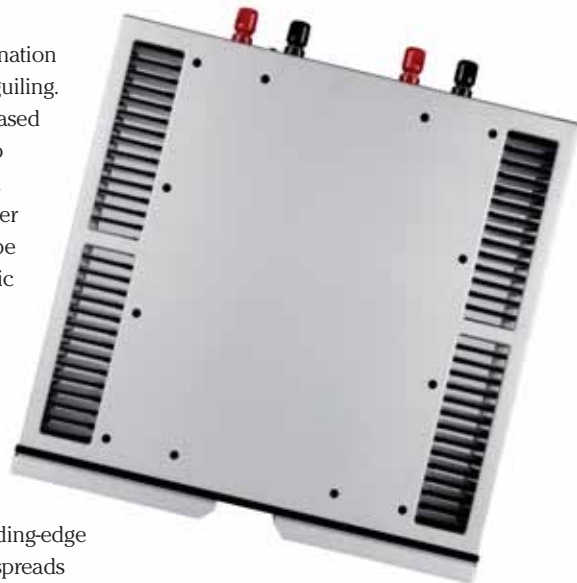


only now its ultimate quality will also be dictated by the partnering pre-amplifier. I used it with the Lyra Connoisseur 4.2L SE line-stage, which is still the best piece of audio electronics I have heard and it was mighty. Ideally I would have liked a bit more gain and Vitus tells me that all production models to follow will indeed be more sensitive. But the transparency, separation and dynamic freedom that this combination produces mean that

the music takes on new fascination and becomes even more beguiling. Working with the Lyra's increased resolution I loved its ability to unravel intense and complex passages of music without ever dropping a stitch and it can be compelling and even hypnotic in its relentless and unerring sense of rhythmic drive and precision. The bandwidth increases and so does the amplifier's sense of control. The bass is now more persuasive than ever with improved pitch and leading-edge impact and as the midband spreads deeper and deeper that extra high frequency articulation and tonal layering and texture give the music a sense of unprocessed reality that is rare and tremendously enjoyable. Just when you think you have its measure it will surprise you by illustrating a new slant on musical pieces that you have heard a hundred times before. You will hear a melody line or a tempo change and new possibilities and instrumental

relationships will open up. The Lyra Connoisseur itself is the master of these particular insights anyway, so hook it into the SS-010 and you have something that sounds so musically natural and powerful that you'll find it hard to tear yourself away.

I suppose the power rating might be inadequate for those with larger rooms or exceptionally inefficient speakers but I reckon it will still be enough for most. And there are those for whom two inputs will not be sufficient. But its possibilities are appealing. You could use it, with complete satisfaction, as an integrated amplifier and set up like this it comprehensively crushes most pre/power opposition, even at twice its price.



Then, at a later date, add a separate pre-amplifier (I'm sure there will be a suitable model from the Signature series soon) with no redundancy. By the time you read this, Vitus will likely have a UK distributor and I would strongly encourage you to seek them out. For a hand-made amplifier of this quality I assure you that the asking price is not excessive. I think it is a great product – in many ways the most impressive I've heard since the Connoisseur, which is praise indeed.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Solid-state class A power amplifier – with volume control
Power Output:	25 W Class A / 25W Class AB
Inputs:	1 x RCA, 1 x XLR
Input Impedance:	RCA – 10 kOhms, XLR – 600 Ohms
Frequency Response:	DC to 800kHz
Dimensions (WxHxD):	435 x 130 x 430 mm
Weight:	35 Kg
Price:	£6550.00

Manufacturer:

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