



Sound Of Music

BEL CANTO 300I INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Spaghetti-loving *Tone* readers may already know this, but the term 'bel canto' is Italian terminology for 'beautiful singing'. Quite conveniently, it's also the incredibly apt brand name of this amplifier.

Bel Canto is a hi-fi company founded 15 years ago by a tube-loving chap called John Stronczer. His company has since developed a range of up-market solid state audio components, including this remarkable 300i integrated amplifier.

The hardy 2-channel hi-fi reviewer quickly realises that gear tends to fall into one of several categories: 1) it's okay in the background but lacks the kind of musicality that gets you really involved; 2) it's an impressive sound but just wants for that spine-tingle factor; or 3) it's so divine that giving it back is about as much fun as a death in the family.

Bel Canto's amplifier is such a clear winner in the third category that I had to convince my bank manager that under NO CIRCUMSTANCES should he lend me any money. Yep, it's that good.

This Italian stallion (though despite the name, Bel Canto is actually an American-based company. You get my drift) is so small and compact for a 150-watt-per-channel amplifier that it's hard to take it seriously until you put it through its paces.

Don't get me wrong - just because it's unassuming, don't take that to mean it's unattractive; the rounded front panel is very becoming. Similarly, the minimalist path taken by Bel Canto in using a single knob to double as both volume control and input selector adds a touch of class.

The 300i comes complete with a wee remote, a USB DAC, and is also available with an optional moving magnet input module for those who are lucky enough to have held onto their precious vinyl records. The rear of the unit sports heavy speaker cable terminals and gold-plated inputs.

The Bel Canto's sound is almost impossible to describe, because it doesn't really have one: what I got every time with every new CD or record was a profound musical event in my room without any interference whatsoever from the amplifier.

Bass was so natural, fast and deep that there was no need to hook up my subwoofer. This was no doubt aided by the dual mono architecture; the amplifier has independent regulated power supplies that Bel Canto claims - correctly, as it turns out - give music robust bass sounds. Conversely, the treble was so transparent and effortless that voices floated magically between the speakers.

The highest praise I can give an amplifier is to say that it's genuinely musical, and the Bel Canto effortlessly fulfils this tough order. With a size that doesn't suggest its real power and a simplicity of function that complements its superior aural action, the Bel Canto comes with my highest endorsement. ■ PAUL BURGESS



DETAILS



CONTACT

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SPECIFICATIONS

POWER OUTPUT

150 watts rms per channel into 8 ohms

300 watts rms per channel into 4 ohms

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20Hz-20kHz

DAMPING FACTOR

<1000

DYNAMIC RANGE

111dB

DIMENSIONS

216 x 318 x 75mm (W/H/D)

WEIGHT

5.5kg

PROS

✦ Utterly musical

CONS

✖ None

VERDICT

GO FOR IT

Aesthetics	90%
Performance	95%
Features	85%
Functionality	90%
Price Value	90%
Overall	

