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Jadis DA88S MkII Integrated Amplifier Magnifique!

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by [Jacob Heilbrunn \(/articles/?authors=21\)](/articles/?authors=21) | Jul 17th, 2015

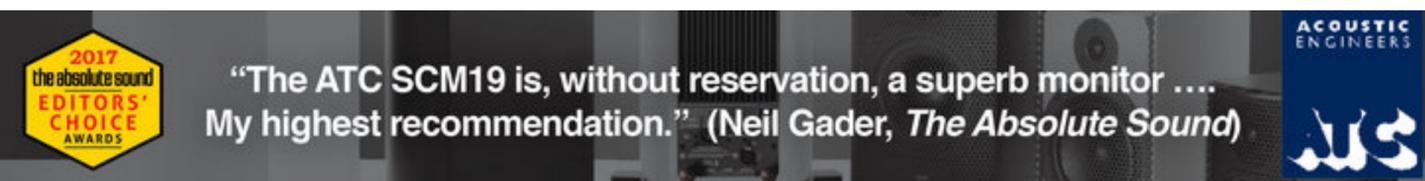
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I'll be the first to admit that I was more than a little dubious after uncrating and surveying the Jadis DA88S MkII integrated amplifier.

Sure, Jadis is a storied brand known for its hand-wound transformers, and it has more than a few audiophile worshippers. But I must confess that I was a mite skeptical about whether this integrated amp could really deliver the goods. My reservations went along something like these lines: Integrated amp, not separates; fairly inexpensive, as high-end audio products go; a mere 60 watts of output power; a lightweight; and so on. Skepticism, in other words, abounded. Still I was determined to give this piece of Gallic electronics a fair shake. So I plugged in a CD featuring the British trumpeter John Wallace performing Gabrieli and hit play on the dCS Vivaldi.



Every preconception that I had was laid waste within a few seconds as I listened to an integrated amplifier that wasn't merely good—it was spectacular. I knew that the Wilson XLF loudspeakers are fairly easy to drive, but the Jadis demonstrated a dynamic alacrity and vividness and prowess—a *puissance*, to use the wonderful French term—that placed it in the very top echelon of audio equipment regardless of price. There was no syrupy sound here—just superb dimensionality, iron grip, and unrelenting drive. The jump factor of the Jadis is off the charts. Put otherwise, it sounds as stunning as it looks.

One of the reasons that the DA88S looks so striking, apart from its metal work, is that it displays its input and output tubes so prominently. The version that I received was loaded for bear with the imposing KT120 tube, a more prodigious version of the venerable 6550, that has come on strong in recent years. The input tubes are 12ax7 and 12au7s. The 12ax7 is often considered to be somewhat dark in sound, but I heard no hint of this in the Jadis. The unit is simplicity itself to operate. All that is required to get it up and running is to unscrew the bolts holding down a black protective cage and insert the tubes. The owner's manual states that you should always keep the cage on, but I didn't. It's visually more pleasurable to see the glowing tubes without a barrier.

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Jadis DA88S MkII Integrated Amplifier

As far as the tubes are concerned, the Jadis requires no further user intervention. The unit is self-biasing. Its only other controls are a volume knob, an input selector, and (gasp!) a balance control, something that many audiophiles frown on but that my friend and fellow TAS reviewer Anthony Cordesman considers a vital part of an audio system, because of room anomalies (not to mention that it's pretty much impossible to get a phono cartridge to output precisely the same voltage from each channel). Measure it and you're more than likely to find a discrepancy, however minute. I should also state upfront that, though I've seen reports of reliability problems with Jadis equipment in the past, there were absolutely no hiccups in my system. It truly was plug 'n' play, though you're better off waiting at least an hour for the tubes to warm up fully to attain everything that this unit has to offer.



One of the first things you notice about a revealing system is a sense of flow—a sense of the almost microscopic nuances that transform a musical passage from rote reproduction into a singing line. On a Carlos Kleiber live recording of the Vienna Philharmonic performing Strauss waltzes in the Musikverein, this once more came vividly home to me. Probably no orchestra in the world has this sense of pacing more in its bones than the Vienna players. The Jadis delivered those tiny details with truly stupefying fidelity, at a level that I would hitherto never have credited to an integrated amplifier. On the venerable *Radetzky* March, for example, the crispness of the trumpets, the precision of the cymbals, and the sheer exuberance of the waltz were fully realized by the Jadis. The Jadis discriminated between the *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* passages with sovereign ease. It was hard not to be swept along by the martial zest of the whole thing, particularly when you could hear the audience enthusiastically clapping in the background.

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