

## EQUIPMENT REVIEW

# Peachtree Audio Nova 300 integrated amplifier

by Eric Neff



**T**o some, hi-fi is about 'WAF' vs 'The Stack' and the fun of seeing your mates faces when they come over to see and hear your new amazing system. Should you go with the lifestyle piece and forego that visceral thrill of jaws dropping upon sight? What about performance? Naturally the big iron (or billeted Aluminium) will have a sonic and power advantage over the smaller and almost certainly Class-D unit, right? Well, the lifestyle piece certainly won't blow your friends away by dominating one end of the living room like a shrine to your audio deity, but we have reached a point where sonically you can bring high performance and significant flexibility in a single box.

Case in point, the Peachtree Audio Nova 300. Peachtree Audio is an American company whose amps are built in Canada. Peachtree Audio is celebrating its 10th anniversary and is rebranding itself Peachtree 2.0 to reflect a complete overhaul of their lineup as well as moving all production back to North America. The Nova 300 is currently the top of their lineup with the yet-to-be-released Nova 500 coming soon. The Nova 300 is not simply an integrated amplifier. Reading the box, it is an integrated amp, reference DAC, phono preamp (MM only), has a home cinema bypass option, and includes a headphone amp. It is also iOS certified and supports direct WiFi play. It offers a wide variety of connectivity to accommodate most ▶

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- ▶ any system configuration. It can operate as an amp only or a high-performance preamp. The two analogue inputs can each manage two different functions. It is easily field upgraded for any firmware updates (I performed one and it took less than 15 seconds.)

Previous models of Peachtree integrated had a valve input which has been removed in this new series of products. When I asked about that to Peachtree's VP of Sales and Marketing David Solomon, he stated that the reduction of signal-to-noise ratio to  $-111\text{dB}$  at the pre-amp meant the valve was simply too noisy for the qualities of this next generation pre-amplifier. It's one thing to use a valve buffer on a preamp that's doing  $-100\text{dB}$ , but totally different when it's  $-111\text{dB}$ . No audiophile would want that kind of dynamic damper. One step back perhaps for some audiophiles but a clear two steps forward for sonics. Another upgrade is the switch to new-generation ICEpower ASC Class D amplifier modules that in Peachtree's view have surpassed many of the Class A/B amps in sonic character. This forward leap is due in large part to the new switching power supplies operating at  $440\text{kHz}$  vs the previous  $100\text{kHz}$ . All hint of power supply noise is gone creating a real head to head battle in amplifier designs. The amp has a signal to noise ratio of  $105\text{ dB A-weighted}$  at the speaker level and can function safely down to  $2.5\text{ Ohms}$ . Power ratings come in at  $300\text{ Wpc}$  at  $8\text{ Ohms}$  and  $450$  at  $4\text{ Ohms}$  – sufficient power to drive virtually any speaker with ease and musicality.

One currently missing item is the wireless module. It is in development. What to do when using your iPhone as a source then? Enter DyNEC, the Dynamic Noise Elimination Circuit. DyNEC is specifically designed to eliminate the electronic noise generated from interference coming from the high-resolution screen refresh from the phone itself as well as power supply

interference. Using the same USB-A to Lightning cable that comes with the iPhone it creates a direct link to the Nova 300's ES9018K2M SABRE32 Reference DAC. The DAC can handle  $32\text{Bit}/384\text{kHz}$  PCM and  $5.2\text{MHz}$  DSD. Peachtree has optimised the DAC to its own programming and power supply specifications to maximise its full potential. The cheap iPhone DAC gets a huge boost from this proprietary setup. Hooking up my iPhone 6s+ to the Nova produced excellent results from basic iTunes Store downloaded AAC files. It was a good introduction to the sound I would enjoy with Nova 300.

Utilising the Nova 300 as a true lifestyle system, I connected my KEF LS50 standmount speakers using AudioQuest cables. Digital files were sourced from my MacBook Pro via AudioQuest to the USB-B connection on the Nova. A quick reset of the Mac to the Nova 300 as DAC and Annie Lennox was playing through the KEF's. 'Into the West' [2003, Reprise] was the final credits track for the *Return of the King* movie soundtrack. It is a great female vocal track and the Nova 300 produced excellent tonality via the LS50's. The horns had just the right amount of brass. The guitar strings were gentle and complimentary to Annie's soft vocals. Imaging was spot on and the soundstage was broad and well defined. David mentioned when I spoke to him that the KEF's were a popular pairing with both Nova integrated's. I can certainly see why.

Switching to one of the analogue inputs, I hooked up the new Oppo UDP-205 with AudioQuest cables. The new Oppo utilises a pair of the new ES9038Pro chips and now is the flagship for Oppo Digital's audiophile focused player. Starting with female vocals, I selected Dido Armstrong's *No Angel* [1999 CD Arista] and the last track, 'Take'. The beginning snare drum was crisp with a terrific sense of decay and space. This track ▶

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► is very intimate, building from the sounds of a drum set, then adding piano, Hammond B3 organ, and Wurlitzer electric piano. The effect is haunting as the song takes on more dimensionality. Dido begins to emerge from within the center of the massed keyboards and takes shape in front of the listener. You can hear her lips parting prior to the words. I have heard this song on systems priced at ten times this price and not been any more moved. Coming in around £4,000 including cables, this was fun! The fact that you could place this system easily into most living rooms without it demanding to be noticed was wonderful.

Moving back to digital audio, I queued up Los Lonely Boys' *Sacred* [2006 Epic Records]. 'Diamonds' is a fluid, guitar-led track featuring Henry Garza's smooth Stratocaster. I have seen them perform it live a few times from 30 feet away at their annual summer show in Minneapolis-Saint Paul. I love how their enthusiasm comes through via the ripped CD file. The Nova 300 allowed the crisp attack of finger on strings to come through clearly. The key to the track is tone and the strings had clear and accurate tone with an almost weeping quality with the bends Henry performs so expertly. This is a joyful song which the Nova 300/LS50 combination brought to life in a wonderful presentation.

One aspect of the Nova 300 I have not yet addressed is the headphone amp. It was not a quick add-on. It was engineered to be a high performance stand-alone component of the system suitable for virtually any impedance headphone. Most headphone amps can drive a high impedance headphone without much trouble. I went to other way using a pair of HiFiMAN Edition X v2 Planar Magnetics coming in at an amp straining 25 Ohms. I wanted a test for the Nova 300 so I went with Mozart's Piano Sonata no. 16 in B Flat Major 3. Allegretto [1990 Friedrich Gulda Piano, Deutsche Grammophon] Reproducing piano tones for any speaker or headphone is a challenge. The Edition X is a natural tone champion so it was up to the Nova 300 to deliver the goods. And deliver it did! The headphone amp is clearly a well-designed unit offering subtlety and clarity with no power challenges driving this lower impedance planar-magnetic headphone. Attack and texture came through clearly. The playful aspects of the piece created musical highlights throughout the performance. Was this the equivalent of a high-end headphone amp? No. There was an aspect of a more closed in soundstage than there is through

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Integrated amplifier with digital converter

**Analogue inputs:** 2× RCA stereo pairs (phono stage and line level), 1× RCA stereo pair home cinema loop input, 12V trigger input

**Digital inputs:** 2× Toslink, 1× RCA S/PDIF inputs, 1× USB A input, 1× USB B input (switchable to USB B output), 1× USB A input (updates only)

**Analogue outputs:** 1× RCA stereo pair preamplifier output, 1× RCA stereo pair home cinema loop output, L/R multi-way speaker terminals, 12V trigger output, ¼" headphone jack

**Formats:** PCM to 32bit, 384kHz, DSD to 5.2MHz (USB), PCM to 24bit, 192kHz (S/PDIF)

**Amplifier power output (@ <1% THD-N):** 300W per channel into 8Ω, 450W per channel into 4Ω

**Headphone power output (RMS):** 1200mW (32Ω), 330mW (300Ω), 170mW (600Ω)

**Frequency Response (20Hz–20kHz):** < ±0.4dB

**Dynamic range:** 105dB (A-weighted, loudspeaker amplifier), 100dB (unweighted, digital source, headphone amplifier), 107dB (unweighted, analogue source, headphone amp)

**Dimensions (W×D×H):** 35.6 × 33.7 × 11.1cm

**Weight:** 7.7kg

**Price:** £2,195, \$2,499

**Manufactured by:** Peachtree Audio

**URL:** [www.peachtreeaudio.com](http://www.peachtreeaudio.com)

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my Simaudio Moon 430HA, but as an aspect of an integrated vs the headphone amp as a stand-alone unit the effect was very satisfying.

Peachtree Audio 2.0 has taken its original goal of affordable lifestyle audio and moved it into affordable high performance audio. That it comes in a handsome, lightweight case is a wonderful added benefit. The new Class-D amps are fantastic and drove my floorstanding 86dB Vandersteen Treo CT's to stupendous levels. The grip on the low end was wonderful. There was more than enough power to go around. Coming in at a price of £2,195 or \$2,500, the Nova 300 is a flat out steal for all the audio capabilities it delivers. If you are upgrading, check it out. If you need to remove the shrine, it can do that too! Highly recommended! +