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## **RA971 Stereo Integrated Amplifier**

The RA971 is just the right stuff to complement the MMG loudspeaker. Here's an integrated solid-state amp with conveniences galore (e.g., multiple source inputs, effective bass and treble tone controls), sufficient juice to drive the MMG to the limit, and most importantly - a musical soul.

Rotel was founded in 1961, and has gone against the grain by remaining a family owned business. Company president and graduate engineer Bob Tachikawa is the son of the founder, and has kept the company focused on the pursuit of hi-fi equipment that is musical, reliable, and affordable. The research and engineering facility is located in Britain, while the main factory is located just north of Hong Kong, China. Rotel engineers are said to be first and foremost, music lovers who labor over their designs like proud parents. They listen to the results, and tweak and adjust the product to meet the team's exacting musical standards. Only then does production begin.

I certainly applaud Rotel's vision of using the human auditory as the final arbiter of quality, and to judge from the performance of the RA 971, they have clearly met their goals. Let me put it as indelicately as I can: most inexpensive solid-state gear is either harsh and aggressive sounding, or bland and canned sounding. You're doomed in the first instance to active annoyance, and in the second, to sonic lobotomy. What is so surprising about the Rotel is the fact that it's so easy to listen to yet is also musically involving.

What you get is a basic black box. That's because all of the good stuff is inside. If you peek through the top of the chassis you'll make out the power supply, which is dominated by a large toroidal power transformer, manufactured by Rotel. The transformer is complemented by slit-foil capacitors made to Rotel specifications. The design concept is to produce a fast, low impedance, power supply with good dynamic capability and damping factor. The supply is highly regulated – standard practice for Rotel products. Make no mistake about it: the power supply is the heart of any amplifier. Since the music signal is simply the modulated current from the power supply, one might conclude that the power supply defines an amp's envelope of performance.

The RA971 excels in its fidelity to harmonic color. So many solid-state amps bleach out colors to the point of sounding cool, mechanical, and canned. The Rotel by and large preserves the warmth of midrange textures and delicacy of low-level detail. It's pretty suave sounding all right; not really in the class of vintage tube sound, but a major step forward from the base line of its price point competition. Its distortion spectrum is quite benign, being neither harsh nor bright sounding. Sound staging is another strong point. In the context of the Y2K system, it was able to delineate the spatial perspectives of various recordings quite well. Soundstage width and depth were convincingly defined, while image outlines were tightly focused. I consider this to be a major accomplishment. Even far more expensive solid-state amps fail to flesh out a

convincing 3-D spatial perspective, squeezing the air out of each instrument and in general collapsing outlines into nothing more than two-dimensional cutouts. Live recordings were especially delightful with the Rotel in the chain.

These, after all, are not surreal soundscapes created in a mixing studio with panning and artificial reverb. A live concert gives us a concrete frame of reference for evaluating the acoustic illusion. The Rotel consistently painted a believable and clear spatial impression. It gave that perceptual “window on the soundstage” a good Windex treatment.

The bass range is tight and well delineated. Don't be afraid to play with the tone controls. The bass control provides up to a 6 dB cut or boost below 100 Hz, while the treble control provides a similar level of adjustment above 10 kHz. I found it useful to boost the bass of the MMG by a couple of dB on most recordings.

Within its envelope of current delivery, the Rotel RA971 offers a sympathetic and musical rendering of the music's emotional power. Its natural delivery is a blessing in this day and age of treble excess. It is blissfully free from the bite and/or blandness that afflicts its nearest competition: a real winner under \$1K.

### **Specifications:**

Power Output: 60 wpc into 8 ohms; 90 wpc into 4 ohms (0.03% THD)

Frequency Response: 10 Hz – 100 kHz, +1 dB/-3 dB

Input Overload Level: 5 volts

Power Consumption: 300 watts

Dimensions (W x H x D): 17-3/8 x 3-5/8 x 13-11/16 inches

Weight (net): 6.5 kg (14.3 pounds)

### **Manufacturer:**

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