



TEST BRYSTON BCD-3 CD PLAYER

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Bryston BCD-3 CD Player in Canadian Style

Bryston has exactly one CD Player in their program. It was always like that. Its name is BCD-3, and it provides an unmistakable statement how music from compact disc should sound according to Bryston.

The Canadian smithy delivers this component free of charge (apparently in Europe). Indeed, in the year 2018 we are still building a CD Player which can't do anything else but play CDs! Yes, that is undeniably correct, but please, how could it get this far after over about four decades millions of CDs have been pressed and distributed into households all over the world? After presumably all music that has ever been created at one time or

another has been committed to this long-term stable and potentially exquisite sounding sound carrier. So please, how can it be that CD Players are threatened by extinction?

Alright, I exaggerate. But indeed, several manufacturers known for their full-range offerings have completely eliminated CD-Players from their equipment assortment. Others today only offer one or two entry level models. The future does not know any physical digital sound carriers. But the stock of CDs is so immense that the existence of specialized optimized CD Players of the highest tonal aspiration should not even be a question.



Therefore, let's offer Bryston already right here an honorable preliminary distinguished award for their faith in the BCD-3 CD-Player.

At that Bryston, known and valued as specialists for substantial (20-year warranty!) transistor amplifiers, entered late, and then also haltingly into the area of digital sources. The first CD-Player, the BCD-1 entered the market in 2008. After only two years later it was gone, the internal disc drive was no longer available. Then it was quite a while until the first D/A converter of the Canadians saw the light of day. In the meantime the fans grumbled, so it was said, and asked for a CD Player because the BCD-1 had been highly praised all along for its musicality.



With Stream Unlimited from Austria a supplier was finally found who could supply a disc drive with the desired functions. Since there was no doubt about the excellent converter technology with their own in-house D/A converter, the Bryston developers did the obvious and married the large BDA-3 D/A converter with the Stream Unlimited disc drive. But there was still a not insignificant change, the D/A section which does not have any further inputs to the drive with the exception of the 12S line, was radically limited to only decode 16 bit/44.1 mode. Voilà: The BCD-3.



The focusing onto the CD format according to the Red Book format, i.e. completely without bells and whistles like HDCD or MQA is notable, and the key to the essence of the BCD-3 CD Player. My complaining that the USB jack on the back of the CD Player for purposes of remote control should also be able to receive digital music data and forward it to the D/A section, was not agreed to by Bryston the manufacturer. A USB D/A converter must really be able to work with diverse sample frequencies. For this an elaborate periphery for

the pace-setting quartz component would be necessary in order to bring its oscillation into the respective necessary frequency. However the disc drive was chosen according to the criteria that it does not have to interact with everything that looks like a silver disc but only read 44.1 Kilohertz CDs. Of course with this frequency it also interacts with the 12S bus which transports the raw signal to the D/A converter. A solution for everything – that’s the recipe for jitter prevention and ergo harmonious sound at Bryston.

With this information one is astonished when one takes a look at the built-in converter chips. An AK4490 from Asahi Kasei is a highly potent workhorse. 32-bit resolution is a matter of honor; in the area of maximum sample frequency with PCM signals the end is only reached at 768 Kilohertz (16 times the venerable DAT frequency 48 KHz!), and with DSD bitstreams it even achieves 11.2 Megahertz. Calling it in its workplace in the BCD-3 unchallenged is clearly an understatement. But who knows – perhaps right there a tonal secret is hidden?



The output stage is built up discretely, op amps are not used. There is more than that, but whether the transistors work in low distortion Class A cannot be determined. The power supply equipped with plenty of output reserves corresponds again to the large BDA-3 DAC.

The BCD-3 CD Player is supplied, typically for Bryston, with a cabinet height matching standard racks, which in this case is two racks high, i.e. about 8.5 centimeters. All the control knobs are on the front

which is to be expected, including the, for me still obscure, shuffle play. An extremely solid aluminum remote control which would serve for easy operation if its 30 identically appearing buttons would not be double to three times labeled. On the backside of the cabinet there are RCA and XLR analog and digital outputs. Four different connections in formats like USB-B, Ethernet, or mini jack allow every conceivable wired remote operation.

The BCD-3 CD Player received a very generous warm-up time in my listening room. In the meantime there were no cross-comparisons, the Canadian simply assumed the role of my master CD player, my Electrocompaniet EMC-1. I prefer this procedure to constantly back and forth switching, i.e. calmly exchanging one individual component, and then listening to what happens. Here it becomes quickly evident, that in this story the term “clarity” will play a central role.

I am really surprised how, yes how, clearly the BCD-3 CD Player imprinted its aural stamp onto my system. By the way, it also helped me to reevaluate the character of my Electrocompaniet CD Player.

Apparently the Norwegian plays into the width, it likes openness, superbly resolves and thereby tendentially lets the music sound airily and clear. With the Bryston CD Player the actual sound sources move closer into the foreground while “trappings” like hall, rooms, the overtone aura of acoustic instruments in the service of clearly hearing and understanding are less exposed. Which is absolutely not to be understood as a deficiency of information.



A friend of mine, who is a music enthusiast, visited me for a listening afternoon, and after a few titles it was clear that he was not after perfect studio productions of the audiophile sort, but rather that he wished for inspiration of handmade musicianship. Consequently *Tell Me Everything* from the Dutch cellist Ernst Reijseger (Winter&Winter 910 151) landed in the drawer running on steel rails of the Bryston disc drive. Reijseger recorded the CD in a medieval Tuscan palace building in the midst of a soundscape comprised of the most colorful, most Mediterranean bird twittering and insect chirping that one can imagine. We were in the middle of it, including the listening room and the system. The cello played by Reijseger with hairs and wood of the bow in the wildest manner, plucked like a guitar with his fingers, finger nails, and finger knuckles, stands perfectly placed and finely swinging between the speakers.

I took one of my CDs with the violinist Gilles Apap from my cabinet, his debut with the title *Who?* Apap here lets it strongly crackle and fires, accompanied by the “Transylvanian Mountain Boys”, a best of virtuosic salon showpieces (Saber Dance!), and Romanian/Gypsy inspired treasures (Ciocarlia/The Lark!) that one’s mouth stays open.



She or he Who manages to still pay attention here to the sound of the involved Bryston CD Player will notice the obviousness with which the occasional genuine nasty high notes are always reproduced as part of the wooden violin. This naturalness in the harmonic without even a trace of rounding is a remarkable capability.

Somewhat later I was after something more substantial, and I took a CD which was still in its original wrapping on the shelf: *German Brass Celebrating Wagner*, released by Berlin

Classics. This recording from the city church in Schwaigern under the control of the renowned sound studio Bauer from Ludwigsburg is exquisite! Moreover, one can mercilessly probe the sound with the four trumpets, two horns, two trombones, and a tuba in the audio chain. Once more here again: Clean and natural, neither clinically pure nor warmly turned off high frequencies, completely natural sound colors, best plasticity of all the musicians, and a very convincing, never an ethereal floating spatial image. By the way the Canadian kept its overview every second even when matters were going typically high Wagnerian.

Whatever I presented to the Bryston BCD-3, it always led me close to melodies and phrasing, made things clear which served for appreciation and the effortless following of the music. No matter which genre was involved, whether acoustic or electronic tones were generated – whereby I must confess that this time I especially enjoyed classical music, that still many other players previously hardly or not at all heard discs landed in this inconspicuous Bryston BCD-3 Player.

Yes, inconspicuous, but not underappreciated. Those who believe that CDs are from yesteryear, those who are enamored by the streaming boom and let their silver treasures gather dust, they should urgently consult a veritable specialist like the BCD-3 CD Player. The result could, yes indeed, clearly result in its favor.

Translated from the German by Peter Ullman