

THERE IS PLENTY OF POWER TO DRIVE NINE CHANNELS

It has L P S O H P H Q W M B U, but from the UCD series, not Ncore, more precisely the UCD250LP. This results in a receiver that can put a lot of watts into the scale: 90 watts per channel, even if each channel is controlled (4 or 8 ohms). When comparing with another brand, you have to look carefully at how manufacturers specify their figures. Often they will quote a higher number, but then controlled with Wwo channels. Then the SPA25 reaches 145 watts per channel (with 8 ohm speakers).

It is striking that Primare never loses sight of stereo enthusiasts with its multi-channel products. The A35.8, for example, is as good an 8-channel power amp as it is a very powerful stereo amplifier (via bridging and bi-wiring). Same with the SPA25. It is an AV receiver, but the Swedes state that it can also be set up as a powerful integrated stereo amplifier. If you choose stereo and can bi-amp speakers, 290 watts per channel are available.

That stereo scenario is theoretically also possible with many other AV receivers. With the SPA25, however, the DAC section has also been modified to better present the stereo channels. The two ESS9026PRE chips are 8-channel DACs, with four channels dedicated to the left and right channels according to the designers to enhance stereo music reproduction.

AS POWERFUL AS HIFI ESQUE

For this review we do not hang the Primare receiver on our usual DALI Rubicon setup, but Z H F R Q Q H F W L W V B R - r a y, Dolby Atmos) are, of course, D O R W

5.x setup with Bowers & Wilkins 700 S3 speaker. Specifically, the 703 S3 floorstanders, the 705 S3 bookshelf speakers and the HTM71 S3 center speaker - all with the signature tweeter-on-top. To bring the whole thing to 5.1.4, we also connect the four DALI Alteco height speakers in the room and use the ELAC 2050 Sub as an LFE reproducer. The sources on duty are as usual an Oppo UDP-203, an Apple TV 4K and an Xbox One X.

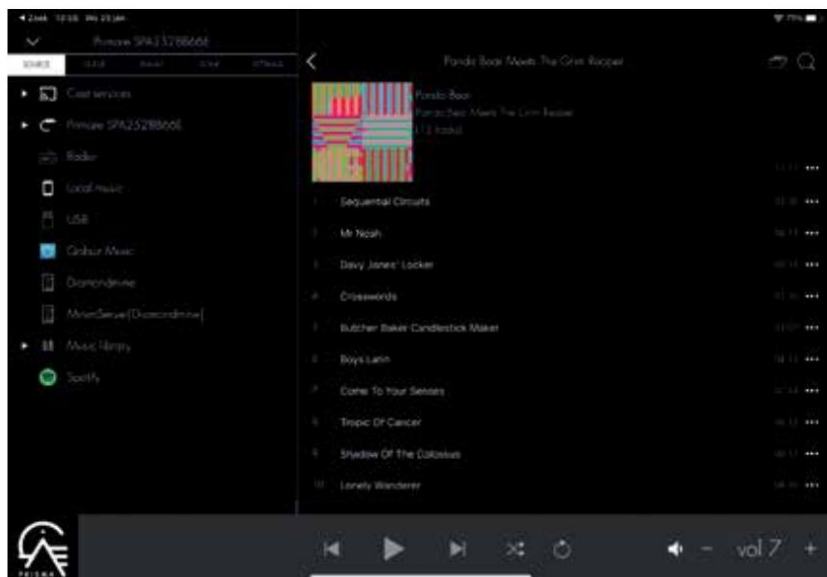
Game adaptations are usually not very good, but the first episodes of 'The Last of Us' suggest that this HBO series will break that curse. Even during the intense build-up to the collapse of society, the Primare knows how to transfer the minimal yet atmospheric soundtrack to the Bowers & Wilkins 700 S3 loudspeakers. The height channels will continue to be provided by the DALI Altecos on the wall.

Although initially not much exciting happens in the audio field, there are soon outliers that attract attention. The police cars passing by outside or the fighter jets flying over the viewer high in the air - subtlety is successfully married here to good positioning. And then we haven't called in Dirac yet.

We know from previous experience that correct Dirac adjustment can yield spectacular results. Although we weren't quite done fine-tuning yet, we were able to realize a very noticeable improvement. Both in The Last of Us and in an exciting scene from the Amazon Video series 'The Rig', when the torch on an oil rig has to be lit with a flare gun. In this sequence you almost continuously hear the waves crashing into the structure, and that is very present in this outdoor scene. There is a good immersion in the oppressive atmosphere of this series.

The complex Oscar-winning soundscapes of 'Dune' (UHD B I R - r a y, Dolby Atmos) are, of course, D O R W





tougher to put down properly. The marriage of the strange sound effects and the special music of Hans Zimmer produces something very unusual, distant yet intriguing. The challenge here is to create those soundscapes in a layered and defined way, because otherwise it sounds like a mush. The SPA25 succeeds in that, and we also notice that the receiver has the reserves to make those abrupt transitions from near-silence in some scenes to scenes with very intense audio. It becomes very impressive when Paul Atreides flies into a giant sandstorm; we can hear the grains of sand rattling past the cabin, just

as the mechanical parts give up the ghost. The moment the ornithopter rises above the storm, there is a very clever Atmos moment where the sound effect moves diagonally upwards. The ensuing crash is also a showcase of the Primare receiver's talent for delivering fine micro detail discreetly.

In 'Jurassic World: Dominion' there are enough dynamic peaks to register. Like the roar of dinosaurs of all kinds, for example when Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard are chased in Malta by a herd of raptors. It is striking that the effects in the rear channels are also very mature, with effects moving quickly and with good definition across the room.

It's an exciting performance, on the level of a receiver at this price point. What the SPA25 brings is a good nose for detail and relatively little coloring.

The hi-fi roots of the Swedes we notice while listening to music. Via the Apple TV 4K and Apple Music we can enjoy Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the virtuoso cello player, in a Dolby Atmos mix. Fortunately, it is still done quite subtly, making it sound like played in a concert hall.

The three-dimensionality is very convincing. What the Primare does excellently here is to put down the strings very naturally and authentically. We also have that with the fine guitar playing on 'The Longing' by Tamino, where the voice of (in stereo via Roon on the Oppo) Belgian-Moroccan singer hangs amid a lot of texture. Ask a die-hard stereo fan if he would like an AV receiver as a music player, and the answer is definitely 'no'. But put this device in a blind test, and it may well be 'yes'.

CONCLUSION

The SPA25 is not your average AV receiver where a long list of features seems more important than the actual performance. Not that it's missing in this respect. Thanks to Dirac, the Primare has an excellent manner to tailor the playback to your speakers and room. There is also a lot of flexibility in how you can configure the device, without making the interface very complex. The lack of HDMI 2.1 support is a deal breaker for discerning gamers, but movie buffs will need less of it. We also appreciate that this receiver not only focuses on a sophisticated surround reproduction, but also really high-end music in stereo.

