

the audio beatnik

A JOURNEY IN MUSIC AND AUDIO

Review by Jack

Review: Pass Labs X250.8 Stereo Amplifier



I have reviewed many Pass Labs amplifiers and they have always been musical, but they are also very heavy. I had asked to review the XA250.8, which is huge and very heavy. In fact, it weighs in at 100 pounds, so I knew I'd better have someone ready to help me move it. I had asked Pass Labs for this amp to use with a pair of YG Acoustics Vantage speakers. With Covid-19 going on, Dick Diamond of YG wasn't able to get me a pair of the Vantage speakers. So, I decided to go ahead and review the Pass Labs X250.8 with my DeVore gibbon SuperNine Speakers. The result opened up the world of real high-powered amps to me.

A Word About Pass Labs

There are no better people to work with than those at Pass Labs. They are friendly and always ready to help. Their build quality is as good as any in the audio industry at any price. I have never heard a bad sounding piece of Pass Labs gear. Yes, their gear is high-end audiophile quality. It also looks great and will run forever. I also want to thank them for how responsive they have been to Becky and me over the years.

Description

This amp is a 250 Watt Class AB design that runs Class A up to 25 watts into 8 ohms. At that point, it seamlessly transitions into Class AB while doubling down to 500 watts into a 4-ohm load. While my DeVore gibbon SuperNines would theoretically never cause the amp to leave Class A, all that powerful Class B power is still there in reserve if needed for a split second.

Like the Pass Labs XA30.8 (my review) and the A60.8 monoblocks amplifiers (my review), the X250.8 has a front faceplate made of billet aluminum and one large display meter backlit with blue lights. There is also a recessed groove on both sides near the bottom of the faceplate leading to the center where there is a standby button and the word PASS recessed into the faceplate. The back panel is straightforward with both XLR and RCA inputs and a speaker terminal for spades and banana plugs. This is a nice looking amp, though, after all this time, I still prefer the looks of the .5 series.

The Review System

I used the X250.8 with my LTA MZ3 preamp and my DeVore gibbon SuperNines. The source was the DS Audio Master1 Optical Cartridge System. All of the cabling was Audience FrontRow and the power distributor was the HB Cables Marble Slave.

Listening to Music



Listening to the X250.8 over the SuperNines was an interesting experience. I have mostly used the Pass Labs XA30.8 and the First Watt SIT-3 with these speakers. I was not surprised that the X250.8 sounded more like the 30.8. The midrange was exquisite, some might even say luscious. The detail is there, but it is never etched or unnatural. The perspective is of sitting at a pretty close distance to the performance. I have to confess that I enjoyed this. For years I had season tickets to the symphony on row C. I understand that others might prefer a little more distant point of view, but it's a matter of personal taste.

The bass goes very deep with nice breath and air. I found the bass very musical with excellent scale and grandeur. It was always very tuneful with real drive and pace. At really loud levels, the bass was simply more realistic.

The midrange reproduction held up well in comparison to the 30.8 and the SIT-3. The sound was very emotionally involving and resolving. The midrange has a very natural bloom that helps give recorded music life. The tone and timbre of instruments allowed the experience to be quite convincing. The midrange can be summed up with three words, luscious, powerful, and relaxed. I don't know about you, but I find that quite remarkable.

The top-end is very open-sounding, and yet it does not in the least sound etched or bright. No, on the contrary, it seems to allow one to listen to all this information in a relaxed yet involving manner. Yet, I did not find that it ever left me wanting more sparkle and shimmer.

Soundstage and Imaging



The soundstage and imaging of the X250.8 was everything I could want. As wide and deep as the soundstage was, it always maintained a very stable center. While the vertical soundstage or height was adequate and never a distraction, though it is not in the same league with those of the best SETs and pure Class A amps.

One of my pet peeves is that many popular and very expensive transistor amps make instruments and people sound like they are just hanging in the air without a body or breath. This is sometimes described as sound coming from a perfect black background. So it is, but I have never heard live music sound anything like that. Thank goodness this amp is much more like tubes with a soundstage that has some flesh and breath to it. It renders instruments and people in a very believable space that seems occupied by something with mass.

Conclusion

This is the third Pass Labs .8 amps that I have reviewed. It is, however, my first review of a Pass Labs Class AB amp, and it is the first time I've reviewed one of their amps with over 60 watts per channel. Maybe, the nicest thing I can say about the X250.8 is that it sounds like a Pass Labs .8 series amp, and that's no small compliment. If you have speakers that need this kind of power, this is a world-class amp. With the build quality that Pass Labs puts into their products, you can enjoy it for years to come. [Click here to see specs for this amplifier.](#)