

Jack Roberts examines the phenomenon of solid-state power and tube sound that is the \$5,000 pair of the Monarchy Audio SE-250 hybrid monoblock power amplifier



December, 2007

SPECIFICATIONS:

(Absolute Zero Feedback: No global, No local Feedback)

Architecture: One Dual Triode used in an SRPP configuration; 12 pcs of complimentary MOSFET in Output Stage.

Tube: One 6DJ8 Military Grade. Can be substituted with 6922 or ECC88. Customer can specify 6N1P if desired. (The sonic characteristics of this amp depends to a large extent on the choice of this input tube) Other dual triodes with the same pin-out and filament voltage may be substituted to attain personal taste. The current-output stage is totally transparent, so if there are any sonic characteristics observable on this amp, it would be attributable to the tube's own sonics.

Input

Sensitivity: 2.5 Volt RMS for full output

Output: 250 Watts rms on 8 Ohm load
500 Watts rms on 4 Ohm load
will operate with speakers that dips into 2 Ohm at part of the frequency spectrum.

AC Input: 117V or 240V (must be specified when ordering)

Input
Impedance: 100K Ohms, direct coupled. RCA connection only.

Slew Rate: 80V/usec minimum

Frequency
Response: 20 Hz to 20KHz +/- 0.25 dB at full power

Power
Supply: +/- 60V DC from a 850 Watt toroidal transformer
Exclusive Dual-bridge Low Noise Rectification.

Class of
Operation: a) Front end: Single-ended Pure Class A.
b) Output Stage: Class A biased up to 50 Watts, then Class AB to full output.

Maximum
Power
Consumption: 800 Watts

Dimensions: 12.5" x 5" x 16"

Net weight: 46 Lbs; Gross Weight: 50 Lbs

Color &
Finish: Chassis: Black anodized. Front panel: Smoked silver
Lapped (polished) to Hubble-mirror like.

MSRP: \$5,000/pair

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Let's start by just saying these are really great amplifiers to have around.

They sound great, they have gobs of power, and they are beautiful to look at. The combination of sounding great and the gobs of power can really come in handy for some speakers that come in. But, we should start with a little background information. These amps are designed by C.C. Poon, the proprietor of San Francisco-based Monarchy Audio. I won't go into details on the company's philosophy and goals, because Constantine did an in-depth article on Mr. Poon and Monarch Audio back in 2001 that you can read.



I would be remiss if I didn't talk a little about build quality and looks. These amps just shout out quality. They are not overdone, but very classic-looking. The company describes the very thick front panel as "smoked silver, lapped (polished) to Hubble-mirror like." All I can say is it's a beautiful- smoked silver that I would describe as a almost perfect brushed finish. Though only 12.5" x 5" x 16", the handles come in very handy on a 46 lb. amp. The heat sinks, the rear panel and the insides all look equally impressive.

“Simply put, to my ears, feedback most often keeps an amp from bringing a life-like bloom to music.”

The SE-250's are hybrid amps that use Dual Triode tubes and MOSFETS in the output stage. The amps come with a single 6DJ8 Military Grade tube each. Mr. Poon encourages tube rolling. The caps are WIMA's from Germany, and the resistors are carbon-coated or metal film. The hook-up wire is silver-coated. The SE-250's employs zero feedback; it uses neither global nor local feedback. Personally, I almost always find that feedback causes an amp to sound somewhat closed, and lacking in ultimate dynamics and transparency. Simply put, to my ears, feedback most often keeps an amp from bringing a life-like bloom to music.

WELL, HOW DO THEY SOUND?

Whether I'm listening to the 250's on my \$4,000 Ikonoklast3 or the \$6,000 GamuT L3 minimonitors, I was impressed with the monoblocks' overall musical sound, especially considering their power. Now, there is no doubt that my \$27,000 Wavac EC300B integrated SET or the Shindo Cortese are more transparent, but they both have only 10 watts per channel and cost many times more. It is also true that the 250's are a little warmer than either the Wavac or Shindo amps. Still, as I listened, I thought that the 250's had a very natural-sounding bottom-end with nice punch and drive.

For a high-powered, hybrid amp, the Monarchy Audio's midrange is exquisite, some might even say luscious. You can play your music much louder without fatigue through the SE-250's than with most high-powered amps I have heard. The detail is there, but 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; I had season tickets to the symphony for years on row C. I understand that others might prefer a little more distant point of view, 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. The bass was always very tuneful with real drive and pace. It isn't quite as quick or nimble as my Wavac EC 300B when playing the Ikonoklast, but that's not a fair comparison considering the Wavac costs \$27,000. Anyway, you can't really play the GamuT's with the Wavac; they are too inefficient and the impedance goes too low. The Monarchy 250 amps really make the GamuT's sing though, with just incredible bass out of a speaker their size.

“They are really very emotionally involving, and more resolving than most components I have heard in this price range, especially with this much power.”

The midrange of the Monarchy 250 amps is surprisingly SET-like. They are really very emotionally involving, and more resolving than most components I have heard in this price range, especially with this much power. They have some of that natural bloom that helps SET's give music life. The music never sounded analytical, and the Monarchy 250 amps always allowed the timbre of instruments to be experienced in a quite convincing manner. Sure, the micro-dynamics of the midrange are not quite up to the Wavac, but what is? The point is, they aren't that far behind world class, which amazes me at such a reasonable price for so much power.

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. I know, when you review a MOSFET amp, you're suppose to talk about “MOSFET Haze”; but to be honest, I didn't pay it much attention. I surely noticed the 250's weren't quite as transparent as my Wavac, but I would have never called it hazy. Honestly, the midrange is very beautiful to listen to.

The top-end is very open-sounding, and yet not in the least does it 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 leaves me wanting more sparkle and shimmer. With the popularity of the digital amps right now, I feel the need to say that none of them I have heard come close to the top-end of the Monarchy 250 amps.

“Thank goodness: The Monarchy amps were much more like tubes with a soundstage that had some flesh and breath to it.”

Soundstage and Imaging of the Monarchy Audio SE-250's was everything I would expect from a good pair of tube mono blocks. I think that's quite an accomplishment for a hybrid. As wide and deep as the soundstage was, they always maintained a very stable center. Vertical soundstage or height was adequate and never a detraction, though not in the league with the best SET's. 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 body or breath. This is sometimes described as sound coming from a perfect black background, and so it is; but I have never heard live music sound anything like that.

Thank goodness: The Monarchy amps were much more like tubes with a soundstage that had some flesh and breath to it. They allow instruments and people to be rendered in a very believable space that seems occupied by something with mass.

CONCLUSION

The Monarchy SE-250 hybrid monoblock amplifiers are great amps when you need power. I find them quite attractive and well made. I think they are quite a bargain. If you were to try to buy tube amps with this kind of power, you have to spend mega dollars. The transistor amps I have heard for this price with this kind of power just don't have the bloom and life that I want in an amp. You can get a good bit of this also in some transistor amps, but it'll cost you a lot more for this kind of power.

If you have speakers that need this kind of power, this is a great sounding amp at a very good price.

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