



Entry-level Copland

THE CSA70 MAY BE THE MOST AFFORDABLE OFFERING IN THE COPLAND AMPLIFIER RANGE, AT £2999, BUT CHRIS KELLY FINDS THIS IS A HIGHLY CAPABLE DESIGN

I wonder how many of you reading this are like me, having read about Copland products in favourable reviews for at least 20 years, but never having actually had a chance to hear one? In fact that was true of me until 2020, when I had the chance to use and review the CSA100 integrated amplifier and then last year I hosted its big brother, the CSA150. And now I have completed my acquaintance with the CSA, after having the smallest of the family, the CSA70, in my system to review in these pages.

Founded in the mid 1980s by Ole Møller, who is still its owner and chief designer for the brand, based in Copenhagen, Denmark, Copland originally specialised in the use of valves (or tubes, depending on your location): from its first product, the CTA15 power amplifier, Møller, became a recognised leader in the use of thermionic devices in audio equipment, using modern techniques.

In the 1990s the nomenclature CSA was first used on a Copland amplifier, the CSA14, combining triodes in the preamp with a solid-state Class A power amplifier. Copland has returned to that CSA nomenclature for three current models, and Møller has moved on too, incorporating a DAC in the new range. For the CSA150 (2x150 watts into 8ohms) and the CSA100 (2x100 watts into 8ohms), he kept a single 6922 valve in the pre-amplifier section, but the entry-level CSA70, selling for £2999 and under review here, is an entirely solid state amplifier. Otherwise it uses the same design topology as that in the two more powerful designs, but the absence of a valve means it doesn't invert phase, a feature of the other two CSA models some found vexing.

On paper, the design of the CSA70 is not especially impressive, delivering 2x70 watts into 8ohms. However, what we actually have here is a fully capable design, which has a moving magnet cartridge input, a headphone amplifier accessed via a 6.3mm socket and digital circuitry offering USB,

coaxial S/PDIF and a pair of optical S/PDIF inputs. An external driver will be required for Windows, while MacOS and Linux are supported natively. In addition, the CSA70 can be specified with an optional aptX HD Bluetooth module, should it be required.

There are three pairs of RCA analogue inputs in addition to the phono stage and its associated ground terminal, and two pairs of RCA output sockets, marked "Pre Out" and "Line Out". The only features on the rear are an on/off rocker switch above a standard IEC input socket.

The front of the 435mm-wide unit, which is available in black or silver, sports two large rotary knobs either side of a circular display which shows via LED the input currently selected. Below the left hand input selector knob is a smaller rotary switch, via which the user can elect which digital input is in use. When a signal is locked in an LED illuminates for confirmation.

The supplied remote is made of metal and feels very comfortable in the hand. It allows the user to control volume and main input selection, but digital input switching is not available. For that you have to go back to the amp itself, which is hardly going to be much of a hardship.

Looks are of course a matter of subjective appraisal, but I like the elemental symmetry of the current CSA family, and living with the CSA70 was a very enjoyable experience.

HIFICRITIC
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Specifications

Copland CSA70

Type	Integrated amplifier
Price	£2999
Analogue inputs	MM phono, three line
Digital inputs	Two optical, one coaxial
Outputs	One pair of speakers, pre-outs, line out
Output power	70W per channel into 8ohms
Accessories supplied	Remote handset
Dimensions (HxWxD)	43.5x13.5x37cm
Weight	13kg

copland.dk
UK distribution
absolutesounds.com

The rest of the system during the review period consisted of my Linn Sondek LP12 and Ittok arm, with a Dynavector 10X5 MkII high output moving coil cartridge attached, my Yamaha CD-S3000 SACD/CD player and my Harbeth C7ES-3 XD loudspeakers on HiFiRacks Fortis stands. A Shunyata Research Hydra mains conditioning block supplied power to the whole system. I used Tellurium Q Ultra BlackII loudspeaker cable and Audioquest Earth RCA interconnects from the CD player. The LP12 was connected directly to the Copland phono stage, Dynavector strongly suggesting using the 10X5MkII with a moving magnet input. Our television was connected to the DAC via one of the optical inputs.

Listening to the CSA70

Despite its comparatively modest power output, the CSA70 impressed from the start of the review period, and seemed a very good match for the Harbeths' fairly constant 6ohm impedance. I was able to drive them to levels far above comfortable without any discernible deterioration in the sound.

A great deal of my listening was via the phono input, which sounded exceptionally good, with no noise through the loudspeakers until the stylus hits the record surface. I played my usual test tracks and albums during the review period, but also reached for music I really don't play often enough. For example, *YoYo Ma Plays Ennio Morricone*, on the Music On Vinyl pressing of the original Sony album, was absolutely engrossing: the first of the four sides starts with the haunting 'Gabriel's Oboe', from *The Mission*, a beautiful melody – and the sonorous, full bodied richness of Ma's cello absolutely blew me away. The CSA70 conveyed every nuance, with the sympathetic accompaniment of the Roma Sinfonietta Orchestra under the composer beautifully portrayed just behind the cello.

Changing musical genres, I played my original 1971 copy of Osibisa's *Woyaya* on MCA. Tony Visconti produced this album, with its eclectic mixture of Ghanaian and Caribbean musicians, and captured their joyous and expressive music making really well. As you might expect, there's a lot of complex percussion in the mix, which the CSA70 conveyed with great realism through the Harbeths. This was beyond a toe-tapping experience, but full-on air-drumming would have worried anyone who had been in the house with me!

Whatever I played, this system turned it into a truly immersive experience. From full orchestral and choral works, through hard rock and onto more delicate sounds from the likes of John Martyn's *Solid Air*, all was delivered with panache by the CSA70.

Switching to SACD, the Doors' *LA Woman* reissue from Analog Productions sounded as if it had been recorded last week, not more than half a century

ago. The driving rock of the title song came through with great energy, yet the gentle rainfall and storm sounds on 'Riders On The Storm' lacked nothing in drama and atmosphere.

Using the CSA70 to replay television sound through its DAC also revealed that this section is very well-considered and certainly no afterthought. Watching action films can cause a reach for the remote control, in attempt to boost dialogue and or tone down explosions and gunfire, but with the CSA70 we found a happy medium where for the most part the remote was not needed. Dialogue was crisp and clear and lots of small atmospheric micro-details came through as well. Spoken word programmes were conveyed with commendable clarity, with voices sounding very lifelike.

In addition to my larger Compact7 Harbeth's I also have a pair of the same company's smaller PS3ESRs, a sealed box design whose antecedents were BBC-designed LS3/5As. These are rated at 6ohms but at only 83dB efficiency can give a amplifier a bit of a challenge, but the CSA70 had absolutely no problem with them and served to remind me what a lovely sound they produce.

I'm not great user of headphones, as most of my listening is done during the day when I am home alone, but I did for completeness plug in my Audioquest Nighthawks to see how they fared. Loading my SACD of the redoubtable *Dark Side Of The Moon* into the Yamaha, I expected to listen for a couple of tracks before going back to loudspeakers. Ha! I had forgotten what a different experience one gets through headphones, and having listened to that album from first to last, I then spent the rest of my session with other silver discs such as Pink Floyd's next offering, *Wish You Were Here*, Love's 1967 magnum opus *Forever Changes* and the Beach Boys' *Smiley Smile*, all on SACD. Yes, if – like me – you're an occasional headphone user, the CSA70 will serve you very well.

Conclusion

It may seem misguided to describe an amplifier that retails at just under £3000 in the UK as a bargain, but the CSA70 does represent excellent value for money. It's an extremely easy design with which to live and very feature-rich, the only minor gripe being that digital source switching requires a walk across the room.

The Copland doesn't embellish the sound, but presents music and the spoken word with a sense of realism and a hint of warmth I found most beguiling. The DAC works very well and sounds very good, the phono stage performs well above what one might expect from a built-in device and the overarching musicality and power of the amplifier makes the package an easy recommendation.