



Power and the glory!

Dubbed The Conductor and The Orchestra, Hegel's upgraded pre/power amplifiers are superb flagships worthy of their names

By all accounts, Hegel, a company that doesn't exactly have a reputation for banging out new products on a regular basis, has been very busy over in Norway during the last few years quietly working to make its major integrated amplifiers Roon Ready. It now appears the company has also been beavering away to create a follow-up to its flagship separates, the P30 preamp and H30 power amp. Both of these were originally launched back in

2010, therefore predating new advances made at the company, one being its SoundEngine2 'error cancelling' technology. Now, after being teased over a year ago at the High End Munich Show, the P30A and H30A have arrived, bringing the Norwegian company's reference models up to speed. Of course, Hegel wouldn't be Hegel without adding to the creativity – not to mention out-and-out fun – by giving the duo suitable nicknames, in this case plumping for Conductor for

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Hegel P30A/H30A
ORIGIN
Norway
TYPE
Pre/power amplifiers
WEIGHT
7.2kg/47.4kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
430 x 96 x 300mm
430 x 240 x 575mm
FEATURES
• P30A inputs: 2x XLR balanced; 3x RCA unbalanced; Home Theatre inputs
• P30A outputs: 1x XLR balanced; 2x RCA unbalanced
• H30A rated at: 2x 300W (8ohm)
• H30A inputs: RCA unbalanced; XLR balanced
DISTRIBUTOR
Hegel Music Systems
WEBSITE
hegel.com

the preamp and Orchestra for the nigh-on 50kg power amp. There's no denying these sound a lot more thought-provoking and appetising than the simple 'A' added to the P30 and H30 prototype titles, so hip-hoorah for that.

Priced at a not inconsiderable £17,000 for the H30A and further £7,000 for the P30A, this pairing is aiming high, competing with pre/power combinations including the likes of Mark Levinson's N°536/N°5206 and McIntosh's MC1502 and C70 – and these are just two examples of some extremely classy and varied competition.

Smartly, in the case of the amp, Hegel has opted to do what it does best: build as much power as it can into a rather austere-looking box, and let the product speak for itself.

The components are dressed rather differently than what's come before, heralding a design change which other brands would call minor, but in the case of the minimalists from Oslo might be considered earth-shattering. Retained from the older models is the full black chassis and next-to-nothing

controls, but the angular wedge cut out of the top rim adds a twist of sophistication previously missing. As you would expect from a power amp, however, there's little more to say about the H30A's looks: it's a big box with a power button, and choice of unbalanced RCA or balanced XLR inputs on the rear.

The P30A is a touch more outgoing, though, sporting a brace of dials for volume and input selection, the latter a bit of a looker with its crescent of legends and white LEDs per input. There are five of these: three single-ended RCA pairs and two sets of balanced XLR pairs, plus an additional sixth Home Theatre 'max volume' input for integration into a surround-sound system should that be your bag.

There are no digital inputs, as the P30A is purely analogue. It's also fully balanced, duplicating every part from start to finish, including separate volume controls per channel. This strict separation of left and right is continued in the H30A, with two large 1kVA toroidal transformers, one per channel, together with an equally imposing dual arrangement of 56

The combo handles large orchestras and more refined works with equal panache

large reservoir capacitors. This helps explain why when it comes to shifting it (something you won't want to do too often), it's a hefty, two-person job. Hegel's SoundEngine2, a feed-forward compensation regime, which the company's main man Bent Holter has refined to reduce distortion in as least an invasive fashion as possible, is also implemented on each channel.

Hegel markets the H30A as a monoblock first, stereo power amp second. The company – and we can imagine its accountants are in agreement – envisages the P30A being paired with two of these monstrous units. You won't be lacking power in that case, as in mono mode the H30A is specified to deliver 1.1kW into 8ohm. Opt for one H30A and you'll still enjoy appreciable grunt. Bank manager agreeing, that is...

Before this audition, we've been fortunate enough to encounter the system a few times paired up with KEF Blade One Meta floorstanders, as there's a working relationship between Hegel and GP Acoustics in many countries. It's a match that



HOW IT COMPARES

Rated at a relatively conservative 2x 300W/8ohm, the H30A is Hegel's most capable power amp to date with a massive 2.45kW available to support transient peaks into the lowest 1ohm loads. This puts the H30A in the elevated company of far costlier power amps, including D'Agostino's £35k Progression S350 and PS Audio's £30k BHK Mono 600, a robust tube/MOSFET hybrid monoblock. Direct competition comes in the form of Rotel's Michi series P5 preamp (HFC 467, £3,000 including a DAC stage) and M8 monoblocks (£12,400). These black power amps combine fuss-free style and operation with an impact as deft as it can be devastating, all allied to a natural musical flow...

seems to work extremely well, although during testing here we decide to go with Focal's three-way floorstanding Sopra N°2, which in our day-to-day setup is connected to a Hegel Reference H590 (HFC 449). We decide to leave this – the company's top-flight integrated amp – in place, allowing for comparisons between the two to be made.

Sound quality

Although there's a fairly significant price jump between the H590 and the P30A/H30A – and they clearly seem to be aimed at very different audiences – there's an obvious performance strand running through them. Call it a 'music-first' approach. In that sense, Hegel's new duo offers more of the same – well, very much more of the same – with no sign of a gaping performance chasm between the two.

Yet, as hoped, the P30A and H30A are able to showcase more control and refinement. The choice of DAC stage will impact the tonal character too, compared with the AKM-based converter in the H590, and with more challenging loudspeakers, the combo obviously charges ahead.

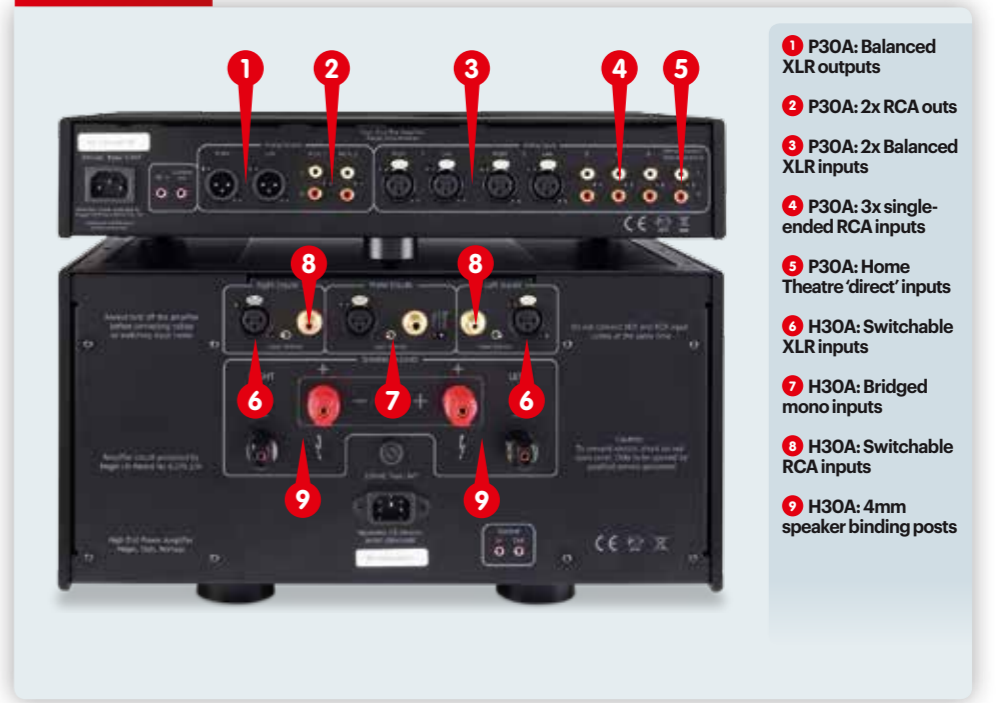
Kicking off with Andrew Gourlay's Wagner: *Parcifal Suite* the system impresses with a very natural, lifelike portrayal overflowing with detail. This collection of music from the German composer's magnum opus is thrilling stuff, especially if you don't have a spare four and a half hours to set aside to listen to the full opera.

Streaming from Roon through an Auralic Aries LE and Musical Fidelity M6x DAC, the P30A/H30A embraces the wealth of information in these recordings. *Act 3. Transformation Music* is an eye opener, with the momentous funereal progression building to a climax, church bells ringing and horns at full blast, then fading softly away. There's so much going on, both in terms of composition and dynamics, and it is all displayed brilliantly on a very grand scale.

This part is an exciting high point, as the rest of the suite is more subdued and romantic, favouring smaller details over melodrama. However, Gourlay isn't the first to let the music from Wagner speak on its own. *The Ring: An Orchestra*, with Neeme Järvi conducting, is an earlier, more rousing attempt. Playing *V. Die Walkuren*, at high volume, which these days evokes images of ominous, balletic pea-coloured helicopters instead of the intended original warrioresses – cheers for that, Mr *Apocalypse Now* Coppola – doesn't strain the Hegel system one bit. The instrumentation sounds crystal clear, from the attack of the horns to the sustained crash of the cymbals. It all feels very effortless, as if there are no limits.

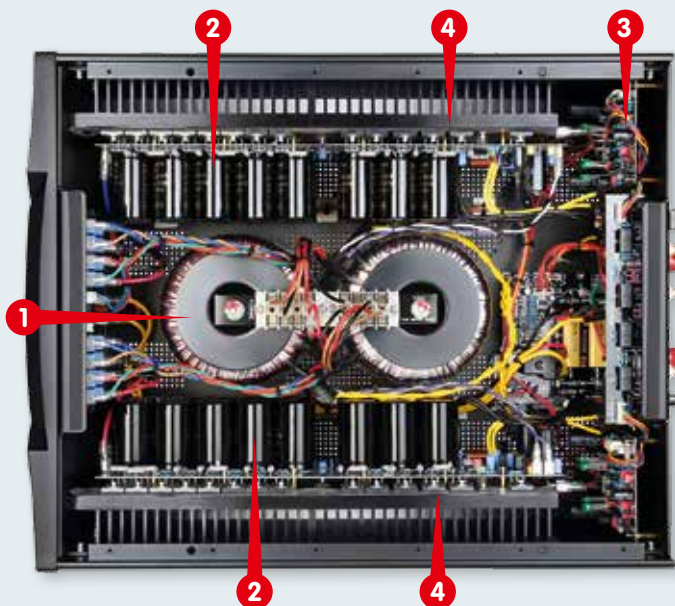
Looking past the Sopra N°2's own sound signature, the P30A/H30A makes a striking show of rendering these recordings as they are, with only a fleeting touch of added colour. This is what the H30A, in particular, excels at: not over embellishing, but

CONNECTIONS



- 1 P30A: Balanced XLR outputs
- 2 P30A: 2x RCA outs
- 3 P30A: 2x Balanced XLR inputs
- 4 P30A: 3x single-ended RCA inputs
- 5 P30A: Home Theatre 'direct' inputs
- 6 H30A: Switchable XLR inputs
- 7 H30A: Bridged mono inputs
- 8 H30A: Switchable RCA inputs
- 9 H30A: 4mm speaker binding posts

INSIGHT



- 1 Dual mono PSU transformers...
- 2 ...are joined by 16x8200uF/100V reservoir capacitors per side
- 3 Balanced line input/voltage amplification stage
- 4 The H30A includes no fewer than 14 pairs of Sanken power transistors on each heatsink

HEGEL HISTORY

In 1988 Bent Holter, a student at the Technical University in Trondheim (NTNU), wrote a thesis about the original design of the transistor used in amplifiers, and how you could cure the problems of traditional hi-fi systems – such as distortion. This developed into a project that became the basis of what is known today as SoundEngine Technology.

Holter went on to form a company in order to act on his findings, naming it after a rock-metal group he played in called The Hegel Band. When they needed amplifiers for concerts, he suggested building them himself, financially backed by Norwegian multinational Telenor – one of the biggest players in the telecommunications industry.

The brand took off in the early Nineties, developing a DAC in 1994, its first CD player in 1996 and steadily continued to research, develop and launch new products. Which brings us up to date with the highly anticipated release of the P30A preamp and H30A power amp from a company which also boasts a reputation for producing some of the most modern and sophisticated D/A converters on the market.

The company website states: "SoundEngine Technology was just a start. Today there are six more original technical solutions in Hegel's portfolio. The company has dealers in 63 countries and its products are sold all over the world. Awards and press reviews speak for themselves."

letting excitement come from the music at hand. This might strike some listeners, used to amps that tend to embroider, as a bit dull at first but to our mind there's so much more long-term joy in listening to the actual music than to apparatus.

Folkesange, the last album from Danish performer Myrkur (née Amalie Bruun), combines traditional Scandinavian folk and instruments,

such as the nyckelharpa, with more modern sounds. No challenge there for the P30A/H30A, with Bruun's singing on *Ella* airily arranged on top of powerfully driven percussion. The preamp, helped by the capable Musical Fidelity DAC, shows off its chops on the *Leaves Of Yggdrasil*, dextrously weaving the background choral singing with the main vocals, and the sparse piano notes with the strings.

Designwise, it's basically a big, black block...

Myrkur's older *M* set has a different flavour, veering closer to black metal, and it presents the P30A/H30A with a different challenge of reproducing guitar and double bass drum-driven soundscapes upon which more delicate instruments float. This hard contrast between sheer power and subtlety is difficult to pull off, but again the P30A and H30A simply shrug and take care of business.

The power chords on *Hæven*, the dramatic piano playing beneath the singing on *Byssan Lull* – both are very different in character – but this Hegel combo has the capability to handle large orchestrations and more refined works with equal panache.

At £17,000 for the H30A and £7,000 for the P30A, this pair is aiming high

Some 20 years ago, 'mathrock' outfit Cursive released their landmark *Domestica* album, an extremely raw listening experience detailing the painfully gradual breakup of singer Tim Kasher's marriage, with ultra-precise guitar riffs and drumming to turn up the intensity. Spinning the 2022 vinyl re-release, on a balanced Pro-Ject X2 B and Phono Box S3 B (HFC 495), the Hegel amplifiers are able to deliver the drums into the room with superb timing and incredible dynamic impact.

Conclusion

Mathrock bands rarely sound as tight and in control on stage, atmosphere and energy replacing audio subtlety and losing some of the instrumental intricacy in the live setting. All of which makes an excellent recording like this played via the admirable P30A/H30A setup arguably the best and most fulfilling way to enjoy it ●



Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Power and precision
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** The design looks a bit austere; it's far from cheap
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** It's hard to imagine any speaker that this system can't drive to excellence
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL

