



AMPLIFICATION

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

MOON 240i



Moon by Simaudio delivers another rock-solid Canadian amplifier, this one combining digital and analogue inputs with understated high-quality power able to deliver musical thrills across the board.

We do delight in a review of a good amplifier. Even though today's amps have become more complex than of old, with digital inputs alongside the traditional analogue RCA sockets and speaker outputs, it's still a pretty quick operation to shift banana plugs and inputs from our reference system into a visitor. Indeed we had a moment of *déjà vu* when installing the pleasingly weighty and visually desirable Moon 240i into position. Had it not visited before? No, we were thinking of the Moon Neo ACE, a \$3999 unit which won a Sound+Image Award in 2017. The 240i is also part of the Moon Neo series, hence the similarity, but it costs a thousand dollars less.

The primary difference was exposed once we finished plugging up and found one cable left hanging unused — an Ethernet cable. Where was the Ethernet socket on the 240i? Ah, there is none. Because the 240i doesn't do networking.

EQUIPMENT

So while the 240i has digital and analogue inputs, there is no networking, no streaming. So do you want that in your amplifier? It's the trend of the time, 'smart amplifiers' — but we bet you don't,

really. You may not want such new-age sources at all, but even if you do, there are plenty of other ways to include them.

For example, one of the Moon 240i's five digital inputs is a USB-B socket to play direct from your computer, so you can stream music on your computer and from there into the Moon's DAC. That way you'll have far better control of your music than by using some smart amplifier app on your phone or even on a tablet.

Or perhaps you have some dedicated source unit that can connect to online music sources — one of the new breed of network players (of which Moon has its own to offer). A separate source could well be of higher quality than a networking module installed inside the amp itself, not to mention giving isolation against all those invasive switching noises that 20 years ago any self-respecting audiophile would have banned from the room, let alone allowed inside the same chassis as delicate preamplifier componentry. The phono stage here is working down in the microvolts, for heavens sake. Separation between audio and IT components could be a fine policy.

So let's see what you do get. This is a solid hi-fi integrated amplifier rated by Moon at 50W

per channel of Class-AB amplification into eight ohms, and that's with quoted distortion levels of 0.005% IMD, 0.02% THD, from 20Hz to 20kHz full power. That's high-quality power.

There's a healthy selection of socketry to handle external sources. There are four analogue inputs — a moving-magnet phono input for a turntable (hoorah), two line-level inputs on RCA pairs plus a third on the front as a minijack socket, handy for casual plugging up of a portable device. We note, not that we tried it, that the analogue inputs can be configured as pass-through for home theatre bypass mode. Take the usual care if trying this, as it entirely bypasses the volume control, with the assumption there's a control earlier in the system chain, e.g. on your AV preamp.

Digital inputs include the aforementioned USB-B for a computer, plus two optical and two coaxial. From USB the Moon offered our Mac up to 384kHz PCM at 32-bit, and DSD decoding up to DSD256. You get a high-quality physical remote control, and there's also rear socketry for RS-232 and IR control, plus the company's SimLink between components. Indeed the further we investigated, the more we became convinced that this amplifier in fact identical to the award-winning Moon Neo ACE, lacking only that unit's built-in Bluetooth and network inputs.

PERFORMANCE

Even before we'd left it to burn in, the Moon's soundstaging skills had impressed us — our reference system images impressively, but here,



through the same speakers, the soundstage seemed significantly forward of that plane, the width equally impressive, and the sweet spot for enjoying this imaging also less critical in terms of front-back positioning. Its precision seemed to spotlight individual performances within a well-recorded group, or to bring more artificial mixes to life.

It was also one of those amps which broadcast their quality across a distance, as some tunes called us siren-like from elsewhere in the home to the Music Room during the warm-up period — in-the-room-real Wright-Gilmour harmonies over the dreamy *Burning Bridges* from Floyd's 'Obscured By Clouds', the growth from enclosed intro into widening cosmic jazz of Gong's rather strange *Zero The Hero and the Witch's Spell*.

Settling down for more critical listening, we became reacquainted with Moon's CRM3 remote control, a high quality unit capable of controlling other Moon components e.g. a CD player or external DAC (and in that regard the rear SimLink sockets can communicate between components allowing various functions to work at the touch of one button). Volume uses two buttons vertically, while input selection and balance use two buttons horizontally, but practise makes perfect, and you're guided helpfully by the unit's attractive OLED display showing the input names. You can rename the inputs using the front panel menus, and you can include volume offsets for each input so that, say, your turntable is no longer quieter than your CD player when you switch between them.

Pressing 'mute' invokes a lovely relay clunk, and unmuting by pressing a volume button returns you immediately to the previous level, rather than some amps' infuriating habit of making you ramp back up from zero.

On the unit itself, of course, there is a lovely large and lightly-weighted knob, along with the various press studs and a display that scrolls track details, file quality, volume and more — you can dim this (three levels) though apparently not disable it. You can however kill the blue LED above the display, again through the amp's internal menus. Also in there you can select whether or not to use standby mode and how it is implemented, and you can set a maximum volume beyond which it will not play, handy if leaving the system in the care of teenage offspring (hoping only that they won't find that setting and remove it).

We continued listening, using Roon on a Mac Mini to take exclusive control of the Moon's USB input. The 2012 Rickie Lee Jones/Ben Harper collaboration 'The Devil You Know' was spectacularly lifted above the Moon's silent background, every whisper of Jones' emotional delivery of *Sympathy For The Devil* held clear above the ambient organ bass notes filling the void around Harper's delicate guitar chugs. All sorts of simple fare gained from such clarity, and



acoustic recordings most of all. We thrilled to John Coltrane's outrageous solos on the newly released three hours of Miles Davis and Coltrane on tour in 1960, including four versions of *So What* but particularly the atmospherically-recorded second night in Paris. We played all six 'I' songs from Paul Kelly's acoustic live 'A to Z' recordings, enjoying their immediacy and dynamics, with the Moon handling the on-the-edge shrieking top notes of harmonica just right on the end of *I Close My Eyes*.

This sonic silence and wide soundscaping was just the thing to enhance enjoyment of some of Brian Eno's recent 'Music For Installations' release of extended pieces (nine are over 15 minutes, *77 Million Paintings* is the longest at 44 minutes) where nothing much happens (which we love). These rolled gently forth from the Moon, ambiently drifting from our reference speakers and through the home for hours and hours.

More complex material didn't phase the 240i, even when we substituted average-sensitivity standmounts in place of our reference high-sensitivity monitors. It thrust forward all the power of the bass line in the often thinly-presentated *Colors Fly Away* by The Teardrop Explodes, and it revealed that Dion's *I Read It (In The Rolling Stone)* is indeed a bit lean and fizzy on the vocal yet the rest of the band is solid enough, a rare success for this torture-test of a track. It slammed out the dynamic changes through The Flaming Lips' complex *A Spoonful Weighs A Ton*; it went massive delivering the Karajan/Alexis Weissenberg recording of Tchiakovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1... where a sensible level set during the quiet sections left Mr Wiessenberg's piano dynamics astounding, yet still with absolute untrammelled madness in reserve for the orchestral peaks.

We ran our Thorens turntable into the moving magnet phono input and enjoyed a succession of albums and singles. We had a low-level buzz from this input until we removed cables from the rear RCA outputs which we had connected to a recorder, aiming to copy over some vinyl. This is not their purpose — these stereo outputs can be used for a subwoofer or a separate power amplifier, but they are under the control of the volume knob and cannot be switched to fixed level, and they are also muted by the headphone socket. That precludes their use with a recorder unless you're

very careful with the volume! These unplugged, all returned to silky silence and the Moon's high-quality phono stage was properly revealed. We've never heard side one of Joan Armatrading's *Show Some Emotion* sound more beautiful.

To close with notes on more contemporary fare, it delivered a pure and atmospheric rendering of Fleet Foxes' 2017 two-toned arrangement of *Niads, Cassadies*, an open acoustic arrangement punctuated by a middle-eight rise into power-pop. And how tight was the kick behind Lorde's *Sober*; how carefully plain Laura Marling's vocal over the broad canvas and curious percussion of *Wild Fire*. A final highlight was listening to Giles Martin's 2017 remix of *A Day in The Life*, delivered so clear, so rich, and so large by the 240i.

CONCLUSION

Try as we might, we couldn't find anything that caused the 240i to balk — as with the company's Neo ACE those specified 50W were capable of sounding like a whole lot more, and playback quality was fine indeed, with the Moon's DAC and amplification excelling in delivering all manner of music. Get your networking and streaming kicks elsewhere — leave the 240i to deliver everything with panache and purity. ■

Moon by Simaudio 240i integrated amplifier

- High quality power
- Excellent USB computer playback
- Fine phono stage

- Get your networking done elsewhere

Price: \$2999

Inputs: 1 x phono, 2 x RCA analogue inputs, 1 x minijack analogue input, 2 x optical digital, 2 x coaxial digital, 1 x USB-B, SimLink in, IR in
Outputs: 1 x headphone out, 1 x pre-out/subwoofer, SimLink out, RS232

Power rating: 50W into 8 ohms (20-20kHz, both channels, THD 0.02%)

Dimensions (whd): 430 x 90 x 37mm

Weight: 11kg

Warranty: 10 years

Contact: Busisoft AV

Telephone: 03 9810 2900

Web: www.busisoft.com.au