

NEW PRODUCTS

ARCHER'S SCREENING ROOM

Can't Touch This

I have to wonder if the artist known as Hammer was inspired to write "Can't Touch This" after listening to a system full of Cary Audio gear.

Of course, I am only fooling, but I can say that after spending significant time with the company's DVD-6 player, Cinema 6 pre/pro and Cinema 5 amplifier, I was won over by the components' effortless power delivery, smooth, extended sound and plentiful, easy-to-use features in a package that is competitive with the very best products the industry has to offer.

Technologies and Design

In order to save valuable space within this write-up I will say that each of the Cary products offers everything that a user would expect to find in a theater component other than the DVD-6's lack of DVD-Audio or SACD compatibility. Nevertheless, the DVD-6 is compatible with DVD-Video and all of the popular recordable CD and DVD formats. The Cinema 6 offers a plethora of inputs and outputs, including an analog multichannel bypass mode for players equipped to play DVD-A and SACD. It also offers all of the usual home theater-decoding suspects: Dolby Digital, DTS, Pro



Logic IIx and DTS Neo: 6. One feature on the pre/pro I found unique was its upsampling mode, which doubles the word size and bit-rate of CD's 16-bit/44kHz standard. The Cinema 5 includes balanced and unbalanced inputs and a 12-volt trigger.

Installation Issues

I found the setup of the system to be easy; in fact total setup time was about 90 minutes. This included unpacking the double-boxed components, the connections of speakers, source components and system calibration. I attribute the quick setup to the fact that the components' physical layout and user interface are clean and simple. For example, wiring the 12-volt trigger is as easy as plugging in a mini-jack cable, and there's enough room between the amp's binding posts to tighten them down without scraping your knuckles. Moreover, the pre/pro's user interface can be set up from the front panel or by running a composite or S-Video cable to a video display like my Hitachi RPTV. Once into the menus, their instructions are understandable and are easy to read. The only problem I ran into was

the fact that I could not reset the factory default for analog decoding from two-channel to Dolby Pro Logic II.

Sound

After completing the necessary break-in time with the components, which surpassed the 100-hour plateau, I found the system's sound to be smooth from the lowest frequencies right up to the last octaves. It didn't add any bloated low-end sloppiness, any midrange coloration or any brightness to the top end.

The system was also remarkably consistent in its ability to image and to throw a wide soundstage. Its background blackness and low-end speed didn't quite match my Bryston 9B-ST, but it was pretty close.

The amp's ability to drive a variety of speakers was also apparent. During my time with the Cary gear I swapped out Mirage, BG Corp. and Aerial Acoustics speakers, and the amp never seemed to compress or to run out of power driving these speakers.

Comparing the Cary pre/pro to my Bryston 1.7, I also found the performance difference pretty close. I liked the tightness and pacing of the

Cary unit's sound, but as good as the Cary's user interface is, Bryston's is the best in the industry. I also preferred Bryston's bypass modes, which I thought sounded a little more natural.

Finally, I think the Cinema 6 DVD player is one of the best DVD players on the market, and I would put it up against any manufacturers in terms of video quality, DVD and CD sound quality and its user interface.

Final Thoughts

Cary Audio's Cinema series of components are by no means cheap when compared to mass-market black plastic boxes, but at the same time they are not priced in the stratosphere. In my mind, based on the current market conditions, this makes the Cary products a true value. They are well built, their designs are well thought out, and their performance is reference quality. All things considered, the Cary line is impossible for dealers to pass up, and in today's age of instantly informed consumers there's always someone looking for their next value purchase.

SYSTEM MSRP IS \$8,500.

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