

Integrated DAC/Amp of the Year



Aavik U-300 Unity

This is a category that simply couldn't have existed a few years ago. Such is the change in the industry from one-box-per-activity systems to all-in-ones that this category has grown faster than expected. So much so, in fact, that more integrated amplifiers are now shipping with built-in DACs, streaming systems, and increasingly fully-functioning digital hubs alongside the regular line-up of line level and phono inputs. This is a hotly contended sector at all levels, and deservedly so... such designs are increasingly taking the lion's share of audio electronics sales, and the trend looks set to continue.

This year, however, we stuck our flag firmly in the high-end of this market, because it's perhaps here that we have seen the biggest changes, both in product and perception. The Aavik U-300 Unity is at the forefront of that change, not just because it sports an incredibly good DAC, but because it also features an incredibly good phono stage and exceptionally good line inputs, all feeding into a powerful 300 watt per channel Class D amplifier that sounds truly world class. A few years ago, recommending such a device would have brought forth an angry audiophile mob demanding heretics be burned. But now, thanks in no small part to products like the Aavik U-300 Unity being demonstrated around the world, the scene is set for a truly open-minded investigation of what makes a one-box audio system in the future, at all levels. "Every input has the same exciting, yet even-handed sound," said Alan Sircom in his test, and the U-300 Unity delivers "a fine sense of rhythm, a good 'bounce' to that rhythm, plenty of detail, and easy, unforced dynamics."

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