

Sugden A21SE Signature Integrated Amplifier

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I first came in contact with **Sugden Audio**, the company behind the Sugden A24SE Signature integrated amplifier, in 1969 when I was a sophomore at San Marcos Academy, a college prep, boarding, military and thankfully co-ed school in San Marcos, Texas. We had a new English teacher from England, and Texas was a huge culture shock for him. I remember he once ordered buttermilk at dinner instead of sweet milk since both were on the menu, and he assumed sweet milk would be chocolate milk. Well, he took one swallow and spit it out.

Now you probably want to know what this has to do with audio. Trust me, I'm getting there. This guy was the youngest male teacher we had, and he would sometimes invite students over to his house to listen to music. He was proud of his system, and he should have been. He had a **Sugden Audio** amp, a pair of **Wharfedale** speakers and a **Garrard** turntable. He had bought it all with him from England, and we were very envious.

I hadn't thought much more about Sugden Audio, though until I began to hear the name again about 20 years ago on audio forums. They were seldom mentioned, but when they were, it was always with glowing praise.

Sugden History

James Edward Sugden founded Sugden Audio in 1967. It was a division of Research Electronics, a company that manufactured scientific instruments and test equipment Sugden designed for universities. According to their website, the original A21 was the world's first commercial production pure class A transistor amplifier. The amp was originally branded for Richard Allan, a local

loudspeaker company. The partnership was short lived and within a year the amplifier was renamed the **SUGDEN A21**.

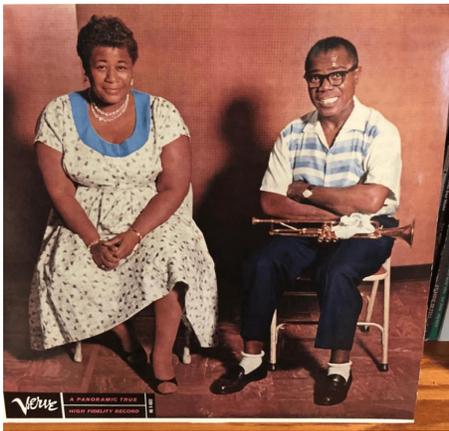


Description

The modern **A21SE Signature** integrated amplifier is still a transistor, pure Class A amplifier. According to Sugden Audio, the SE Sig is a special edition that builds on the strengths of the classic A21. While it is a more modern class A single ended amp, the sound remains distinctively ‘Sugden’. Upgraded with a fifty percent larger power supply and increased power output, the dynamics are even more impressive. A sophisticated pre-amplifier stage is another improvement on the A21SE.

The A21SE Sig has five line-level inputs operated by relays. It has one preamp output and one fixed tape out. It also has high-quality RCA inputs and a five-way binding post. Both channels have their own transformer windings and relay-switched source selection.





Ella and Louis

This is one of the greatest recordings of all time. If you don't believe there is spatial and staging information on mono recordings just listen to this LP. On track 2, "*Isn't This a Lovely Day,*" the A21SE Signature let me hear the beauty and lushness of Ella and the gravely power of Louie Armstrong. The voices are really lifelike, but the horn was a little too polite. I don't want to overstate the case because I ended up listening to the whole album.

Final Thoughts

No amp is perfect and neither is the Sugden A21SE Signature. In my opinion, though, it's as perfect as you are going to get for less than \$7,500. My reference **LTA MZ3 preamp** and **First Watt SIT 3** amp beat the A21SE Signature at its own game, but hold on just a minute. Using both a preamp and an amp means that I have to add another **Audience powerChord** and **Au24SX interconnects**, which then means that my reference costs three times as much as the A21SE Signature.

Let me close by saying that if you love to experience the emotions of music, you will love this amp!