

Audiolab 6000A

£599



Rivals to our reigning champion of mid-priced stereo amplifiers, Rega's excellent Brio, are few and far between - but this amp isn't afraid to lay down the gauntlet.

This is the most affordable amplifier Audiolab has produced in recent years, and also one of its most capable, confident and competitive efforts. It uses Class A/B amplification, with a claimed power of 50W per channel into 8 ohms.

The pre-amplifier section is kept as simple as possible to maintain signal integrity. The layout aims to keep noise interference and distortion down to a minimum. There are also independent power supplies for critical stages of the circuit, and a dedicated headphone amp.

Audiolab has paid special attention to the digital circuitry of the amplifier, the 6000A using technology derived from the top-range 8300A series. It even uses the same DAC chip as in the Award-winning Audiolab M-DAC from 2011.

Comprehensive connectivity

The 6000A has four digital inputs - two apiece for optical and coaxial - and all are capable of playing up to 24-bit/192kHz hi-res audio files. There are also three line-level analogue connections and a moving-magnet phono input. It has Bluetooth, too.

A 6.3mm headphone port is mounted on the front panel, alongside a large easy to read OLED display, and rotary dials for analogue volume, input and mode selectors.

The amp mirrors the same design as its 8300A sibling, with the metal casing available in silver or black finishes. Build quality is of a high standard. The 6000A

feels solid and neatly finished with its rounded corners and sturdy aluminium front panel.

The control dials turn smoothly and responsively, and selecting the sub-menu options (balance, digital filters, operating modes) is simple enough using either the physical dial or sleek remote.

As a nod to the original 8000A amplifier, Audiolab has included the ability to switch between three modes. Select which mode you want in the menu and you can switch the 6000A between integrated, pre-amplifier and power amp configurations.

Clarity and detail

We listen to the Audiolab 6000A in its primary role - as an integrated stereo amplifier - and are taken with how clean and articulate it sounds. It has a gorgeous sense of clarity and ample detail, leaving you listening to your music library comfortably for hours on end.

The 6000A follows the lilting vocals and delicate tone of The Unthanks' *My Laddie Sits Ower Late Up* effortlessly, gliding along the tracks with a nimble-footed assuredness. Voices cut through with emotion and nuance.

The edges of each note are crisp and punctual. Piano notes land with satisfying weight, bass is pulled taut, and strings are bowed with conviction - it's a wonderfully confident performance.

But the 6000A isn't all about refinement. Give it something with a charging rhythm, such as Amanda Palmer's *Runs In The Family* with its underlying staccato beat, and the amp

doesn't pause for breath. It keeps the momentum going at a snappy pace - something amps twice the price don't always manage.

Plenty of space

The presentation is large and airy (more so than on its rival Rega Brio), giving instruments plenty of space to flaunt their wares. You can listen to this amp very loud, too - very little hardness creeps in when you turn the volume up.

The expressive Rega Brio offers more texture and punch on grittier tracks compared with Audiolab's refined and spacious character. Both presentations are appealing, and which one you prefer will be down to personal taste.

The 6000A's clean, crisp presentation comes through across the analogue and digital inputs alike. The DAC inside this amp is of a good standard, and it's impressive to hear such a capable and composed sound at this price.

If you're using the digital input, you get the option of three digital filters. We like 'slow roll-off' the best, but it's worth experimenting with all three.

Of course we can't forget the convenience of Bluetooth. The 6000A pairs swiftly with our iPhone, and being able to stream songs in a flash is a bonus. There's the expected drop in quality when using Bluetooth, but the sonic character remains much the same.

It will take a lot to knock the all-analogue Rega Brio (£600) off its perch, but we can see plenty of appeal in the Audiolab's refined presentation and range of digital features. It's excellent.

Nice build, good finish and plenty of ways to connect



WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR

- Clear, refined and articulate sound
- Excellent timing
- Big, spacious presentation
- Spread of features

AGAINST

- Fierce competition

VERDICT

A hugely capable stereo amplifier that's good enough to worry the class-leading Rega Brio