



Musical Heritage

David Price samples a distinctive CD player and integrated amplifier setup that combines Gallic flair and great value

Launched in France in 1981 by electronics professor Yves-Bernard André, YBA today is a very different thing to the company that it once was. Some might lament the way the EU is dissolving national borders, but the real story of the past few decades has been the wholesale move of manufacturing from the West to the East. This was already happening in the seventies, with British brands

beginning to manufacture first in Hong Kong, then Taiwan and eventually China. YBA describes its products as being “designed in France, made with passion”, deftly circumnavigating the fact the majority shareholder is now the Shenzhen Shanling Digital Technology Development Company – a prominent Chinese hi-fi marque.

In 2009, Shanling purchased a controlling stake in this most Gallic of

DETAILS

PRODUCT
YBA Heritage CD100
ORIGIN
France/China
TYPE
CD player
WEIGHT
5.7kg
DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
430 x 118 x 372mm
FEATURES
• Wolfson WM8740 DAC, 24-bit/192kHz PCM compatible
• Switchable upsampling filtering
• Digital inputs: 1x coaxial; 1x USB
• Outputs: 1x RCA; 1x XLR; 1x coaxial
DISTRIBUTOR
Nintronics Ltd.
TELEPHONE
01707 320788
WEBSITE
ybahifi.com

brands, and all production aside from the flagship Statement range went East. Founder André is still very much a driving force however, and there’s no denying the distinctive and pleasingly quirky French feel of even the affordable Heritage range. Since the company’s 2012 relaunch things have gone from strength to strength. The Heritage range – to which the CD100 and A100 you see here belong – is the company’s affordable audiophile line. It offers a good taste of the higher end products but at a more accessible price, only made possible by manufacturing on the other side of the world.

Unboxing these two components, you’re struck by the interesting design cues. The fascia and top/side casing are finished in lavish brushed aluminium – available in both silver and black – which is reminiscent of Shanling products of yore. The main power switch on both units is underneath, just below the fascia – which might catch out a few people – and when you’ve located this and switched on you’ll see a rather nice

warm yellow/burnt orange display illuminate in the central window.

The CD100 is not your bog-standard silver disc spinner either; the main power switch – and indeed all the other controls – are toggles. At first they appear fiddly, but actually work rather well with a crisp and positive action. They comprise power, stop/play/pause – pulling this toggle up ejects the disc – track search up/down and finally Sample Rate Conversion, or upsampling to 192kHz. Around the back is a choice of RCA unbalanced or balanced XLR analogue outputs and a coaxial digital output should you wish to use it as a transport. A coaxial and USB Type-B digital input are also present, so the unit can work as a DAC. The heart of the machine is a 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson WM8740 DAC, which is now quite dated but is still liked for its lively but smooth sound.

As you would expect, the amplifier is a close visual match – and equally quirky to use. Its central display shows the source selected, and has two rotary controls – for volume and source selection – instead of the

DETAILS

PRODUCT
YBA Heritage A100
ORIGIN
France/China
TYPE
CD player
WEIGHT
9.2kg
DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
430 x 118 x 400mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power output: 2x 100W RMS (8ohm)
• Inputs: 5x RCAs; 1x balanced XLR
• Preamp output
DISTRIBUTOR
Nintronics Ltd.
TELEPHONE
01707 320788
WEBSITE
ybahifi.com

toggle switches. These work well and are nice to operate. It sports three feet rather than the usual four, and a remote is supplied that gives access to all the functions. This is a pretty substantial item with a quality feel, and works with any YBA product.

The amplifier has five pairs of RCA stereo inputs, plus one balanced XLR. The video input has a bypass feature, which is effectively a direct ‘power amp in’ so that it doesn’t go via the preamp. There’s also a handy preamplifier output for those using a separate power amplifier or sub. A single set of loudspeaker binding posts is fitted. The manufacturer claims 100W RMS per channel into 8ohm, or 150W into 4. No doubt the chunky 320VA power transformer helps to deliver this.

Sound quality

Not particularly familiar with this brand, I don’t know what to expect – but am very pleasantly surprised. Right from switch-on I characterise the sound of the YBA combo as rather ‘old school’, and I mean this in the nicest possible way. Instead of the bland, anodyne and clinical sound that you can sometimes get from rival components at the price, things are quite warm, colourful and sweet sounding – with a very pleasing rhythmic gait. The CD100/A100 isn’t the most forensically detailed combination ever made, but it is certainly subtle and finessed.

I kick off my listening with Steve Hackett’s *Narnia*, a laid-back slice of late-seventies progressive rock. It’s not the greatest of recordings, but really takes off via a decent system. The YBA pair instantly gets its measure, giving a snappy rendition of the opening electric guitar arpeggios, and is ready to lift up its skirt and run

as the first verse kicks in. There is a good deal of filigree detail, and a general rhythmic push to the track that makes it a pleasure to listen to. This is a slightly cloudy, opaque sort of recording and the CD100/A100 does little to cut through the mist – this duo doesn’t have an ultra-detailed sound, yet the fundamentals of its performance are so good that I’m not left wishing it did.

Interestingly, the bass isn’t the tightest I’ve ever heard, yet the song powers along with real gusto and a sense of purpose and drive. Things are definitely a little soft low down, yet the combo is able to keep enough control to stop the music becoming a meandering mess. Indeed, this makes for quite a euphonic sound –

The brooding power is something I hadn’t expected from a combo at the price

reminiscent of the classic NAD 3020 integrated in the way it delivers a big, warm, bouncy performance that really hits the spot. The combination of rhythmic dexterity, plus a decent amount of power makes the track really get cooking. At the other end of the frequency extreme, hi-hat cymbals sound silky and sweet, albeit not quite as open and delicate as more costly hi-fi products. Indeed the whole sound is slightly sepia-tinged, bringing a pleasant and inviting tonality to everything it touches – even if it’s not strictly accurate.

Nu Era’s *Lines Between Us* from the *Geometricks* EP is a modern take on classic nineties electro, with an elastic bass synthesiser line dominating the mix, in front of thick washes of warm

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Balanced XLR analogue input (right channel)
- 2 RCA line-level analogue inputs
- 3 Pre output
- 4 USB Type-B port
- 5 Coaxial digital input & output
- 6 RCA line-level analogue outputs
- 7 Balanced XLR analogue output (right channel)

Q&A

Yves-Bernard André
Founder, YBA



DP: What's the raison d'être for the Heritage series?

YBA: It is simple, but not too simple. There are no passive components in the way of the audio signal. Most of the components are made in France, including fuses, solder, wiring, etc. Heritage is now our entry-level series and I design it primarily for young people who really like music and want access to high quality on a reasonable budget – also for people who desire a simple but musical system that is highly reliable and which does not produce heat.

Why did you select an older Wolfson DAC for the CD100?

Well it sounds better to me. Switchable upsampling is handy depending on your source and can sometimes improve the sound. In the CD100, it partners a Sony transport mechanism that's totally reliable and sounds good.

What type of power amplifier section is employed?

It is a special type that I designed and call Class Alpha. I claim that I get the qualities of Class A amplifiers or tubes without having the disadvantages of the heat dissipation. Also, I have optimised the mechanical, electrostatic, magnetic and temperature characteristics of the amplifier design.

How did your controlling stake in YBA come to be sold to Shanling?

My wife was helping me to run the company, but sadly became ill so I had to find a safe solution for the future. It was not a question of money and I am very happy with this decision. Shanling is an excellent manufacturer and its production quality is exceptional. I am always guiding the production, especially of our high-end products where I visit and test each and every one.



The brushed aluminium is complimented by that orange display panel

analogue synthesiser pads, and delicate looped hi-hats behind. It can sound like a fat blob of sound that saunters along for five minutes on the wrong system, but not here. Although the track is quite compressed, the CD100/A100 is able to scythe through the mix and take control of the proceedings. It allows each strand to play along irrespective of what the others are doing, and placing them in space accurately. The soundstage is wide and inside it, instruments don't all cluster up and congeal together. Along with the decent power and warm bass, this is the other facet to the YBA combo that makes it so satisfying; there's a lot of room to roam, so to speak, and insight into the recording acoustic that it sets up. It has a large, ebullient, outgoing nature that really fills the room.

This facet of its performance really comes to the fore with classical music. Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* proves an interesting test; there is some lack of low-level detail to proceedings that marks the YBA combo down, but you really have to remind yourself of its

price at times like this. Despite this last nth degree of focus, there is a great sense of scale to the concert hall, especially left to right, and I can't help but feel that I want to peer deep inside. As the first movement progresses, I am suddenly reminded of the power of this dynamic duo. It's very good at tracking dynamics, giving a lithe and responsive sound that goes loud at the drop of a hat. This brings a real sense of menace and brooding power to the track and is something that I hadn't expected from a combo at the price.

Conclusion

With a fairly dated DAC in the CD player and no gimmicks in the amp circuitry, this combo boasts no hi-tech trickery inside. Yet it proves to be a lovely sounding setup, in a most pleasing way. Regardless of the type of music that you choose to play on the YBA CD100/A100, it gives an immersive yet energetic rendition and really lets the emotion out. Its combination of Gallic flair and great value is hard to fault ●



Audiolab's 8300A integrated amplifier and 8300CD CD player (£900/£1,000) (HFC 404) is an obvious rival; it's a little cheaper but you'd never know it by looking. The Audiolab's finish is superior, and things seem to be screwed together slightly better. There is more functionality and the CD player offers a more up-to-date DAC with a wider range of digital formats it can play. Sonically, though, the YBA pulls right back; it sounds warmer and more mellifluous, making music a less sterile and/or cerebral experience – even if it does lack some of the Audiolab combo's detail.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT: CD100

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Clean, open, musical sound; design

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Hard-to-reach power switch

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Charming and capable CD player

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT: A100

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Sweet, warm, musical sound; lots of power

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Slightly loose bass

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Enjoyable and engaging integrated

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

