



£2,500 (£1,000 + £1,500) ☎ 0845 458 0011 🌐 www.audiolab.co.uk

## AUDIOLAB 8000AP/8000X7

*This musical system will ruffle some feathers*

**O**K, we admit it: this is the joker in the pack. Not, however, that either we or Audiolab are having a laugh. We just thought it would be interesting to find out whether an AV-oriented, multichannel, pre/power combination can cut it when playing music in the company of dedicated stereo-only kit. It's an issue which is often shied away from, but the fact remains that plenty of people would like to use one system for both music and movies (who wants another stack of metal boxes in their life?) but lack reliable information on whether a multichannel amp can be trusted with music.

The 8000AP has five line stereo inputs and one 5.1 channel input, all on phono sockets, plus a 7.1 channel analogue output. It also has seven digital inputs (three electrical, four optical) and two HDMI inputs, plus one optical digital output and one HDMI to feed a projector or plasma screen. Not surprisingly, all the signal switching and volume control stuff is done digitally, but Audiolab has gone one step further and digitised the analogue inputs, as is evident from their frequency response (see Lab Report).

The 8000X7 is a much less high-tech affair. Its story begins with a monstrous toroidal transformer, which is obviously going to be needed for seven channels of 100 watts, and ends with a pair per channel of bipolar power transistors mounted on the heatsinks which make up the sides of the unit. Eight of these (four channels'-worth) are on the left side, mounted so that they actually touch each other. Between the transformer and the output stages are seven channels of driver stages, implemented with a mixture of through-hole

and surface-mount parts, mostly discrete transistors and decent-quality passive parts. Audiolab has been careful with real estate planning and it's not a mad squeeze.

### SOUND QUALITY

Returning to the issue we raised in the first paragraph, it seems that a multichannel system like this can indeed give musical satisfaction. Indeed – and this may ruffle some feathers – it was felt to be one of the most 'musical' systems in the test. Starting on the rock'n'roll, the bass was felt to be big, bold and clear, though just a little loose compared with some of the others. The same applied in the jazz track, where the bass seemed somehow slower than the melody. All the same, the higher frequencies in this track were clear and natural and the overall presentation encouraged musical, rather than technical thoughts in the listeners.

Classical music also showed off the Audiolabs to good advantage, with the relationship between instruments particularly admired. Against that, one listener pointed out that the clarity with which the individual voices in the opera chorus could be discerned was some way short of perfect and the depth of the stereo image fell short of that projected by the other amps.

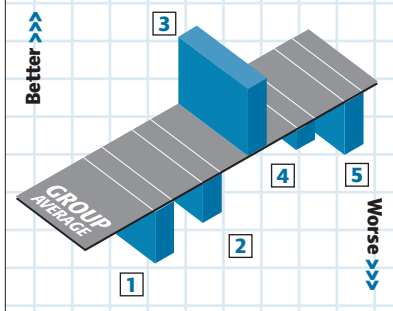
Such limitations as this duo has are to do with resolution and analysis and in these areas it is not a match for the Bryston. But the latter (see page 73) is twice the price and doesn't include seven channels! The DAC performance is impressive too, with notably fine high treble and very clear decay of notes into silence. **HFC**



### LAB REPORT

The most unusual measurement from these units is the frequency response of the preamp, which is 0.2dB down at 2kHz, 3dB down at 23.5kHz and essentially nothing at all above 24.5kHz – the dead giveaway of internal analogue-to-digital conversion. Typical of CD, of course, but an interesting combination with high-sampling sources. However, if you use the internal DAC the response can be more extended when 96kHz or higher sampling rates are used. Beyond that the preamp's performance is typical, while the power amp has a more conventional frequency response, generously extended both upwards and down, and a comfortable 115W power delivery into a stereo pair of 8 ohm loads. The X7's output impedance is high by modern standards, equivalent to a damping factor of about 60, but this is still good enough to ensure decent control of drive units as long as low resistance cables are used.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -30%
- 2] Frequency response >> -20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +40%
- 4] Distortion >> -10%
- 5] Output impedance >> -30%

### SPECIFICATIONS

| Measurement                     | Rated | Actual |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|
| Power output (8 ohms)           | 100W  | 112W   |
| Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)        | -     | 0.007% |
| Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz) | -     | ±0.4dB |

### VERDICT

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>SOUND</b><br>★★★★★    | The multichannel features are impressive and the proliferation of digital inputs could be useful. The welcome surprise, though, is that this combo does music with real panache. |
| <b>FEATURES</b><br>★★★★★ |  |
| <b>BUILD</b><br>★★★★★    | <b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> OVERALL SCORE<br>★★★★★   |
| <b>VALUE</b><br>★★★★★    |  |