

song is an emotional experience.

We were only a little disappointed, but the session was ending on a down note. Gibson's voice remained mesmerizing, but its texture was strangely altered. "Her upper register should be deliciously liquid," said Toby, "but it isn't, and that means the voice doesn't get as much attention." He noted a little "fizz" on throat sounds, and wondered whether a tube swap might be called for (the included tubes bear the Audio Space name, and are presumably Chinese). Albert found the cello a little light as well, and both singer and musicians were less palpably present than with our own expensive components. And was there a bit of a mist obscuring the sonic background?

Still, the shortcomings diluted the visceral pleasures of this song only a little, and we emerged from the listening room with only good things to say about this very capable amplifier.

We took the Galaxy 34 to the lab for a few instrument readings. In Ultralinear mode it didn't quite meet specifications, at least not the way we like to read them. It barely gave us 26 watts at 1 kHz rather than the 32 watts specified. At 20 Hz the undistorted output dropped to just under 19 watts, and at 20 kHz to just over 14 watts. We should add that, unlike a solid state amplifier, the Audio Space didn't clip, but the output wave nonetheless lost any semblance of a sinusoidal

shape. Of course that has audible effects as well.

In triode mode, on the other hand, it actually delivered an undistorted 16.3 watts, just over the 16 watts of the spec sheet. That was at 1 kHz. At 20 Hz and 20 kHz the maximum was, respectively, 11.5 watts and 10.8 watts. We repeat that considerably more power was available, but it was no longer pristine.

Low-level performance was just fine. Leakage between adjacent inputs was a negligible -75 dB at midband. At 10 kHz, where crosstalk is often a problem, it was below the noise level.

Like the two other Audio Space amplifiers we have reviewed, the Galaxy 34 has an engaging personality, and it is easier to love than mere technical specifications and instrument readings would suggest.

Put that together with the affordable price, and you can understand why we recommend it warmly.



SUMMING IT UP...

Brand/model: Audio Space Galaxy 34

Price: C\$1859 (equiv. US\$1728)

Size (WDH): 39.5 x 30 x 19.5 cm

High-level inputs: 3

Most liked: Warm, engaging sound

Least liked: Front panel more flashy than practical, a need for more inputs

Verdict: Among smaller tube amps, this one is a find

CROSSTALK

We gave this amplifier hell at the start. Pipe organ! It didn't reproduce shock and awe like the reference's dozens of solid-state watts. No surprise there, but the Galaxy 34 still did something special, and you won't need to avoid organ music if you buy one. This amp has soul, and on the final chord I was happy to be reminded of 'the power of the Almighty'.

Some pieces did better with the triode setting, some with Ultralinear. I liked that you can switch these from your seat using the remote. The harmonics were delicious, the colors of the piano were different from the high-priced reference but just as interesting, cymbals were pleasantly metallic and the list goes on.

You get an awful lot for your money with this amp, enough to put it at the top of a lot of lists.

—Toby Earp

After the way it handled the first piece, I felt comfortably confident before the beginning of each subsequent selection we tried on it. It breezed through the most complex textures of sound and danced with ease to the music of small ensembles. That's what

it loves, I thought, what it must have been bred for.

There was a distinct sense of balance and a see-through 3-D image on stage. Balance is rare in music reproduction, as you know, and in life, as you probably found out if you're over seven. Sensing that things are in equilibrium, that instruments and voices flow without clashing or hiding parts of one another is cause enough for a smooth brow and a contented smile. If you are in need of either, you'll know where to look.

—Albert Simon

Against all odds, tubes are back in a big way, and their return has been spearheaded in part by the Chinese audio industry. How many brands of tube amps does China have? Apart from the ones you possibly know about, a whole lot of others e-mail us each month to convince us to test their products.

A lot of these products are classics only in the sense that no new research has gone into their creation. Anybody can lift a schematic from an old copy of *Audio* or *Popular Electronics*, and execute it with the cheapest parts to be found on the market.

But not all Chinese companies are as lazy, fortunately. And Audio Space is from Hong Kong, reunited with China only a dozen years ago, still possessing a distinct industrial tradition. That's not a guarantee of higher quality, but expect such products to be different. In the case of this amplifier, that difference yields interesting results. In a number of ways the company has paid little attention to the way things are done elsewhere. And I can't argue with the results.

In this specific case the result is an amplifier with a personality that is nothing less than delightful. Yes, I know, a perfect amplifier shouldn't *have* a personality, and it should let the music dominate. But you don't get perfection at this price. What you hope for is an amplifier that won't be downright bad at anything, and one that will consistently preserve the qualities that are the basic building blocks of music.

On that scale, the Galaxy 34 is a huge success. With the challenges we threw at it, I would predict that there is no recording that would actually embarrass it. And there are lots of recordings on which it can make you very happy you bought it.

—Gerard Rejskind