

# GRAMOPHONE

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## Yunchan Lim

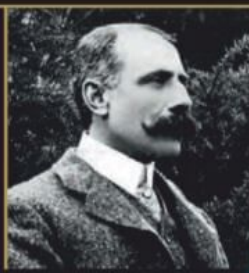
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## REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# WiiM Amp

Streaming audio systems don't get much simpler – or more affordable – than this: here we have a complete network player/amplifier for under £300 – just add a pair of speakers



### WIIM AMP

**Type** Network audio amplifier

**Price** £299

**Networking** Wi-Fi, Ethernet

**Inputs** Line analogue, optical/coaxial digital, HDMI, USB -A for storage devices

**Outputs** One pair of speakers, subwoofer

**Output power** 80W per channel into 8ohms, 160Wpc into 4ohms

**Online services** include Amazon Music, Qobuz, Spotify, TIDAL and internet radio, DLNA for local music stores, Roon-ready

**Wireless streaming** Apple Airplay, Bluetooth (in, and out to headphones), Chromecast

**Accessories** included Bluetooth voice remote; cables for mains, HDMI, RCA analogue in, and optical digital

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 190x63x190mm

**wiimhome.com**

UK distribution **henleyaudio.co.uk**

Only a few months ago I reviewed in these pages the excellent WiiM Pro Plus network player, a compact and budget-price way to add streaming audio to any audio system. I make no excuses for returning to the brand, part of California-based Linkplay Technology, so soon, for its latest arrival is, if anything even more impressive than that little box proved to be, and has even wider appeal.

You see, the Pro Plus, like the less expensive WiiM Mini and Pro models, is designed to be plugged into an existing amplifier or hi-fi system, while the WiiM Amp, as its name suggests, combines the Pro functionality with onboard amplification, making this a complete, and extremely compact, 'just add speakers' system. And the price? Just £299, which probably means you're already thinking 'Hmm, that would make a good little set-up for the study/kitchen/dining room ...'

Having lived with the WiiM Amp for a while now, I can confirm that's just what it will do – plus a lot more besides. Ideal for a desktop system, or for a smaller room, when used with modest speakers of reasonable sensitivity – as most compact

speakers are – it requires nothing more than mains power to function, being able to connect to a home Wi-Fi network and play music from a range of streaming services, or accept audio from handheld devices via Apple Airplay, Bluetooth or Chromecast. What's more, it comes with almost everything you'll need, apart from the speakers and their cables: there's a

**By any standards this is a remarkable amplifier, more than capable of holding its own against more conventional designs**

Bluetooth remote handset, which will work without line of sight to the Amp and is also able to accept voice commands using Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Siri.

For as well as streaming, this little unit, just 19cm square and a shade over 6cm tall, will also allow the connection of one analogue source, two digital (one optical, one coaxial) and even TV sound in PCM via an HDMI port, with cables included for all these connections. And if you wanted

to use it without a network connection you could: you'd lose the streaming capability, but you could easily just plug in a USB drive containing music and use it that way. However, with the network in use, it will also access Amazon Music, Qobuz, Spotify, TIDAL and internet radio, and has DLNA capability to play music on any other devices, such as computers or Network Attached Storage units. All that can be done over Wi-Fi or, if you wish, using a wired Ethernet connection, and the unit can even function as an endpoint for Roon, should you be using that to organise and play your music library.

Speaker outputs are on decent metal terminals, and will feed a single set of speakers, plus there's a subwoofer output, and while you'll search in vain for a conventional wired headphone socket, the WiiM Amp's two-way Bluetooth implementation will allow it to play wirelessly to suitable headphones or in-ear 'buds'.

Go under the lid and things are equally impressive: the Amp uses Sabre digital-to-analogue conversion from ESS, while the amplification is provided by 'chip amps' from TI. Clad in aluminium

### SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The WiiM Amp only needs a pair of speakers to create a complete system: these will work well ...

#### KEF Q150

The compact KEF Q150 speakers will fit in almost anywhere, and have the focus and imaging typical of their UniQ driver



#### Q ACOUSTICS 3050I

For a big, powerful sound making the most of the Amp's power, look no further than these Q Acoustics 3050I floorstanders



rather than the plastic of the other WiiM units, the Amp is available in silver or Space Grey, which should please fans of Apple's computers, and has just one control covering volume, play/pause, Wi-Fi connection and resetting the unit, plus front-panel indicators for status and volume.

If the WiiM Amp looks simple to the point of being limited, the secret to its flexibility is in the accompanying WiiM Home app, available for both Apple iOS and Google Android: not only does this make setting up the unit the work of just a few moments, it also opens up a whole spectrum of extra functions. This is by far the fastest network player set-up routine I have ever uncovered, and operates seamlessly, without any of the glitches and re-trials often encountered. What's more, the link between app and Amp then proves completely stable.

On initial set-up the Amp may require a firmware update, as is so often the case with devices of this kind, but after this initial step the unit will check daily and update if required. This will happen between 2am and 5am, which will only cause a short pause for nightbirds and shift workers!

What else can the app do? Well, it enables you to access all those streaming options, as well as a wide range of settings.

For example, if you're using a subwoofer with the WiiM Amp you can set its relative level and crossover frequency, and the app also offers a range of equalisation options, which should help tailor it to whichever speakers you're using – actually, you can set up different equalisation profiles and gain for each input should you wish.

Then there's a whole range of multiroom options: for a start, the Amp can share its music with other WiiM products, and it can also connect with Google Home/Chromecast, Alexa and AirPlay devices.

### PERFORMANCE

It would be tempting, given the price and compact dimensions, to think the WiiM Amp would be no more than a fun toy – but nothing could be further from the truth. Not only does it deliver a convincing sound when used with affordable small speakers; it also works very well with more ambitious designs, way beyond expectations.

Using it with the Neat Iota speakers on my desk, normally driven by an original Naim Uniti from 2009, the WiiM proved itself to be both powerful and detailed, whether with close-miked chamber works or larger orchestral pieces. Voices and instruments are warm and rich, but with a fine sense of timbre and the acoustic in which they're recorded, and the little

amplifier is more than capable of driving the speakers way beyond normal listening levels with no signs of working hard, let alone any hint of stress. Playing the Ukraine Freedom Orchestra's recording of Beethoven's Ninth under Keri-Lynn Wilson, recorded live in Warsaw, the sound has both space and impact, with both soloists and choir clear and crisp above the orchestra. And if exuberance gets the better of the listener, the WiiM has more than enough in reserve to deliver, while still retaining fine dynamics and speed.

Even more impressive is the way this streamer/amplifier drives speakers with a more extended frequency response, as I discovered when connecting it to a pair of PMC's excellent Prodigy 5 floorstanders, capable of prodigious bass for a speaker so small, not to mention a wide-open view of the music. Playing the Labèque sisters' new recording of the two-piano arrangements of Philip Glass's *Cocteau Trilogy*, the ability of the amplifier to track both the detail and the dynamics of the performance is very impressive, combining with the speakers to deliver the ambience of the recording while keeping those entwining musical lines crisp and involving.

By any standards this is a remarkable amplifier, more than capable of holding its own against more conventional designs in the entry-level arena – and far beyond. **G**

## Or you could try ...

**Given its price and compact dimensions, there's very little to match the WiiM Amp as a complete streaming/amplification system, but if you wanted something more conventional, and with greater input flexibility, you could combine WiiM's Pro network player with a stereo amplifier such as the all-analogue NAD C 316BEE V2, or the Marantz PM6007, which also adds digital inputs. See [nadelectronics.com](http://nadelectronics.com) and [marantz.com](http://marantz.com) for details**

#### Bluesound PowerNode Edge

The closest equivalent to the WiiM Amp



is probably the Bluesound PowerNode Edge, which combines streaming and multiroom capabilities courtesy of its built-in BluOS technology, enabling it to combine with suitable NAD products and other Bluesound units, all under control of the intuitive BluOS app. More information at [bluesound.com](http://bluesound.com)

#### Naim Uniti Nova PE

And if cost is no object, the latest addition



to the Naim Uniti range, the Nova PE, will drive just about any speakers you can throw at. The suffix stands for 'Power Edition', and this new model has 2x150W of amp power into 8ohms, rising to 250W into 4ohms, plus the ultra-flexible Naim streaming platform, complete with multiroom capability, all under the control of the Focal & Naim app. See more at [naimaudio.com](http://naimaudio.com)