

The PASS LABS XA30.8 stereo amplifier REVIEWED

December 2, 2021 by Howard Milstein



Could the Pass Labs XA30.8 stereo amplifier be one of the greatest amplifiers currently available for the most discerning audiophile? Howard Milstein dissects this profoundly exquisite, angelic power amplifier in full detail!

Many of the high-end audio products that are considered “modern vintage” are incredibly good and in many cases, they are still considered state-of-the-art by many major stereo critics in the world.

As this pertains to my first review and auditioning of *Pass Labs* products, till this day, many times I have brought back into my current system a well maintained “Threshold S550e” amplifier, which I still use as a ‘reference’ check when auditioning new products that are on loan for assessment. Concerning *Threshold*, we are talking about the now highly regarded amplifier designer Nelson Pass, (Pass Labs) as well as his expert design collaborator and partner, Wayne Colburn.

As far as the still “exceptional” sound of the vintage Thresholds, Wayne Colburn explained: that *“The Threshold products were a collaboration— as were the Pass integrated amplifiers. The Pass Aleph P preamps and the Adcom also were a joint effort; after that, I started doing them myself”*.

As we delve into this review of the Pass Labs XA30.8 stereo Class A power amplifier, it is interesting to note that Nelson currently only designs the “Big Iron” products, while Wayne Colburn, designs the preamps, phono preamps, and integrated amplifiers.

But everything is still a collaboration. Here are some engrossing and detailed points I received directly from Nelson Pass (with the help of Bryan Stanton, Pass Labs’ communication guru) regarding both the XA30.8 Class A power amp and its higher-powered, more expensive brother, the XA60.8 Class A monoblocks; to quote Nelson:

“Actually, the XA30.8 is mostly my design, although you can find Wayne’s fingerprints on it.....There are numerous bits and pieces in the design that contribute to the result, and they have evolved from the original XA amplifiers to the .8 series. Specific to the .8, The output stage has been altered to deliver some single-ended characters to the sound with a bit of 2nd harmonic to it, where the previous circuits we completely symmetric, giving a 3rd harmonic flavor. Of course, larger sinks, output stage and the power supply didn’t hurt.”

“The XA60.8 has twice the power, and there is twice as much output stage and power supply devoted to the single-channel. If you don’t need the extra juice, the XA30.8 will serve up a similar performance”

“The power reserves on the amplifier are similar to the 30.5 which were measured at 100 watts RM into 6 ohms 160 into 4 ohms, and 300 into 2 ohms. The 30.8 is slightly more and the XA60.8 gives out another 3 db.”

FERVENT POINTS of INTEREST

Simply put, though maybe a bit ironic, *Class A Amplifiers* are the most common type of amplifier topology as they use just one output switching transistor (Bipolar, FET, IGBT, etc.) within their amplifier design. From a purist’s point of view, a Class “A” amplifier, in theory, is considered the *best class* of amplifier design due mainly to its excellent linearity, high gain, and low signal distortion levels when designed correctly. Although seldom used in very high-power amplifier applications due to thermal power supply considerations, the output transistor of a class-A topology never turns “OFF”, (this being one of its main disadvantages).

Class A amplifiers are made as single-ended but there are plenty of push-pull Class A amplifiers. Pass Labs “*First Watt*” has made and currently makes Single-ended designs but are also push-pull. Their older *Aleph* amplifiers were single-ended, but since the mid ’90’s the Pass amplifiers have been of the push-pull variety, and most recently a mix of single-ended and push-pull.

*(Actually, the idea that a Class-A amp draws a continuous steady current from the supply is true in one case only. A single-ended amp using a current source as the collector load will draw a continuous steady current – but **only** if it uses a single supply. In the case of a dual supply, the same amp will draw a continuous current from one supply, and a varying current from the other. (From Elliot Sound Productions). This is a detail that few published designs have ever mentioned.)*

However, one can make a good, substantial argument that some extraordinarily designed Class A/B and believe it or not, in some situations, certain *Class D amplifiers* can give some specific Class A amplifiers a good run for their money (with more usable power if so desired) as to their subjective sound quality!

Typically, there are so many variations between one amp and most others than simply output stage operational class that it is extraordinarily difficult to attribute precise sonic traits simply to class A vs. class AB. In one's view, it would be hard to classify a Class A sound while anticipating all Class A units to share these traits vs. Class AB. You want to hear the amplifier itself while noticing how the amp differs in its clarity, tonal balance, transparency, and vocal timbre, besides its output stage operating class.

The **XA30.8** Class A power amp has currently replaced the Pass Labs **XA30.5** Class A Power Amplifier.

The most significant change Pass Labs made to the electronics of the XA30.8 was to make greater use of the single-ended Class A biasing to the output stage. In other words, the XA30.8, theoretically, should delve "deeper" into pure Class A mode than the XA30.5. To obtain this, the company was required to include a decent amount of extra hardware to the amplifier, most noticeably the huge heat sinks, which increase its weight to a hefty 88 pounds! The output stage uses a startling 40 MOSFETs: 20/Ch. in push-pull configuration. Mr. Pass and Mr. Colburn saw the tradeoff to be well worth the effort.

One can assume that a good designer can get the best out of a topology, but physics still sets the limits on what can ultimately be done. And the design (and performance) of an amp is only part of what makes a "great amplifier" sound the way it does. Nonetheless, a well-designed and optimally biased Class AB output stage will have very low crossover distortion but *not quite as low as a Class A* output stage.

Having been inspired with the help of the Pass Labs' *X.5 series* from about 2006, the output stages of the larger X.8 series amplifiers have been designed for a much greater and deeper bias into the Class-A operating region. With its increasingly larger power supply than its older sibling, this amplifier functions within a larger push-pull Class-A running envelope which inevitably produces less distortion while integrating with most loudspeakers at normal listening levels. To be blunt: at "normal" to decently higher listening levels the amplifier's performance *stays* in its exalted Class-A operation. I will vouch for that further on!

The XA30.8 being scrutinized here delivers 60W per channel into a 4-ohm load (30 into an 8-ohm load) in full Class A operation. At that point, it transitions into class AB operation like a normal amplifier and keeps going to over **100W per channel** before it reaches 1% distortion! As such the 30W power spec is a *massive (Nelson Pass) underestimate* of what the amplifier is capable of. Even at that 100W per channel level, the clarity, transparency, authoritative control, and auspiciously engrossing, yet fluidly elegant transient response of the Pass 30.8 is something that simply cannot be ignored.

These assets will allow the amplifier to drive moderately difficult speakers load impedances. Some observed testing has shown XA30.8 to put out 85W into 8ohms and 120W into 4ohms – the aforementioned are benefits of a large power supply and a beefy output stage which uses the 40 MOSFETs; 20/Ch. in push-pull configuration. This virtually guarantees the use of most loudspeakers with better than average sensitivities to obtain the SPL you desire in your listening room, (within this evaluation—the aforementioned was proved to be incontrovertible!) without having to install a dedicated air-conditioning system to remove the heat generated!

Undoubtedly, the Pass Labs XA30.8 is a truly balanced unit! The X.8 Series amplifiers are models of electronic elegance, delivering more power with fewer stages, lower distortion, and less feedback

than ever before. The *series consists of nine Class-A amplifiers*, four two-channel and five Monoblock models.

The two-channel amps include the X150.8, the X250.8, the X350.8, and the XA30.8. The mono models include the X600.8, the XA60.8, the XA100.8, the XA160.8 the X260.8, and the XA200.8. Their per-channel power ratings range from 30 for the two-channel XA30.8 to 600 for the single-channel X600. As for the XA30.8, essentially what we have here is a more engrossing, detailed, transparent, and *less expensive* Class A stereo power amplifier.

IMPEDANCE AND CONNECTIONS

The XA 30.8 will take either a single-ended (RCA) or a balanced (XLR) input connection. Pass Labs prefers using the XLR connections, and I have recently added the *DH Labs silver "Revelation" cables* both in RCA and XLR formats. (Review forthcoming). It so happens that Nelson himself considers the many "high-end" interconnects to be a bit of a fable. To quote him: *"My favorite XLR connections are Neutrik with (as I recall) Mogami balanced oxygen-free cable and Silicone jacket. Been using that stuff for years, and am very happy"*.

Before drafting this review, I am reminded of the previous nights "particular" and somewhat *tedious* listening sessions. I have concluded that there are incontrovertibly **noticeable** differences between silver and/or *silver plated cables* and pure copper—*particularly if the cable impedance and capacitance is not low enough!* In essence, if your system is a touch lacking at the higher frequencies and needs a little help, providing a "more defined" highest frequency sound quality, definitely audition some silver cables of your choice. Otherwise, Nelson may indeed *be RIGHT!*)



back of XA30.8 – purple lines show jumper pins

For most of this listening evaluation, I used these *new* (for me) DH Labs RCA Pure Silver Revelation interconnects into the *Pass Labs XP-12* unbalanced from my Audio Note CD3.1X/2 or....from the following separate DAC's, I predominantly use: The Prism Sound *Callia* reference, the *Border Patrol SE-I* (to be reviewed shortly) or the *Wyred4 Sound 10th Anniversary* into the exquisite sounding Pass XP-12. The Balanced Revelation XLR's were then connected from the PASS XP-12 output into the XA30.8 power amp inputs. The following setup produced some of the finest results I have heard in my system for many a day! When using vinyl program sources, I hooked up the Audio Note R-Zero II phono stage with a Dynavector *High Output MC cartridge*. The Audio Note I-Zero integrated power amp was also inserted occasionally to be used as a comparison to the XA30.8.

Being that the XA30.8 amplifier input impedance is 50 Kohms single-ended and 100 Kohms balanced, and the input capacitance is just a few picofarads, just about anything will drive it. If you happen to be using RCA inputs, then you want to use the gold input jumper to short the (-) input (pin 3) of the XLR connector to the ground (pin 1).

From what I have observed, the rear panel is very similar to the earlier XA30.5 but has one **great** new addition. *The large, wingnut-style binding posts* with built-in tightening clutches now can accommodate banana plugs in addition to spades. The binding posts “lock” the spade connection firmly — offering a superb connection contact facility that inspires confidence and security!



Wingnut binding posts!

BUILD QUALITY

If we take a look at this amplifier as to its cosmetics, it is undoubtedly beautifully constructed with the feel of the highest, most refined, sturdy, and stable of any amplifier I have recently had the pleasure of using. (quite on par with the *darTZeel CT-8550mk.II* but a bit heavier). Its heat sinks are quite huge and take up substantially more surface area than the XA30.5 but when set on a good solid audiophile rack, this is a mere formality.

The XA30.8's silver, machined front panel contains a single power button centered below a round bias meter, which is subtly illuminated in blue. The on/off button is sturdy and exact and wonderfully efficient. Since this sleeping beauty draws tons of power, it's better to leave the mains switch on its backplate off until about a *half-hour* before you're ready to use it. Then push the on button and within that time the XA30.8 will have plenty of warm-up time.



on/off ~ bias meter

The solid, sturdy handles help you heave this massive amp onto your equipment rack without much trouble. The quality of the case, front panel, and blue-lit meter are as good as can be, and at this price point....was a trifle unexpected!

LISTENING TO THE XA30.8

It may not necessarily take the most discriminating audiophile ears to be able to analyze just how pronounced this amplifier sounds. I initiated my listening sessions at slightly lower sound pressure levels to enable myself to absorb just what distinct quality differences this Class A power amplifier could project unto the musical program sources and my system components used in this review.

The most *sophisticated* Solid-state amps (particularly Class A) electronics, circuitry, and wattage are designed to create a broader range of tones at lower volumes as they do not use tubes for amplification. A system as such will *unquestionably* allow the listener to hear the micro details and subtle, intricate, and musical qualities it can uncover while listening at lower SPL's. (The reference components are listed at the end).

As most readers know by now, I try to use the most decadent, yet simply miked program material for my subjective reviews, and in the case of the XA30.8, this was no exception. Initially, on some source material, the differences were notable yet not overtly obvious. However, when most of the full power of the XA30.8 was exponentially turned up by the decisive *XP-12-line stage preamplifier* (review coming), the rewards in its sound reproduction were starting to change and eventually became more revealing than I may ever have expected! I am talking here about a quality of sound that was unprecedented in the overall body and smoothness — a silky, overtly encompassing midrange with superbly plush and subtle high-frequency detail. Nothing here is overexposed or in any way deviates from its pure, beautifully nuanced tonal response.



The mid/bass response was firm and punchy and satisfying without standing out in any way within the full frequency spectrum. Some critics have found the XA30.8 to be a tiny bit “loose” in its full bass capabilities. However, I found this to be slightly unsubstantiated in my listening tests with many outstanding – *orchestral recordings* and even when applying well-engineered *pop music* (e.g. as one example used here, “*The Hues Corporation*” vinyl disc from

1974; a nicely recorded soul group from the 70's) and/or more *naturally recorded acoustical program sources* will show off this amp's bass response most profoundly. Above, the electric bass is in *full force* and the sound produced by the XA30.8 was nothing short of spectacular. I will admit that occasionally, the XA30.8's bass response may... exhibit a *small* inference to some extremely rewarding tube amplifiers, and this was quite satisfying within itself! Summarily, this amplifiers' overall bass response will *never* let the listener down, in any respect!

If you fancy the voice of *Dusty Springfield*, you can hear and understand the beauty and shading she displays on the above-referenced recording, superbly re-engineered and *mastered by Kevin Gray at CoHearent Audio from the Original Master Tapes!* This was pressed At Quality Record Pressings *On 45rpm 200g Vinyl as well as CD.* The XA30.8 takes the vocal passion of this masterful performance to new sonic heights. I also recommend re-visiting her “best hits” re-mastered to envelope yourself in her wonderful and appealing vocal intonations. While not the most beguiling vocal talent of her time, she possessed an appealing and beautiful vocal intimacy that still is quite unparalleled, particularly to the likes of Diana Krall. Better yet, for the *vinyl enthusiast*, try listening to these *Frank Sinatra* masterpieces!

A distinct factor of sound reproduction where individual listeners may often fluctuate is the significance of sound staging and *stereo imaging*.

As readers of our site may acknowledge, I am a dedicated observer of a component's ability to project a huge sound stage without losing any of the *locational stereophonic* effects of the orchestra, singer, or ensemble's exact placement on the reproduced stage. I wouldn't say it is the

only key aspect to my enjoyment of high-end audio, but it is definitely within the first 2 *areas* of sound reproduction that is an **essential part** of the pleasure I experience when listening to music on a first-rate audio system. The XA30.8 is truly an exceptional component in this respect.

As such, the amplifier's overall channel matching is undeniably within the most minuscule tolerances. The instrumental locational effects of the finest program material are breathtakingly accurate, with center soundstage imaging second to none, The only comparable reference here would be the *darTZeel CT-8550 II* which is also outstanding in this respect.

While the XA30.8 is not dual mono (as is the darTZeel) – the channels share the same supply, although the front-end circuits have **separate supply filtering**. To quote Nelson, "*That stereo image* you hear is partly the result of that 2nd harmonic in the output stage"

Otherwise, Soundstage breadth, width, and depth are truly out of the ordinary. What makes this amplifier a *lick* more delectable than the darTZeel is the "creamy" and marvelously delicate displayed mid-range. The Pass Labs "Class A" midrange has made me, in retrospect, have to reevaluate some of my previous convictions concerning the small, *hypothetical shortcomings* of some of the best Class AB/ amplifiers I had previously reviewed.

This became all the more noteworthy when using my specialty mains power cords into my *Inakustik AC-3500P* power conditioner. (a truly great component!). To quote Wayne Colburn: "*I seem to think that wall power conditioning is worth doing especially if your power is poor, having used the PS Audio power plant with good results on the front-end equipment*"

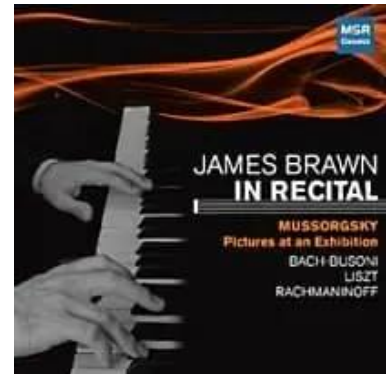
It would be quite easy to assume that the XA30.8 may share some characteristics of a first-rate tube amplifier. There is a *definitive* lack of any "grainy" type of sound to the XA30.8 that could tempt some listeners and critics alike to compare the elegant mid and upper frequencies as emanating a "tube" sound as such; which on occasion may be true.

The XA30.8 using high-biased MOSFETs, which in turn produces higher-power class A operation and direct-coupled front-end circuitry appears, in this case, to have bridged this gap — thereby offering exceptional and subtle detail, dynamics and transient response, crystal clear high frequencies while also offering a phenomenally distinguished, easy to listen to and elegantly and delicately balanced 3-dimensionality.

Add to this a musical tonality that seems to penetrate all types of orchestral instruments — not to mention the natural and accurate tonal representation of the human voice; no matter whether on live recordings, broadcasts, or studio recordings. The best way to describe this audible sincerity would be "*truthful, beautifully accurate realism*" to the music it reproduces — without any harsh distortion components. This distortion may well be (but not necessarily) predominantly 2nd harmonic and will be greatest at high power levels where it is least likely to be audible. Bear in mind though, that a great many Class-AB amplifiers (*including Pass Labs higher-powered X models*) will be capable of a similar performance that is just as good, and in *some* cases, possibly better.

Let's move on to explore more of this amplifier's sonic impressions with some outstanding program sources, both live and studio recordings. Assuming that recordings of a Grand Piano are among the most severe tests of high-definition reproduction truthfulness, particularly at the lower reaches of the audio band, The Pass Labs combination met this challenge with enviable ease, sounding fundamentally as close to true to life within the confines of my listening room. A new set of magnificent recordings on *MSR Classics* owner and CEO *Robert LaPorta* in Newtown Ct. of *Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin* by concert pianist *James Brawn* (soon to be fully reviewed here)

not only set new standards for commercial discs in his performances but some of the most extraordinary and accurately engineered piano recordings I have heard in decades!



(UK. Engineer Ben Connellan has used a combination of 4 mics for these recordings, namely a slightly spaced pair of Neumann U89's at about 110° about 8' back from the piano, and about 6'6" high. These run through a Prism Maselec MMA-4XR and record with a SADIe LRX—while also adding a tiny amount of the Bricasti M7. Monitors are a pair of ATC SCM 25A Pro loudspeakers).

The resultant sound encompasses a natural, clean, and superlative keyboard balance and an even soundstage distance — not to mention tonal and timbral accuracy that is was, in many ways, unparalleled. I would be lying if I did not say that the XA30.8 reproduced these disks (and vinyl recordings) with staggering authenticity and majestic musicality — definitely one of the two or 3 best amplifiers I have ever had in my listening room!



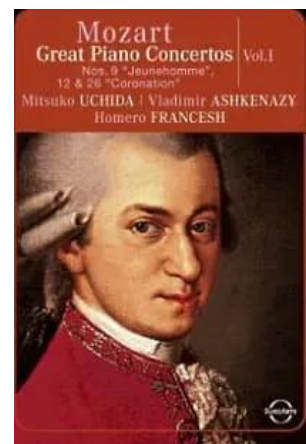
Further on, more digital and analog playback material was entered into the mix and a few references here should be mentioned as quite noteworthy. Two more outstanding examples of exquisitely recorded and played Piano Concerto RECORDINGS that not only exhumed the utmost of the XA30.8' most affirmative reproduction qualities with the loudspeakers used are *Brigitte Meyer and Iona Browns Mozart Concertos*, on Omega records as well as the superlative DVD PCM soundtrack of a young *Mitsuko Uchida and Jeffrey Tate*. Euroarts The Pass Labs brought forth levels of enjoyment here only matched above by the James Brawn, MSR

discs as noted above.

WHY DOES IT SOUND SO GOOD?

Reviewers use a variety of descriptive terms to unveil what they are hearing with most of the finest components that may be planted into their home systems. In the case of the Pass XA30.8, there is definitely something magical going on with this Class A power amplifier that is undeniably hard to describe. It is not unusual to initially describe small differences in the sound of amplifiers as partly psycho acoustical. However, in this case, the amplifier just melted into my system with a reproduction quality that was so believably right and exquisitely musical—particularly when the amp was in its full Class A mode.

When tonal accuracy is combined with loudspeakers and program material that contain some of the most neutral fundamental qualities, the



listening sessions turn out to be as close to a standard of excellence that is quite inimitable: the closest one can get in a listening room to a great seat in your most esteemed concert hall. (when you concentrate your eyes and ears at the loudspeakers and wall behind them.) The XA30.8 without any doubt brings that enviable experience as close as possible for the avid audiophile and music lover.

Yes, the XA30.8 brings forth such midrange transparency, liquidity, detail, and a supremely sensitive treble response to the point that when you put on your cd/ transport or turntable with *preferably*, an immaculately recorded disc, you feel that the sound emanating is the pinnacle of what this hobby represents. Although the above equates itself wonderfully with some of the best-recorded jazz and acoustical pop sources, it is its recreation of classical orchestral and operatic vocal repertoire where the difference truly makes its ultimate mark. Having said this, I wish more “audiophiles” could truly appreciate this genre of music, which is where the most sophisticated artisans and product designs this hobby encompasses can show off their ultimate prowess.

It can be a bit fascinating to see some audiophiles’ reactions when attending a live orchestral concert and how they are a bit shocked at hearing live music for the first time. Compared to their usual audio systems at home, they find live musical transients are gentler, less ragged affairs than they hear in their home listening rooms.

By most standards, “*Arco*” violin strokes, while resinous and vibrant, usually have a *silkie* extreme top end in an acoustically well-designed concert hall. In the case of the Pass XA30.8, *Nelson Pass and Wayne Colburn* have indeed conquered this much sought after and enviable sound trophy!

COMPARISONS

If we take a look at some distinctly praised high-end audiophile amplifiers that listeners may find as useful comparisons, the immediate products that may encompass similar sound qualities (*although in these cases at much higher price points*) that come to mind are:

- 1.The Dan D’Agostino Momentum s250,
- 2.Constellation Audio’s power amps and Integrated 1.0,
- 3.darTZeel separates, as well as their integrated CTH 8550/2 amp
- 4.The Lamm Industries Class A 1.2 monoblocks
- 5.CH Precision M1 stereo amplifier
6. Some of the more highly expensive *Audio Note (UK)*, single-ended tube amplifiers.

It is interesting to note that the only 2 of these amplifiers that run in full Class A are the Lamm monoblocks and the Audio Note; the former hybrid Class A tube design. The CH Precision M1 power amplifier uses a fully differential JFET-input base running in class-A. Of all the above units, the only ones I have used and evaluated personally is the *darTZeel CTH 8550/2*, and have **just started** assessing the entry-level *Audio Note I-Zero* integrated amplifier.

Besides the huge difference in price for all the above amplifiers, I will concentrate on comparing the XA30.8 to what I am truly familiar with—the *darTZeel CTH 8550/2.integrated amp* and to a lesser extent, Audio Note’s I- Zero integrated tube amplifier. (Review forthcoming).

Although the *darTZeel* is of a *higher power rating* than the Pass Labs, the inherent real power that is put out by the XA30.8 is more deceiving than one could realize, particularly as to its overall *power reserves*. Having said that, the XA30.8 will give us the same comfortable, non-clipping high

sound pressure levels as the 2x more powerful dual-mono darTZeel with no problems whatsoever! Additionally, it exhibits a similar if more splendidly rich midrange tonal balance, added to its discreet airiness when reproducing all the program sources I used in the evaluation.

The Pass Labs will offer a “minutely” more forward balance from the loudspeakers than the darTZeel while expiating as much depth and ambiance as the former. As mentioned previously, as good as the darTZeel stereo imaging is.... the XA30.8, particularly when used in a decisively developed acoustical listening environment is definitively its equal in every sense of the word!

Compared to Audio Note I-Zero

Audio Note UK’s entry-level integrated amplifier, The I-Zero puts out 8 watts per channel with four not often used *ECL82 triode/pentode tubes*, operates in class A for the first four Watts then switches to Class AB1. As we compare it to our XA30.8, of course, we’re talking about (30 watts) Class A solid-state vs. the Audio Note which runs Class A for the first FOUR watts.

The I-Zero is a really fine amplifier provided your speakers are happy with less than ten watts of Class A power. The Class A weighted operation along with its tube output stage offers a significantly rich sound, with full body and texture, while managing to retain very high-quality transient behavior. (Somewhat similar to the Pass Labs). What did not truly surprise me was the level of bass depth and “potency” that the amplifier possessed— being overly familiar with the Audio Notes CD3.1X/2 DAC. These 2 amps offered me a good comparison even while acknowledging the brief initial listening experience I have had with the Audio Note.

Four of my most laudable and definitively accurate loudspeakers were used to appraise and compare the XA30.8; — the “new” *Living Voice R25a loudspeakers*, vintage *Spendor BC1’s* and modified *Quad ESL-63’s* (both of these designs at least 40 years old), as well as Audio Note’s own earliest *AN/ED* speaker (to be reviewed next month).

Both the Living Voice and the AN/E’s have very high sensitivities, but even with the Quad and Spendor— the XA30.8 handled them all with **great aplomb** while producing exceedingly clean SPL’s way beyond any expectations!

Nonetheless, The Pass Labs XA30.8, considering all that it offers the most selective and judicious music lover, is quite a hard act to follow. It has a lot more power at one’s fingertips than the 30 W per channel specification would suggest. With truly remarkable sound quality and full Class A configuration, what more can anybody ask for at its *relatively* low price?

POINTS OF CONCERN?

If one could squeak out any of the XA30.8’s performance weaknesses, as noted previously, **some**.... listeners will notice more overall finesse than sheer deep bass vigor, although, in my opinion, this was quite innocuous by any definition of the word! The end-user of a product such as this will most likely not be using the XA30.8 for surround systems with over-engineered, blasting movie soundtracks as their primary source of program material. If you lust for the bloviated “slam” involved here, you may be better served by trying any of the more powerful Class A monoblocks from Pass Labs in the Point 8 Series. The XA30.8 is a discreet, discerning, and most highly refined 2-channel stereophonic amplifier.

Additionally, if your preferred loudspeakers have an extremely low sensitivity, you had best look for a higher-powered Pass Labs unit, or some of the more highly touted amplifiers now available for the discerning music lover; a few of which were mentioned above — that is if your needs and/or

disposable income warrants it.

The XA30.8 steadily consumes approximately 375 watts or a little more than a traditional 60-watt light bulb. There are as mentioned above, Class D amps that “imbibe” tiny bits of power and sound great — however, they *may* not be totally in the same class as this unit.

The amplifier does runs hot and requires space for proper ventilation. After several hours of operation, the XA30.8 may add a moderate amount of heat to your listening area. I turn the mains switch off after each listening session.

CLOSING

The Pass Labs XA30.8 is one of the best amplifiers I have ever heard in my home listening environment. If you own even moderately or inordinately sensitive speakers, the XA30.8 at its current price is the **consummate amplifier** on the market today! Even when acknowledging its *theoretically* lower power output, it has everything — and I do mean everything any person could ever desire in a power amplifier. The Pass XA30.8 will reproduce music in a fashion hardly rivaled by others and in that sense, you could spend 4 times the amount of money on another product and it is doubtful that it could outperform the XA30.8.

If by some chance, your preferred music genre and high listening levels truly demand more power, then, without doubt, go right to the next step up with the XA60.8. Of course, that would pan out to almost double the price. However, even considering the above, the value here is still quite exceptional, indeed!

For most audiophiles and music listeners, the XA30.8 could well be the final step in your search for the most beautiful sound in your audio system. It is worth every penny and it will soon become a permanent resident in my music room!

(The Pass Labs XP-12-line stage preamplifier review will be forthcoming soon and evaluated along with the XA30.8)

Price ~ 6,800.00

Review system: Loudspeakers: Living Voice R25A, Sendor BC1, Quad ESL 63, Audio Note AN/ED ~ **Digital:** Border Patrol DAC SE-I ~ Prism Sound “Callia” DAC ~ Innuos Zenith Mk.3 server/streamer ~ Wyred4Sound 10th Anniversary DAC ~ Audio Note (UK) CD3.1x/2 **Analog:** SOTA comet 5 and Dynavector high output moving coil cartridge. **Amplification:** PS Audio M1200 monoblocks ~ Pass Lab XP- 12 line stage preamp ~ Audio Note (UK) I-Zero integrated amp/ Audio Note R Zero II Phono stage **Cables/ Conditioners:** Inakustik AC-3500p power station & LS-4004 speaker cables, AC-2404 reference Air Power Cord ~ Silversmith Audio ‘Fidelium’ loudspeaker cables ~ DH Labs RCA & XLR Silver Revelation interconnects ~ Wireworld Electra 7 digital SPDIF/ Audio Art 1 e” AC Power Cord.

WEB: <https://www.passlabs.com/>

Pass Laboratories
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Technical Features Class A Type Stereo

Gain (dB) 26 **Full Pwr @ 26 dB gain (V)** 0.77 **Low-Frequency Response** 1.5 Hz

High-Frequency Response 100 kHz **Power Output /ch (8 ohms)** 30 **Power Output /ch (4 ohms)** 60

Maximum Output (Volts) 40 **Maximum Output (Amps)** 20 **Input Impedance (SE & BAL Kohms)** 50 / 100