



Synthesis Roma 96DC+ £3,300

This Italian company has been making attractively styled hi-fi separates for over 30 years now

There's an element of quirkiness to this company's designs, and the Roma 96DC+ integrated does little to change this. It's pleasingly compact by valve amplifier standards and sports a small but thick aluminium frontspiece, inside which the large volume knob nestles. Oddly, the power switch to its left doesn't have a pilot LED, so you need to look to the source display to see if the amp is on or off – or put your hands over the valve cover to check for heat!

This cover is unscrewable should you wish to show off your tubes, but when in situ is much safer for those with pets or young children. This 96DC+ model adds a built-in DAC over the standard version, but sacrifices a stereo RCA line input, making a total of just two – as well as a moving-magnet phono stage. Inputs are toggled by two small, fiddly buttons on the front panel, but you can also use the sleek brushed aluminium remote control. Our review sample comes in standard black finish, although various other fascia options are available including wood. It's a well-finished product, although not as subtly detailed as some others in the group.

The four EL34 output valves that it conceals together deliver a claimed 25W per channel, running in Class A mode. Two large output transformers take up much of the amplifier's real estate, alongside the central power transformer. The Synthesis doesn't put out quite as much heat as the more powerful PrimaLuna offering, as you'd probably expect – but still needs to be properly ventilated. In operation it is really quiet for a valve design, with no obvious buzzes from the power transformer or hum through the speakers audible.

Sound quality

Charming and cheerful, this amp may not be as accurate as the Rega, Sugden or Cyrus, and lacks the power of the valve-powered PrimaLuna, yet somehow it succeeds. The Synthesis

turns in a polished performance that's redolent of classic EL34-based tube amps of yore. That means tonally sweet with a gorgeously lucid midband, plus slightly soft treble and a rounded bass that's tuneful but not especially grippy. It's a lovely listen, but not quite 'in the zone' for those who want a frank description of what is going on in the recording.

You would think you'd need great power and authority, such as the NAD has, to reproduce the Vaughan Williams classical piece. Yet oddly the Roma 96DC+ shows that you don't. Its midband is peachy – surprisingly detailed and open, with better vocal timbre than the NAD and Cyrus to name but two. Rhythmically it's lovely – the music just lilts along in an effortless way and the effect is delightful. Feed it the bouncy Lynx soul/funk track, and it's the same. This amp knows how to have fun.

It turns in a polished performance that's redolent of classic EL34-based amps

The Liquid Crystal track sounds good too, up to a point – here the Synthesis is a little less on the front foot. That big bassline is carried deftly until you turn the volume up high, when it begins to get a little breathless. You do have to be really going for it with the volume knob, but there's a noticeable softening of dynamics and bass grip all the same. This said, it makes an exquisite job of the sharp-sounding sampled female vocal lines.

It's a little constrained in terms of sound staging too – it lacks the sheer width of the PrimaLuna in this respect. Depth isn't exceptional either, but despite these foibles this little amplifier is a beguiling performer with both its built-in DAC and phono stage performing better than expected ●

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Synthesis Roma 96DC+

ORIGIN
Italy

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
18kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
420 x 260 x 210mm

FEATURES
● Quoted power: 2x 25W RMS (8ohm)
● 2x RCA line inputs; MM phono
● USB-B; coaxial; optical digital inputs

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Charming, beguiling sound

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: It can sound a touch soft

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A lovable little integrated amp

FEATURES



OVERALL

