

Notes on the KECES Audio S300+ Power Amplifier and S4 Stereo Preamplifier

07-27-2024 | By [Dean Seislove](#) | Issue 134



A few months ago, I was pleased to write about the KECES Audio Ebravo Streamer Transport. In that review, I noted that the Ebravo, "Elevated the sound in many subtle, but easily recognizable ways." This was all to the good, of course, and that kind of discernible difference is what makes so many of us read about, listen to, and eventually purchase high end audio products. Reviewing single audio components, however, is always tricky. As we all know, system synergy is undeniably important. If you've ever been to a large audio show, you hear flagship components in many rooms and in many systems. Yet, no matter the price and pedigree, those big-buck items often sound completely different from room to room. There's a reason why audio retailers stake their claim on the concept of, "everything matters." While putting the Ebravo through its paces with my reference system and with gear shared by obliging audio pals, I got a clearer vision of what the Ebravo could and could not do. How much of the Ebravo's sound was attributed to the partnering gear is tough to determine, as is true with every change to a system. Throughout this audiophile Tupperware party, however, I kept thinking that Ebravo sounded most perfectly at home with its brand of brothers: The KECES Audio S300+ Power Amplifier and the KECES Audio S4 Stereo Preamplifier.

As the Ebravo was the focus at the time, and because I was leery of starting an amplification dog fight by introducing the KECES Audio preamp and amp to the mutts my audio buddies brought by, I always used the KECES Audio S300+ and S4 in tandem. Like the waitress said to Nicholson long ago, "No substitutions." Anyway, there's nothing I can say any better about the S300+ Power Amplifier than was already said in the excellent review written by *PF* colleague Dean Waters. I recommend his informative and entertaining article wholeheartedly ([HERE](#)).



And, because I know there are some of you who just want to know what's inside the boxes with no further explanation necessary, here are the highlights for both products:

S300+ Stereo Power Amplifier

- 2 OZ Copper PCB for Power Layer, Ground Layer and Signal Layer to get high damping factor and get more sound quality.
- 130 watts x2 @ 8 ohm continuous output power / Maximum output power 240 watts x2 @ 8 ohm. 225 watts x2 @ 4 ohm continuous output power / Maximum output power 300 watts x2 @ 4 ohm
- High bias Class A/AB operation, 5 watts per channel of pure Class A power at high bias setting, 45 amperes peak current per channel
- Stable with speaker impedance dips below 2 Ω
- Operation model selection: Stereo, Bi-Amp, Bridged
- Dual-mono design
- Direct-coupled signal path, no capacitors or inductors
- DC Servo and relay protection circuits
- JFET input stage, MOSFET driver stage
- 1.2 kVA toroid power transformer with independent secondary windings for each channel
- Independent power supplies for left & right channel input stages, driver, stages, output stages
- 65,600 µF Rubycon filter capacitors for output stages
- Automatic turn-on by 12 V trigger
- Neutrik locking XLR input connectors
- Heavy-duty 24k gold-plated RCA input jacks
- Heavy-duty 24k gold-plated 5-way speaker binding posts
- AC turn-on inrush surge protection
- Overload/Over Temperature Protection
- The 4mm thickness of the aluminum chassis to effective to blocks EM/RFI interference



S4 Stereo Preamplifier

- Single-ended, zero feedback circuit topology and demanding pure Class A valve operation and removing the need for a phase splitter. Fully symmetrical construction and offer a wide range of symmetrical (XLR) and asymmetrical (RCA) inputs and corresponding outputs.
- The preamplifier circuit boards are of symmetrical double-mono construction.
- The elaborate volume regulator is created by an R-2R network that has the same impedance at 128 possible, logarithmically tuned levels and guarantees an extremely good synchronism down to the lowest volumes.
- The new design uses low noise toroidal transformer in external supply.
- Build in DS audio EQ and MC/MM phono.
- Build in high-quality headphone amplifier. All-metal infra-red remote control handset.

Moving on, you may be wondering that, aside from virtues of the previously extolled Ebravo Streamer Transport, what did I hear from the S300+ and the S4 combination? For one thing, it's remarkable how well the preamp and amp articulated the nature of the various speakers they paired with these products. The speakers on hand are a ragtag bag of brands and models that I've accumulated over the years. The main speakers that I use are a pair of Triangle Audio Antal Anniversary floor standing loudspeakers and a pair of Nola Contender speakers. From time to time, I will use stand mount speakers from Ebravo, Totem, Tannoy, and Paradigm. In all instances, the KECES Audio amplification illustrated the positive and negative aspects of each of my speaker choices. The claim of "nothing added" abounds in reviews about almost every product. When was the last time you read, "I found this product to deliver a highly colored and unnatural sound"? Neutrality is in the ears of the beholder. I don't know how many times a supposedly "neutral" audio system sounds like a whole lot of rouge and mascara to me. Rather than go that route, I'll just say that the KECES Audio preamplifier and amplifier combination neither masked nor distorted the characteristics of the speakers that I know so well. All was brought to the fore, and nothing sounded amiss. Works for me.



To illustrate, my Triangle Antal 30th Anniversary speakers have responsiveness and resolution in due measure. Paired with the KECES Audio S300+ and S4, the Triangles did their thing, effortlessly. The Antals are used in my big room because they fill the space well and have proven doughy in the battle to sound good in a demonically reflective room. In this capacity, the S300+ and the S4 combination had no problem pushing the Triangle speakers to deliver enjoyable playback at raucous volume levels. I've been shuffling the *PF* archives to catch up on music reviews. Following Claude Lemaire – SD 19363, XSD 19363 Can., 1982), I powered up the S300+/S4 and, ahem, engaged the Triangles for a thundering playback at high volume and maximum enjoyment. It takes a lot of amplified oomph for this room to go where no low frequencies have gone before, but the KECES Audio amplification seemed to have plenty left in reserve. That being said, critical listening in the big room is best done in nearfield. It's the only way to really enjoy minute details like brush sticks on a snare, woodwinds in the back of the stage, and recording effects buried deep in the mix. Nearfield, the sound was clean, detailed, and perhaps a little too lively for some recordings. Which is exactly how the Triangle speakers should sound, given my experience with them in a variety of settings and with many amplification iterations.

Given this success with the Triangle Antals, I was a little hesitant to break the spell by swapping the Triangle speakers with my Nola Contenders. The Nolas are marvelous speakers, but they are snobbishly partial to tube amps, and like a fair bit of power when they can get it. On paper, it looked like a bad match. Spinning vinyl, however, using the S4 preamplifier's phono stage (more on that later) showed that KECES Audio has designed amplification that enables speakers that have it in their power warmth and midrange magic on demand. Yes, I am partial to the sound of a glowing tube amp pouring maple syrup midrange from its glass serving cylinders. (If there is too much of a good thing, I haven't heard it yet!) Still, there's no doubt that the KECES Audio method of telling the story without due excess is effective in conveying warmth, responsiveness, or whatever else your speakers have to say.



The S4 Stereo Preamplifier has plenty on offer all on its own, and what it does well merits attention and praise. Quiet in operation, sturdy in build, and filled with handy features, it does many things well, all on a rookie salary. I was especially eager to audition the S4's phono stage. It had been some time since I had an operable turntable, ever since my Vyger Baltic M turntable tangled with the curious hands of my neighbors' toddler. Bless me, if he wasn't an audiophile in the making, because as soon as he crossed the threshold, he barreled to the only breakable thing that I hadn't hidden away. In one fell swoop, he swatted my SME H12S tonearm straight across the platter, snapping off the stylus of the Zu Audio Denon DL-103 cartridge. His young parents are wonderful friends, and I wanted to spare them of their first encounter with audiophile pricing. I quietly said, "No big deal, just a broken record needle!" But we know the real truth! Knowing that the S4 was coming, I contacted Zu Audio to see about retipping the cartridge. Speaking with Sean Casey, Zu Audio godhead and easily one of the coolest people in audio, we decided just to replace the cartridge. I soon received a new DL-103 Mk. II, which also conveniently proved to be a much better match with my reference phono stage, the Chennel D Lino C. I then arranged a visit from my audiophile life coach, Russ Stratton. Stratton is active in the local audio scene, and I rely on him for technical expertise. He prevented the necessity of me ordering a third Zu cartridge by making me maintain a safe distance and keeping away from moving machinery while he installed the cartridge and set up the turntable.

Now fully ready, I commenced a long audition playing vinyl using the KECES Audio S4 phono stage. For the Zu DL-103 Mk. II, I set the DIP switches to either the 100 Ohms or 220 Ohms options, depending on my mood and the recording on hand. Playing the Mobile Fidelity release of Crosby, Stills and Nash's CSN (UD1S 180g 45RPM SuperVinyl 2LP Box Set) illustrated the ability of the S4's phono stage to deliver high quality playback in all areas that are important to me. Bass was solid and timely, vocals were represented with clarity and warmth, and recording details were discernible without being intrusive. Elements of recordings so often heard as to be articles of faith came through with fidelity and verve. "Suite: Judy Blues," with its characteristic opening lick in alternate tuning, Stills' fantastic bass lines throughout and, of course, the unforgettable harmonies in the song's bridge ("Friday evening, Sunday in the afternoon") flowed without artificial sonic embellishment and in excellent proportion. What have you got to lose, indeed? There are many other examples, of course, but they would only make the same point that the phono stage of the KECES Audio S4 Stereo Preamplifier delivers an unerring and comprehensive delivery of vinyl playback. Perhaps, compared to the Lino C, it may not have the same granular insight into a recording, but neither does it expose the grittiness of so many recordings.

The only disappointment that I had in auditioning the S4's phono stage was not having a DS Audio optical cartridge to test out the S4's EQ capability. Believe me, I tried to secure a DS Audio cartridge for review, but the queue is way out the door and down the street! Others will have to tell that part of the story. Long story short, the phono stage of the S4 sounds superb, and significantly adds to the S4's appeal. In sum, the S4 preamp and S300+ amplifier faithfully and accurately deliver source material and ancillary system choices. They do better with a little warm up, however, and the power supply for the S4 and the S300+ run warm, so keep a cool bevvy at the ready.

Whew! Okay, so maybe all of this is more than simply "Notes." Like the Ebravo streamer, the KECES Audio S300+ Power Amplifier and S4 Stereo Preamplifier offer excellent value and highly accomplished sound. KECES Audio is a new discovery for me, (although there are reviews on *PF* dating back more than a few years). I have a feeling that, as word spreads about this company's sound and apparent build quality, the prices will go up. As such, the S300+ Amplifier and S4 Stereo Preamplifier may be worth auditioning sooner, rather than later. I'm confident that you will find such an effort to be well worth your time.

S300+ Power Amplifier

Retail: \$3499

S4 Stereo Preamplifier

Retail: \$3800

KECES

HUIKANG ELECTRONIC CO., LTD.

2F., No.4, Ln.163, Xinyi Rd., Banqiao Dist., New Taipei City 220636, Taiwan

KECES@huikangcorp.com

www.KECESaudio.com