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EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Cyrus Lyric 09 system *by Jason Kennedy*



Cyrus Audio is no stranger to UK readers, but its half-width ‘singing shoeboxes’ sometimes struggle to make their mark outside of the British Isles. This, coupled with the significant changes in the type of product people buy today, meant Cyrus needed to make something bigger and that is capable of being all things to all people. Lyric is the result. Lyric is the first full-width product that Cyrus has made, but it retains much of the cast aluminium casework, albeit with a glass fascia, a clever non-print coated glass fascia at that. This is both smooth to the touch, and leaves engineers wondering how they got that finish to look so good – something (with the greatest of respect) not normally associated with Cyrus products and its typically rugged-feel castings.

Lyric comes in two flavours, 05 and the 09 tested here; the latter offering greater power and a better DAC than the former, at a price differential of £750. But what is Lyric? It’s a preamp, power amp, FM and DAB tuner, CD player, network streamer, and DAC in one box. Some elements are culled from existing Cyrus products; the streaming engine comes from Stream X, and the CD transport has the ‘servo evolution’ control system from CDt. The DAC comes from the CDi CD player, and is a 32-bit device able to accept inputs up to 24/192 in PCM. Apparently, Cyrus will “never, ever” embrace DSD according to Peter Bartlett. For now, at least.

The most radical bit of Lyric is the power amplifier, a hybrid of analogue and Class D approaches, which has a large toroidal transformer-based linear power supply and a Class D output stage. This gives the Lyric its high 170 watt power rating, but without the weight of a similarly powerful Class A/B design. This is because the efficiency of the output stage allows for a relatively small power transformer. It also runs fairly cool for a high power amp. Apparently, this technology was developed for a forthcoming standalone power amp from Cyrus with even more power, and if Lyric is anything to go by, that could be very interesting indeed.

One of the weaknesses of some Class D implementations can be sensitivity to the impedance of the loudspeaker load, meaning the amp’s character may not be predictable from one speaker to another. Cyrus has taken the step of building in automatic impedance matching to the attached loudspeaker. It does this at switch on, so don’t make the mistake of switching on before hooking up, because that rather undermines the process, I found!

Lyric changes its display if you put your hand near it, showing track title, album, and artist over the cover art that it displays when streaming. A quick scroll through the menu reveals that inputs can be named and the analogue one can be converted to AV direct (effectively cutting out the volume control). You can also specify 2.0 or 2.1 speaker set up and



► backlighting has three modes. Being Cyrus' attempt to woo the smartphone generation it is also 'made for' all things iOS, and can stream wirelessly from any phone with aptX enabled Bluetooth. Control is achieved with a supplied remote that lights up its buttons when you move it. Unlike the n-Remote supplied with classic Cyrus products, this does not have a screen nor is it rechargeable. Instead, you are encouraged to use the Cadence app on your Android or iOS device, a piece of software that seems to work well on both platforms. It even has buttons for Wikipedia info look-up as well as instant social media links, so that you can tell the world what you are enjoying on your Lyric, in the musical equivalent of a selfie. Internet radio is covered by TuneIn, which requires a small amount of computer interaction to set up presets. In addition, both A and B variants of the USB input are available for computer audio, memory sticks or tablet/phone connection. In other words, it can do almost everything, all the time.

But does it encourage you to listen? Yes, is the short answer. For a start it's intuitive to set-up and use. If you wire Lyric into the network with an Ethernet cable, you don't even need to use a password; it's ready to roll. The supplied

handset is a little unconventional, with unusual graphics in place of words, but it doesn't take long to learn. More importantly, once you have the app, the remote becomes almost redundant, but might prove useful for volume and play/pause. The volume wheel on the Cadence app works nicely though, allowing small volume changes (unlike most slider designs) and the level is writ large on the unit's display. In fact, all the key info on the app is reflected in that small front panel screen, including album art.

Hooked up to PMC fact.8 loudspeakers with Townshend Isolda cable, the sound is pacey and very open. It is also uncannily clean. That's not a bad thing; it is a large part of the Lyric 09's sonic appeal, and the wider appeal of Cyrus products in general. The Cyrus Lyric 09 makes many of its rivals sound a little grubby or earthy in comparison, but without the 'shiny' sound that you might expect from an amp designer over-compensating. It has excellent depth when the recording allows, and always works well with regard to tempo. There is a slight emphasis on the mids and highs, which enhances the sense of space and subtly reinforces leading edges, but it also brings out a lot of detail. Norah ►

- ▶ Jones is in fine fettle singing ‘Court and Spark’ with Herbie Hancock [*River: The Joni Letters*, Verve], where you can follow the brushwork of the drummer with ease yet its easy to become immersed in the song.

The CD player is also pretty decent, a bit of Mozart opera sounding very even-handed and spacious. Once again, scale and image depth aren’t as strong as with streamed material, but the disc gives up a lot of precision and poise. The digital input, coax, is likewise rather engaging. I hooked up a rather more expensive streamer in the Naim NDS and heard the benefits that it brings in close to full effect. These amount to far denser resolution, which makes things more realistic, warm, and musically complete. Timing was clearly superior as well, and this made the combo very hard to put down, which proves the strengths of the DAC and amplifier side of Lyric. Going one step further and connecting the analogue output of an Antelope Platinum DSD DAC (also fed by the NDS) brought greater focus, much enhanced image depth, and a more realistic/less obviously open presentation. But it’s important to remember that the source and DAC here are considerably more expensive than Lyric. However, this shows that the amplifier is not a limiting factor and makes me very keen to get my hands on the power amp that Cyrus is launching in the autumn.

Using the Cyrus alone and hooking it up to the Vivid Giya G3 speakers that have been distracting me of late proved to be a very enjoyable and enlightening experience. Gregory Porter’s ‘No Love Dying’ [*Liquid Spirit*, Blue Note] sounded positively sumptuous; calm yet taut, and smooth enough to be turned up to 11. That was achieved with the CAD CAT used as NAS; switching to a Naim UnitiServe added considerable leading edge bite that gave the song more drive and energy, if undermining the degree of resolution. In this set up, the Naim worked a little better, with this polished album at least.

Contrasting Lyric with a Naim SuperUniti streamer/amp (but not tuner or CD player) increased the sense of involvement at the cost of a coarser presentation. The groove got stronger through the Naim and one’s inclination to drop pressing affairs and listen became harder to resist, but many may plump for the greater sheen of the Lyric 09.

Lyric is a *tour de force* for Cyrus. The sound quality combined with the feature count and sheer ease of use puts it in the premier league. The amplifier is a major upgrade on virtually all multi-source, single box solutions and makes Lyric good enough for some very revealing loudspeakers. This is a product for today! +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Inputs: CD, Optical SPDIF x 2, Coaxial SPDIF x 2, USB A x 2 iPhone, iPod & iPad compatible, USB B x 1, Bluetooth Stereo RCA, Streaming via UPnP or DLNA, DAB+, FM, TunelIn Radio

File compatibility: WAV, FLAC, ALAC, AAC, MP3, WMA, AIFF

Outputs: Speaker out x 1 stereo pair, Configurable line out x 2, 3.5mm headphone jack

Sample rate: Up to 24 bit/192kHz

DAC: 32 bit

Continuous power: 170 watts per channel (into 8 Ohms)

Dimensions (HxWxD): 10.5 x 42 x 32cm

Weight: 9kg

Price: £3,000

Manufacturer: Cyrus Audio

URL: www.cyrusaudio.com

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