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Danish Devil Delivers Dynamics and Detail

Gryphon Audio Designs Diablo 120 Integrated Amplifier

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Diablo 120 is the least expensive amplifier from Danish Gryphon, but there is no hint of compromise.

- Dynamics, details and musical pleasure
- Loads of power
- Extremely fine D/A converter
- Quality/Design 9/10
- User Friendliness/Flexibility 9/10
- Performance/Price 9/10



It is always exciting to audition products whose designers have not had price as the primary limiting factor during development. Not least because more affordable

models from manufacturers in cost-no-object territory often borrow heavily from the development of their most expensive models. This is the case with Diablo 120, a direct replacement for the Gryphon Attila integrated amplifier which was in production until last year.

The number in the model designation indicates its 8 Ohm output power capability. That should be enough for the vast majority of systems and loudspeakers, especially when the output doubles each time the impedance is cut in half, so that it delivers a whopping 440 Watts into 2 Ohms.

Diablo 120 has been developed based on experience with the brand's top amplification system, Pandora and Mephisto, and especially its integrated big brother, Diablo 300, which itself was a further refinement of the original Diablo amp.

Therefore, the amplifier is a dual mono design, meaning that you could basically cut it in half and have yourself two integrated monoblocks. Gryphon also strives for the shortest possible signal path with minimal internal wiring.

The standard version is a pure line amplifier with one balanced XLR input and four single-ended phono inputs. As an optional extra, it can be fitted with either an MM/MC phonostage or a digital to analogue converter. The phonostage is also a dual mono design based on the Legato Legacy.

The D/A converter module includes inputs for AES/EBU (XLR), TOSLink, S/PDIF (BNC) and USB and handles signals up to 32-bit/384 kHz PCM and DSD 512.

Either module can also be installed after purchase.

I'd like to take a moment to praise the loudspeaker terminals. They accept banana plugs and spades, but what sets them apart from most terminals is that they are very sturdy and fitted with rubber rings that provide a good grip for tightening. Outstanding.

The remote is solid and controls volume, On/Standby, Mute and input selection. The buttons are very large and easy to use. For us aging users, it is a good thing that display text size can be adjusted.

Listening

Let's make it clear up front: Gryphon Diablo 120 is an amazingly good amplifier. It exudes authority and maintains control of loudspeakers, with sufficient finesse to reveal even the slightest variations in chamber music or jazz recordings.

It is authority and ease in perfect symbiosis.

Perhaps the very best thing about this amplifier is its ability to unearth musical details that you hardly knew existed. This makes close listening to music very entertaining, because it almost feels like you are hearing familiar music for the first time. It allows you to discover treasures in your own collection that you had forgotten or overlooked.

It should be noted that Diablo is not just about detail. It never gets in the way of enjoyment of the big musical picture. Instead, it presents music against a black background, so that even the minutest details are rendered in a way that a huge number of other amplifiers cannot manage, because their microscopic background noise, which you don't notice until it's been removed, masks the very finest details.

Once you adjust to this surprise, you find yourself in the company of extraordinary music reproduction. **Voices sound fantastic with nerve, body and a truly impressive tonal richness. Mary Chapin Carpenter's stunningly beautiful "Mrs. Hemingway" is pure magic, as her voice simply floats between the loudspeakers.**

But midrange reproduction is about more than vocals. Try "Trozee" from *Hello, Troll* by the Helge Lien Trio. Diablo reproduces the piano and string bass with extreme realism.

This is not just a result of tonality, but also dynamics. Gryphon holds nothing back in terms of macro- or micro-dynamics. Again, this a result of the amplifier's ability to isolate microscopic noise from the music signal. Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band's "Sing, Sang, Sung" displays these dynamic capabilities with perfect clarity. On this track, so many things are going on with great force, yet the 120 never loses control or power. It just keeps going, regardless of volume.

Feel free to try Paula Cole's "Tiger," too, but make sure your roofing tiles are firmly attached and that you don't have any glassware that you are worried about, at least not if you want to experience deep bass that shakes more than your trouser legs. **Diablo's bass performance is simply superb. Firm, well-defined, with massive attack, yet never anaemic and sterile. Diablo puts meat on your musical bones in the bottom octaves. It is a pure demonstration of power.**

In the upper region, there is little to complain about – if anything at all. Here. Things are so airy, so open, regardless of whether it is handling female vocals, guitar harmonics or cymbals. It just goes on and on upwards, without stopping.

The wealth of detail and fine handling of bass and high frequencies contribute to the amplifier's ability to render the width and depth of a soundstage that approaches the finest tube amplifiers.

Instruments are placed with great precision and appropriate size. At least if the recording engineers made an effort.

The Gryphon D/A converter pours out sweet sound, in addition to possessing a fun factor that kept me listening to the onboard D/A module, instead of my own DAC. It is pure and simple a devilishly good converter.

Conclusion

Gryphon Diablo 120 is an amplifier that is hard to ignore, if you are in the market for a top class integrated amplifier.