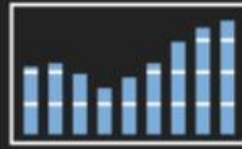


StereoLife



Bryston BDA-3.14



Just like actors specializing in specific roles and rarely going beyond their comfort zone on the screen, so can producers of audiophile equipment be pigeonholed. I have the impression, however, that many people like this situation, because assigning individual brands of the "favorite" category of equipment allows you to simplify the complicated world of electronics, in which quite loose rules apply, and listening can bury all theories previously arranged - price, technical or purely ideological. Bryston is considered a specialist in amplifiers. There is a reason, because in some circles the opinions of this brand are a subject of worship. They are considered extremely refined and armored (which is confirmed not only by warranty cards issued for two decades since the purchase, but also by reports of independent service technicians, who in many amplifiers after such a time replace most of the components with new ones or resign from the service due to the poor chances of rescuing the device, while in Bryston the operation usually ends with the preventive replacement of several capacitors, cleaning the interior and basic regulations), and their sound is considered very natural and perfectly balanced.

However, Canadians do not want to lock themselves in the world of transistor power amplifiers and have long offered their customers other hi-fi components, such as compact disc players, digital

converters and transports, phono preamplifiers, headphone amplifiers, passive and active loudspeaker sets, and even network conditioners and power supplies. Bryston knows perfectly well how to divide a stereo system into several or several elements.

This may surprise some, but in my opinion Canadian engineers are particularly good at digital sources. At a time when audiophiles approached the subject of files with great distrust, and streaming music in quality beyond the capacity of compact discs was still in the realm of dreams, Bryston - based on considerable experience not only with amateur equipment, but also those designed for professionals (who moved to computers and files much earlier than music lovers) - they created a unique shared player consisting of digital transport and DAC. This transport was primarily concerned with reading files from a pen drive or hard disk connected to one of the USB ports. It sounds quite cosmic, right? The full-size and quite expensive device was supposed to do what "just as well" he could have done any computer. Canadians, however, recognized that this only looks like in theory, and practice (listening) shows that an ordinary PC is suitable for reading music just like a cordless screwdriver for drilling holes in the walls.

The latest version of this device - BDP-3 - turned my world upside down.

I knew Bryston would be better than a computer, but how about it? If I won a million dollars tomorrow, it would probably be the first block to land in my system. I also remembered the BDA-3 transducer test positively. First of all, because it is one of the few DACs available on our market with such powerful capabilities (including HDMI sockets), which by the way offers a universal, easily absorbed, typically "Bryston" sound. that this looks only in theory, and practice (listening) shows that an ordinary PC is suitable for reading music just like a cordless screwdriver for drilling holes in the walls.

The only problem is the price. Both BDP-3 and BDA-3 cost about 15,000 PLN, and if we want to get something like a split streamer, we need to buy both elements or split the investment into two installments (for example, buying transport and a cheaper converter to wait, in the meantime putting money back to Bryston DAC). Thirty thousand zlotys is a specific expense. Maybe not for people interested only in extreme hi-end, but for the rest - yes. How to simplify this? The idea seemed obvious. The cheapest source in Bryston's catalog is the tiny transport that says BDP-Pi. A simple box based on the Raspberry Pi platform can act as a bridge between digital music and a converter and it would probably be a hit if it cost PLN 2000-3000. Unfortunately, when Canadians add the cost of housing matching the other components, employees' salaries, taxes and we don't know what else, and then there will be transport costs, customs fees and everything the distributor has to take on, the price increases to PLN 5,449. Some audiophiles have even come to the conclusion that it is idiocy. And this is one of those cases when I'm not surprised at all. Even assuming that Bryston's engineers worked hard to extract good sound from this device and develop its functionality (the company created its own streamer control system, and also ensured its compatibility with popular network services and the Roon platform), five and half a thousand for transport built on the basis of "raspberry" is quite an absurd amount. Someone must have realized that because now it was decided to connect the BDP-Pi brain with the BDA-3 converter in one housing. The result of this internal crossover is BDA-3.14.



Appearance and functionality

Canadians do not like to combine where it is not needed, so BDA-3.14 looks the same as BDA-3 at first glance. It's the same housing, the same arrangement of elements on the front panel, the same attention to detail and the same studio charm of the packaging, in which, apart from the elegant user's manual, we find absolutely no element to tickle audiophile ego. And some velvet bag instead of foil protecting the device against scratches? What about some thick power cord? None of these things. Only later it turned out that the set was originally to include the remote control, but for some reason the first copies of the transducer described were delivered to distributors without it. Someone forgot, overslept, stared - I don't know but fortunately this error was corrected and literally a week later I received a beautiful aluminum controller, from which BDA-3.14 owners will certainly be more pleased than useless trinkets that will in any case land in the garage, in the attic or in the basement.

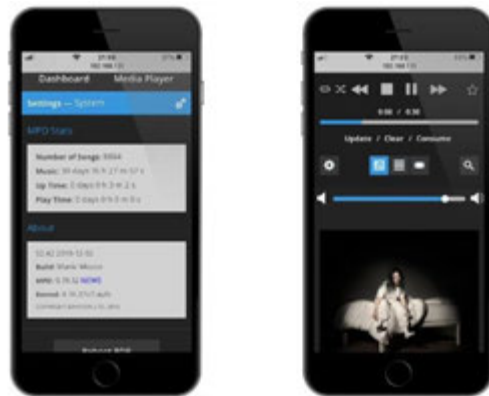


The pilot is important for two reasons. First of all, the described DAC has a whole lot of inputs, so in really complex systems it will be able to take on the signal from a CD player, console, TV, computer and it is not known what else. Secondly, the BDA-3.14 is equipped with an adjustable output, thanks to which it can act as a full-fledged controller and converter, but also a preamplifier.

The manufacturer has added to the manual mentioned above a card printed separately with a clear warning, not to set the volume to maximum before connecting the device to a power amplifier or active speakers. Everything seems to indicate that Bryston really wanted to turn the BDA-3 into a multifunctional real equipment. At first, however, I had déjà vu. What has changed here? In addition to the additional modules inside, two things - at the back there were four USB sockets and a second LAN connector (BDA-3 already had one), and the front was finished in accordance with the latest trends (previously Bryston used brushed aluminum), giving it a more subdued, satin look. Why was this change decided? I have no idea, but in recent years many manufacturers of hi-fi equipment have gone in this direction. Maybe brushed aluminum has already gone too far, or maybe the point is that metal plates with a matt texture are more resistant to scratches? Either way, BDA-3.14 is simply BDA-3 with a "raspberry" mounted.

TEST: [Bryston BDA-3](#)

If you have never had contact with Bryston's equipment, you should know that most devices of this brand have their quirks. Not everything looks and works as expected, which does not mean that there is something wrong with it. On the contrary - although you have to get used to some solutions, from the audiophile's point of view it is very interesting fun. For example, the BDP-3 has a built-in file player that can be accessed from a browser. Just check the IP address of our streamer, open the browser on any computer, tablet or smartphone connected to the same network and after a while a control panel appears, through which we can even start files from the NAS disk or USB stick plugged into one of the USB sockets on Bryston's back panel. It's quite a peculiar solution,



but you have to admit that it is extremely resistant to the rapidly changing world of computers and mobile devices. I also remember the 4B3 power amplifier test perfectly well, which I couldn't even turn on for a good half hour. One button, second button, polarity change of the power cord plug - nothing helped. It turned out that when connecting the network cable, the rear power button should already be on. The amplifier then tests the current parameters and - if everything is correct - after a while it is ready to be turned on by the "main" button on the front. Audiophiles often complain that equipment manufacturers are already designing almost all, even the most expensive and technically advanced devices so that their installation and use can be handled even by a moderately intelligent monkey, which sometimes affects the quality or even limits the possibilities of components used inside. Some companies even prefer to "cut" the maximum signal quality supported by the transducer just so that no one has to download and install drivers on their computer. In Bryston devices it is exactly the opposite. You know nothing? Do not come. Buy a receiver or some kind of wireless speaker and do not pretend that you are an audiophile.

Let's start with the fact that BDA-3.14 has no wireless connection. We can only connect it to the network with a LAN cable. If we are not able to pull such a cable, we can get an external network card, which should be plugged into one of the USB ports on the back.



Bryston offers the "whistle" of the BDP Wi-Fi Adapter, which after plugging into another USB port will provide us with wireless connectivity. In fact, every plug and play network card should pass the exam here. After launching BDA-3.14 we will see a real dance of all multi-colored LEDs located on the front panel. It is clearly seen that the manufacturer in a sense tried to give this device an "analogue" character, so we do not have a display here, nor any other element suggesting that BDA-3.14 is not only a converter equipped with a dozen or so digital inputs, but also a streamer and preamplifier.

Suffice to say that the current volume level is displayed in the form of a line consisting of LEDs located above the buttons used to select the input. Cosmos. But this is nothing compared to the company player Manic Moose, which - similarly to the BDP-3 model - took the form of an application launched from the browser level. Fortunately, you do not need to know the IP address of our transducer. Just enter the address given in the user manual and the screen will display a list of Bryston devices that we can access. In the menu you will find various settings, as well as a player that allows you to start music from storage media, network locations or streaming services. In general, the possibilities of this rather peculiar application are quite big, but the problem is that it was developed by Bryston - attention, attention - ten years ago, so the user interface and the way some functions work is from the current point of view the true Middle Ages. If I were to describe it in one word, I would say that it is crude. Just. While finding even more important device settings should not cause anyone trouble, getting to the music stored on a network drive, creating a playlist and starting playback is fun for a good ten minutes.

Fortunately, this is not the only option. I was wondering why Bryston stayed with such a system instead of creating a modern and nicer application for mobile devices based on the same functions, but the problem was solved when I started Roon. I know it is paid software, but at this point the fun with BDA-3.14 finally began to resemble what we are dealing with in the best applications of this type made available by manufacturers of streamers and network speakers. The change from the company's "browser" player to Roon can be compared only to the upgrade from Windows 3.11 to the current "ten". Adherents of free software can of course look for alternative solutions such as Audirvana. When

it comes to the process of playing music, probably every solution will be better than the one proposed by Bryston. In my opinion, Canadians should as soon as possible withdraw from this idea, leaving on their "side" only the panel with device settings. It would be simple, logical and convenient, and users would immediately know that there is no point in dealing with a program that displays some strange messages and looks only a little better than websites from the nineties. Perhaps such a system made sense ten years ago. Perhaps it was maintained in order to be able to say that with the device taken out of the box you can actually do what the manufacturer declares, i.e. play files, change settings and listen to music from streaming services. But you can also switch the BDA-3.14 into Roon Ready mode and do all this much better. Perhaps it was maintained in order to be able to say that with the device taken out of the box you can actually do what the manufacturer declares, i.e. play files, change settings and listen to music from streaming services.

Since we have already tested the BDA-3 model, I do not want to develop the issues that I raised in that review. BDA-3.14 made an equally good impression on me when it comes to build quality - both from the outside and inside. It is one of those devices that may not look as cosmic as the Auralica streamers and transducers from the G2 series or the metal wonder of Chord, but they were built as if they were to survive the apocalypse. The pros include, first and foremost, the multitude and variety of inputs and outputs on the rear panel. There are more of them than anyone will be able to use. It's cool, because I often test transducers and streamers that have at least one connector clearly missing. As there are USB sockets, there is a lack of optical. If there are three optical ones, there is no coaxial one. And when there are even two coaxial nests, both in the BNC (Exposure XM5, Chord Qutest) standard. Here, however, we have everything that the heart desires. AES / EBU input, two coaxial (RCA and BNC), one optical input, a total of seven (!) USB ports, four inputs and one HDMI output ... Shock.



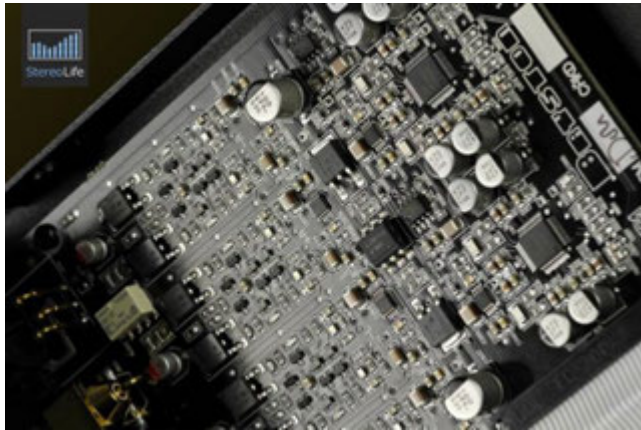
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By the way, the reluctance of audiophile equipment manufacturers to HDMI sockets is completely incomprehensible in my opinion. It's the easiest and best way to connect a hi-fi system with a TV, Blu-ray player or other device of this type, and nobody will convince me that watching movies and series from Netflix with sound system in the form of a pair of decent speakers, a stereo amplifier and a high-class converter is not fair. That I should use the shitty speakers on the TV so as not to mess up my hi-end equipment with such poverty, how HDMI cable Watch (and listen to) "Blade Runner 2049" with the music of Hans Zimmer, "Joker" with the Oscar-winning soundtrack by Hildur Guðnadóttir or, from much more recent things, the horror "In the forest today nobody will fall asleep", to which Radzimir Dębski wrote . The film is not outstanding. At times even infantile and predictable, but the sound layer - chad.

Bryston is not a device that any lover of evening sessions will be interested in, but something tells me that the multitude of HDMI sockets on its back will attract many audiophiles treating their audio system as part of a larger puzzle and using it for everything that is related to sound. Many electronics

manufacturers are already reaching that the lack of an HDMI socket or even an optical input is a huge mistake these days. An example would be Naim Uniti Atom, to which the HDMI connector was added a little bit forcefully, while withdrawing from the version without this convenience (by the way, thanks to which you can now get it at a very good price). Bryston not only remembered about this standard, but even secured his customers for the future, stuffing five HDMI sockets at the back.



Minuses? The biggest, of course, is the "built-in" application for playing music. Theoretically, it works, but even the Sonos windows application, which I think is quite outdated, looks like a modern hybrid car parked next to an old bus. It should be noted, however, that some companies do not provide users with any tool to change equipment settings and play music, directing them immediately to external services and programs, and the Bryston system seems to be resistant to the passage of time, which is probably why for a long time you will be able to use it to quickly change the transducer operating parameters (because it is quite good

for that). I would also attach to the fact that in all promotional materials Bryston boasts an unprecedented in the electronics industry, a twenty-year warranty, which, however, this model - like other digital devices - does not apply. Here we get "only" five years of manufacturer care. On the one hand, it makes sense, because digital products usually have a slightly shorter life span than 100% analog equipment. On the other - I have the impression that this division was introduced due to CD players and their troublesome mechanics, and such a converter should not suddenly break down after four years.

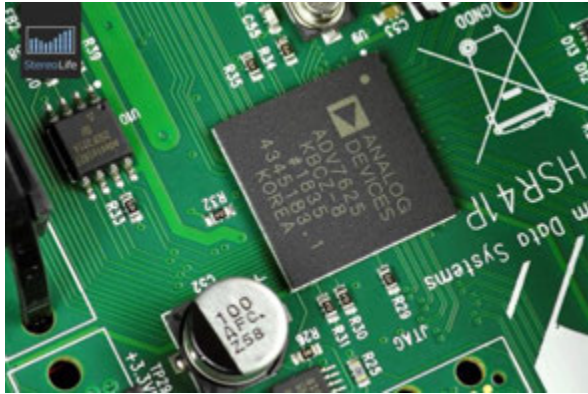
Bryston could extend the 20-year warranty on digital products, stating, of course, that the contract includes the functions and equipment with which the device was originally manufactured and operated (otherwise customers would be able to believe that during these two decades they should regularly replace components with newer ones). Is BDA-3.14 will be more long-lived than tablets and smartphones produced today? In my opinion, yes. Canadians, however, do not want to take such a burden, although extending the 20-year warranty on all products would probably have a powerful impact on customers and their decisions. The last downside of Bryston, of course, is its price. The exact amount depends on the current Canadian dollar exchange rate, however it can be assumed that BDA-3.14 is more expensive than the older brother on which it is based. On the one hand, you can think about whether it's better to take BDA-3 and some other transport, such as Primare NP5 Prisma, Auralic Aries Mini or SOTM sMS-200.

On the other hand, there is always another cable and another box on the table, and the saving is not any, so combining probably does not make much sense. You can of course ask yourself if we even need a DAC like BDA-3 or BDA-3.14, but assuming that we are aiming at this level of quality, **BDA-3.14 is a really good deal**. The next step forward will be the purchase of BDA-3. However, this does not change the fact that the described converter comes into parade with devices such as Auralic Vega G1, Lumin T2 or Cambridge Audio Edge NQ. And how does it sound compare with them?



Sound

Regardless of whether a power amplifier, preamplifier, integrated, digital transport, digital-to-analog converter or headphone amplifier is waiting in the queue for listening, the Bryston logo always has a calming effect on me. I am used to being guaranteed a certain level of quality. In other words, it's equipment that I don't waste time on. Even if I am dealing with a new version of the model, which I have already had the opportunity to meet, its development, modification or hybrid born from the combination of two other devices, because BDA-3.14 should be thrown into this category. It should be noted, however, that there is nothing suspicious about it. Many electronics manufacturers use the same components in many different models or combine them so that customers get what they are looking for. Devices are hatched from the amplifiers, which are really already full-fledged all-in-one systems. Preamplifiers with a built-in streamer are created, headphone amplifiers with a gramophone correction stage, transducers with wireless connectivity, etc.



The combination of the streamer, converter and preamplifier functions is a hit for many music lovers. In fact, in such a system, we only need a decent power amplifier and a pair of loudspeakers, or - if we want to use studio patterns and simplify it even more - active sets. BDA-3.14 may at first appear to be a device built during the lunch break. Streamer module built on the basis of the popular "raspberry", housing borrowed from another model and an application to play music from ten years ago? Yes, but the fate of this battle begins to turn around when we realize that we are really facing BDA-3, which can now play hi-res files from

a connected disk or directly from the network, and is also compatible with Roon and has an elegant aluminum remote control. Anyone who has come across a "base" model will know what that means - very, very good sound.

PRESENTATION: Music for generations - Bryston

To be honest, instead of exercising again, I could repeat everything I wrote about the sound of BDA-3 here. I recommend my review to those interested, because after a few minutes of listening to the well-warmed BDA-3.14 - despite the time that has passed since the test of his older brother - I had the impression that a good old friend came to me. However, I decided that it is worth supplementing this article with observations made this time in different conditions and in the company of completely different equipment. In a nutshell, we are dealing with natural, dynamic and universal sound, but also slightly insulated and slightly rounded. I have the impression that Canadian designers could create a device offering sound that was 100% neutral, even and transparent, but they decided to gently pull the string towards fluidity and musicality, so that even listening for many hours was not something demanding or unpleasant for us. On the contrary - such a presentation is conducive to longer listening sessions and makes us not want to jump between albums or cut songs in half. When I listened to the last few songs from my private playlist, and Roon started serving me more suggestions, I sat for such a good two hours.

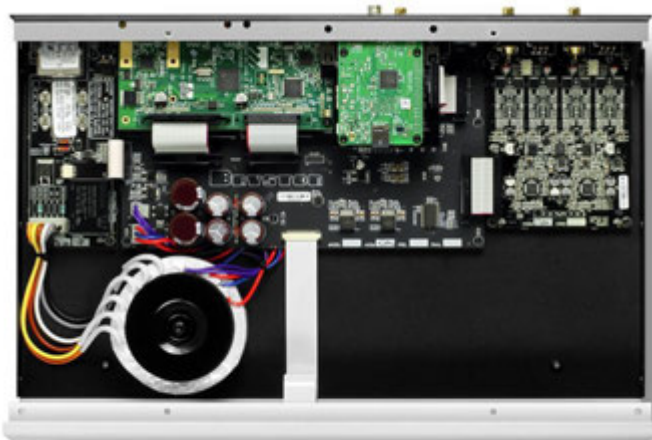
To be honest, I could finish the test at this stage, because I already knew everything about BDA-3.14. This is a fantastic source offering mature, even and well-arranged, yet easily absorbed sound. If just such a combination, such a hit in the bull's-eye balance between studio correctness and analog musicality is that, what we're looking for in the sound of stereo equipment, every single aspect of the message will look exactly as we want it here. The most "objective" elements are low tones and stereo. It will be difficult to attach to them even to those who require compliance with the original from the source and believe that the special feature of ideal equipment should be the lack of special features. While the bass has been subtly thickened, which gives it a pleasant mass and fleshiness, the space is exemplary. There is

neither pushing the instruments forward nor drawing an impressive depth where the recording does not provide it. Interestingly, Bryston can show us a real stadium space at any time or focus sound at one point, but to do so, we need to provide him with the right material. If the producers did not try, nothing will happen. BDA-3.14 will not do anything arbitrary. If we reach for a recording on a level, it will do what it pleases with sounds and place it in front of us exactly as it should.

A player that will appeal to both audiophiles and music lovers.

Bryston is an ideal source from the audiophile's point of view, which would like to obtain a neutral, universal sound without any obvious colorations, strange jumps manifested only on selected albums or other manifestations of interpreting the reproduced material, and on the other is aware that a slight deviation towards tube heat and analogue liquidity in the long run can be very beneficial and even desirable. Even if the device loses a few points in the eyes of the seekers of absolute objectivity, during the first many hours of listening it will gain a dozen or so. Raising the temperature by half a degree is not a sin, and if the equipment stays at the set level, after a while we stop noticing it. BDA-3.14 is constant in feelings and is not moved by any artist. I do my job that the sound would be correct and pleasant. The downside is that when we learn its sound, it doesn't surprise us with anything. Neither a minus nor a plus. So if you hope that one day you sit on the couch and Bryston shows you one of your favorite albums like no other source, this is not the address. It will be the opposite. You will hear exactly what - knowing both the recording and the sound of the Canadian combine - you should expect. There is no hi-fun mode or some kind of sound madness on the "well, let's have fun today" principle. BDA-3.14 always plays the same - evenly, mature, culturally and even a little boring. If we listen to a disc once in focus, there is no strength for us to notice something that we have not yet discovered the second time. For some, it's a dream come true. High fidelity in the release, well, maybe not extreme (due to a slight softening of the message), but certainly very developed. A player that will appeal to both audiophiles and music lovers. In short - a source for long, long years.

Construction and parameters



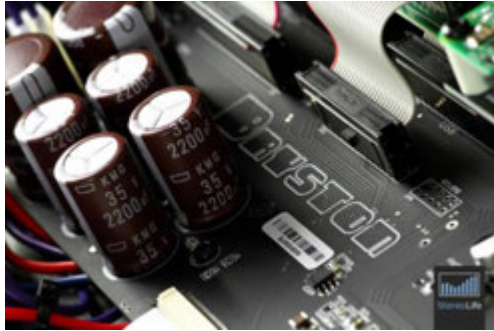
Bryston BDA-3.14 is a streaming player that was created by connecting the BDA-3 digital-to-analog converter with a network module based on the Raspberry Pi platform, previously used in BDP-Pi transport. Both sections are connected by the I²S bus, which - as we read on the manufacturer's website - is currently the most accurate method of sending a digital signal.

In addition, there are as many as ten other inputs available, thanks to which the BDA-3.14 can become the digital heart of the audio system, also equipped with an HDMI output,

additional USB ports and an analog output in the form of unbalanced (RCA) or balanced (XLR) with volume control and remote control in the form of the remote control included in the set. The Canadian streamer can also be operated using the company's application, which we run from the browser on any device connected to the same network or external programs, such as Roon.

The interior of the described model is basically a copy of the BDA-3 transducer with an added network module. The device uses independent power sections for digital and analogue circuits using a common toroidal transformer. The BDA-3.14 brain is the Altera 5M80Z programmable processor, and the conversion is handled by two AKM AK4490EQ bones, which natively support PCM signals up to 32 bit

/ 384 kHz and DSD256. Bryston ensures that each format is played in bit-perfect mode until converted to analog. The output stage works in class A. Similar to the BDA-3 transducer, the assembly of all internal components is perfect. There is full symmetry on the board with the analog section. It is also clear that the designers wanted to reduce the signal path to a minimum. The aluminum remote control was also very carefully made, which - considering the multitude of inputs and volume control - can



really be useful. BDA-3.14 is available in black or silver, and in two versions - with a front panel with a width of 17 or 19 inches. The second option will certainly interest professionals who want to mount such a streamer in a studio rack. It is worth adding that the device is covered by a five-year manufacturer's warranty. 14 is available in black or silver, and in two versions - with a 17 or 19-inch front panel. The second option will certainly interest professionals who want to mount such a streamer in a studio rack. It is worth adding that the device is covered by a five-year manufacturer's warranty. 14 is available in black or silver, and in two versions - with a 17 or 19-inch front panel. The

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Verdict

Initially, I thought that the BDA-3.14 is only a cross-linked version of the BDA-3 converter, i.e. the same device with new features, such as playing files from USB storage devices connected to USB ports, not to mention access to streaming services and Roon compatibility. And of course you can treat it. In practice, however, it is an audiophile streamer offering mature, dynamic and musical sound. The rear wall, loaded with various sockets, gives us great possibilities. With this equipment, we should be able to enjoy the "basic" function of the device even when the world of computers, formats and music services undergoes another and subsequent evolution.

The combination of Bryston and Roon supported by hi-res files and access to TIDAL is in my opinion a masterful package, which will quickly introduce us to a world where music is listened to not only easily and pleasantly, but also in audiophile - with hi-end sound.

By the way, I was wondering if BDA-3.14 can compete with such streamers as Auralic Vega G1, Lumin T2 or Cambridge Audio Edge NQ. I don't have everything on the shelf, but Auralic has been working in my reference system for some time, so the comparison was self-made. Of course, the Vega G1 sounds a bit different, but I have no doubt that the BDA-3.14 is the same class equipment. I don't know if I would be offended if someone replaced Auralic with Bryston. And since the first one is one of the best sources up to PLN 20,000, then the Canadian streamer needs a label from the machine. BDA-3 was great, and BDA-3.14 plays the same, it costs a little more, but it can do much more. And to think that it was so simple ...

Prize

