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Long Time Coming

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BOOKMARK



I've been waiting a long time for the SSP-800 surround preamp/processor from Classé. Originally announced in May 2008 and scheduled for delivery in July of that year, this Canadian company's statement pre/pro is finally about to ship.



The ins and outs are plentiful, including four HDMI ins and two outs—all version 1.3b—which lets you feed, say, a projector for serious movie watching and a flat panel for more casual viewing. Other video connections include two component ins and one out as well as several lesser inputs. On the audio side, there are eight digital ins and two outs evenly split between coax and optical, a 7.1-channel analog input, two balanced ins for the high-end 2-channel folks, and two additional unbalanced L/R ins. To top it all off, there are no less than *ten* analog-audio outputs, available as balanced and unbalanced, which can be configured to drive multiple subs, biamp the front speakers, or supply audio to a remote zone.

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Classe's philosophy regarding video processing is minimalist—the SSP-800 transcodes all analog video inputs to HDMI (and component for displays without HDMI), but it does no scaling or deinterlacing, reflecting the company's belief that these functions are best performed elsewhere in the signal chain. Audio processing is handled by a Texas Instruments chipset operating with 64-bit, floating-point precision, which assures greater arithmetic accuracy than lesser DSPs. I was shocked to learn that the initial release cannot decode Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD, though this capability will be added in the next month or two free of charge to all owners. Interestingly, it will require a new DSP module in addition to a firmware update, both of which are said to be easily installed by end users.



The front-panel display is actually a touchscreen interface that can also show the selected video input, even HD sources. In addition, the onscreen display is sent from all outputs, including HDMI. Custom installers will appreciate the SSP-800's bidirectional RS-232 port, rear-panel IR jacks, front-panel IR transmitter/receiver, and DC triggers.



I haven't heard the SSP-800 yet, but I've read one early evaluation from a reviewer I trust who raved about it—in fact, he called it an \$8000 bargain. Designed to excel at both music and movies, the SSP-800 seems sure to please audiophiles and cinemavens alike.

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