



Naim Nait 5Si

British audio brand Naim has been around for well over three decades now. In that time it's progressed from a mostly colloquial hi-fi maker to a globally recognised – and revered – brand.

The Naim Nait 5Si is the junior member of a three-strong Nait amplifier range – but don't be fooled: there's nothing bare-bones or diminutive about this integrated stereo amp.

Cosmetically, it's unmistakably Naim, with a black powder-coated finish, a green-illuminated half-moon logo, and a substantial, shaped fascia. The effect is slim and elegant, with minimal switchgear, ensuring a certain timeless appeal.

A rotary controller with integrated green LED indicator light is located on the left, while a row of four, round soft-touch buttons is positioned on the right. These illuminate when selected. Finally, a 6,35 mm headphone jack is located just right of the centre panel.

The rear features a set of recessed, banana plug-only binding posts, together with four line-level inputs, two of which offer a choice of stereo RCA or DIN sockets, while the others are RCA-only. There's also a fixed-level RCA output set for feeding a recording device.

Naim has always been committed to DIN sockets as opposed to RCAs, and that

commitment continues here, but at least it doesn't get forced down your throat – and frankly, it's a lot easier to find RCA-terminated interlinks!

Power is via an IEC socket, flanked by a power on/off rocker switch.

The little amp's close on 7 kg mass, and the thick all-metal casing, exudes an unassuming smartness and tactile quality: you feel that you're dealing with something of substance.

Under the covers, almost a third of the casework is devoted to a large toroidal transformer, located as far as possible away from the concise circuitry. Notable are the large BHC capacitors, the tidy wiring, the premium components, and the presence of a dedicated headphone amp.

Updated in 2013, the 5Si is Naim's 'entry-level' amp, but to call it that would be to grossly understate its capabilities. Even the 2x 60 watts rated output is typically conservative, and provides little indication of what the 5Si is capable of.

Given the amplifier's provenance, and its less than entry-level asking price, I decided to chuck it into the deep end as far as ancillaries are concerned.

So, I paired it with my always musical but ultimately revealing Vivid Audio V1.5 loudspeakers, with analogue source material provided by an Avid Diva II SP/SME 309/Blue Angel Mantis record deck

via a Sutherland 20/20 phono stage.

A PS Audio DirectStream DAC with Bridge II was used to source digital material from a Synology NAS using either Roon, or Audirvana 2.6.5.

Okay, the 5Si would be keeping company a little out of kilter with its supposed junior positioning in the Naim pecking order. But as my current amp of choice in this system happens to be a Naim Uniti2, I was pretty sure that the 5Si would find a similar sonic synergy with its analogue and digital partners.

Indeed, the 5Si did share a number of sonic traits with its (slightly older) but more powerful stablemate. Perhaps most apparent from the first bar of music was the lively, foot-tapping nature of the delivery. It's impossible to listen to the Nait 5Si without becoming enamoured and engaged with whatever might be playing.

It's more than just a case of the amp being able to track the music's natural ebb and flow, or of having a talent for pace and impetus. Somehow, it was able to extract the soul and intent of the music, and then to translate that into a compelling, attention-grabbing delivery.

Under the 5Si's capable direction, the music was presented with vibrant realism. The listening experience wasn't hi-fi in the conventional sense – I found myself disinclined to analyse the individual sonic





facets of the music, but to enjoy the music in its entirety instead. Indeed, the delivery sounded lively, lifelike and completely believable.

Part of the reason was the Naim 5Si's uncanny ability to project a vivid, coherent soundstage and a finely defined sonic image. The Naim was able to place its sonic wares in spatial, temporal and dimensional context with such conviction that it was always easy to imagine the actual performers going about their musical business.

This combination of substance and dimension, together with a totally unrestrained flow of sound, is what makes the Naim special – and what ensured that it always sounded more generous, more virile, more 'real' than you'd expect of a stereo 60-watt amp.

Joe Stilgoe's 'Surrey With A Fringe on Top' (from *I Like This One* on Linn Records) showed off a brilliant, liquid and compelling piano. It was rendered with just the right mix of timbre, texture and decay to endow it with real presence, while Stilgoe's dynamic variations and sensitive keystrokes were faithfully portrayed.

His vocals were perfectly balanced with

the piano, while the acoustic bass offered just the right density and urge to create the music's backbone.

The live buzz and ambience of *Four Generations of Miles: A Live Tribute* featuring Mike Stern, Mike Carter, Jimmy Cobb and George Coleman (Chesky 96/24 FLAC) is every bit as atmospheric, as authentically live as *Jazz At The Pawnshop*, and the Naim did its best to put me in a prime seat.

The recording's perspective places the action quite deep into the soundstage, which narrows the presentation, but benefits the sense of rapport between the performers, and allows the audience to move closer into the sonic frame.

The staging enhanced the illusion of being part of the audience, and of experiencing the performance first hand. Despite the apparent distance between stage and listener, each instrument sounded authentic.

The sax sparkled, the double bass was deep and rounded and muscular, and the energetic percussion was pin-point precise, while a shimmering guitar provided a welcome sonic counterpoint.

There's a reason why Naim's Naim amplifiers have been around since 1983, and why the spirit and intent of the original Naim lives on in the 5Si's sleek casework and wholesome, sonic signature.

The Naim captures and effortlessly expresses the elusive musicality that all hi-fi marques aspire to. It does so with real gusto and conviction, and manages to totally engage its listeners in the process.

Once you've heard this not-so-little amp, you'll understand what all the fuss is about – and nothing will ever sound quite the same again!

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

- Power output 2x 60 watts (8 ohms)
2x 95 watts (4 ohms)
- Frequency response Not specified
- Signal-to-noise ratio Not specified
- Inputs 4x line-level analogue
- Outputs 1x line-level analogue (fixed), 2x binding post sets
stereo headphone jack
- Dimensions (WxHxD)
..... 432 x 70 x 301 mm
- Weight 6,8 kg

Verdict

Punches well above its weight in terms of urge and authority. Not at all the junior amp you think it is!

Price R29 990

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OUR RATING: 85/100

