

AVM CS 2.2 All-in-One System: A Compelling Alternative

If the AVM CS 8.2 is more than you need or can afford, I'm happy to say you can get virtually all of the features and much of sound quality of AVM's flagship in the company's \$4995 CS 2.2. I've been using the CS 2.2 as my "daily driver" for the past few months and its combination of features, flexibility, and sound quality in one easy-to-operate component is hard to beat.

I won't reiterate all the features that Steven described, but rather will concentrate on the differences between the CS 8.2 and CS 2.2. As with the CS 8.2, its little brother has a CD drive and a streaming DAC that supports virtually all formats, offers Internet Radio and FM, has integral Tidal and Qobuz streaming, and can be controlled by the same app. The differences? The CS 2.2's chassis is smaller, has all solid-state circuitry rather than tubes, lacks balanced inputs, doesn't offer any DSD decoding, and has less output power. Specifically, the CS 2.2 delivers 110Wpc into 8 ohms and 165Wpc into 4 ohms. The CS 2.2 lacks the CS 8.2's modular construction and hardware upgradeability, but it does have one feature the big boy doesn't: an integral phono stage. Speaker output is on recessed banana jacks. It's all wrapped up in a highly compact, beautifully made aluminum chassis.

The optional RC9 remote control (\$695) is a large comprehensive component with a built-in display. The remote's batteries are integral rechargeable types, which means you'll have to remember to put the remote back in its charging cradle. As Steven discovered, however, controlling the CS Series components through AVM's app is much easier and more convenient than using the remote control. This is particularly true because the remote, which works across all products in the AVM line, is packed with tiny buttons. The downside to using the app exclusively is that if your iOS device turns off automatically after a period of non-use and you want to adjust the volume, you have to wake up your phone or iPad to do so. With the remote, you simply press the volume up or down button. I liked having both the app and physical remote handy. I also liked that the CS 2.2's software allows you to name inputs, skip unused inputs, apply gain/tone-control/balance settings to particular inputs, and access other advanced functions.

AVM says that the phono stage in the CS 2.2 is suitable for any moving-magnet cartridge or higher-output moving-coil. The phono stage gain is 45dB, with an input impedance of 47k ohms and 10pF of capacitive loading. As with the other inputs, the phono stage's gain is adjustable by -10dB to +9.5dB. I drove the phono input with a



Sumiko Blue Point No.2 cartridge—a moving-coil with a high (for an mc) output of 2.5mV.

The CS 2.2 drove the Monitor Audio Silver 300 (\$2000 per pair, reviewed elsewhere in this issue) or the \$25k Piega C711. Through both speakers, the CS 2.2 had a consistent sound that suited these very different speakers equally well. The CS 2.2's Class D output stage provided iron-fisted grip in the bottom octaves along with a remarkably full and rich midbass. Unlike some components that have a generous bass balance and can sound bloated at worst or overly ripe at best, the CS 2.2's entire low end was taut and well defined. The CS 2.2 offered an extremely satisfying combination of weight and authority, coupled

Specs & Pricing

Power output: 110Wpc into 8 ohms, 165Wpc into 4 ohms

Analog inputs: Four line on RCA jacks

Analog outputs: One preamp out, one line out

Digital inputs: One each SPDIF, USB, TosLink, LAN, and WLAN

Other sources: FM-RDS tuner; Web radio: vTuner Internet Radio

Streaming formats: MP3, WMA, AAC, OGG, FLAC (192/32 via LAN), AIFF (192/32 via LAN), ALAC (96/24 via LAN)

Supported media server: UPnP 1.1, UPnP-AV, DLNA, Windows Media Connect Server, NAS

Control: Optional multifunction remote control; iOS and Android apps

Headphone output: 3.5mm jack, Class A amplifier

Dimensions: 13.4" x 3.62" x 23.78"

Weight: 22 lbs.

Price: \$4995

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with very precisely defined pitches and lively rhythmic articulation. On the Duke Ellington LP *Duke's Big Four* Louis Belson's kickdrum packed a wallop, and the CS 2.2 revealed all the tonal and dynamic nuances in Ray Brown's unparalleled bass playing. The richness and solidity of timbre from the bass up through the lower mids was particularly enjoyable. On Gerry Mulligan's baritone sax on *Lonesome Boulevard*, the CS 2.2 captured the warmth and texture of the instrument. The CS 2.2 also nailed the timbre of instruments such as bass clarinet. These bass-range qualities were apparent across all sources from the CS 2.2's integral DAC to the phonostage.

At the other end of the spectrum, the top octave struck just the right balance of liveliness and smoothness. The treble tended just a bit toward the softer side, taking the edge off many bright recordings. This character will match well with the speakers most likely to be driven by the CS 2.2, such as the Monitor Audio Silver 300, which leans slightly toward an incisive treble. Nonetheless, the top end was open and extended, with good resolution of transient detail. The many layered percussion instruments on the track "Are You Going with Me?" from Pat Metheny's *Upojenie* were fully resolved and coherent. Compared with the \$13,000 Esoteric F-03A integrated (which is 2.5 times the price and lacks a DAC and any digital features), the CS 2.2 wasn't quite as pristine in the top octaves.

The AVM's DAC section was superb. I fed one of the CS 2.2's analog inputs with the output from the state-of-the-art \$20k Berkeley Audio Design Alpha DAC Reference Series 2 MQA, and one of the digital inputs from the same Aurender W20 music server driving the Berkeley. It was thus possible to quickly and easily compare the two DACs. Although the Berkeley was, not surprisingly, better sounding, the CS 2.2's DAC wasn't embarrassed. In fact, the CS 2.2's DAC section was competi-

tive with multi-thousand-dollar stand-alone DACs. It had excellent dimensionality, space, and depth, beautifully resolving the halo of air around instrumental outlines and resolving the sense of space behind the instruments. In addition, the midrange had a remarkable sense of presence and immediacy; vocals were tangible, and images were centered precisely between the two loudspeakers.

The phonostage was also superb, with very low noise, wide dynamics, and palpable rendering of timbre. It had plenty of gain for the 2.5mV Sumiko cartridge.

The AVM CS 2.2 offers a compelling array of advanced digital features, an excellent DAC, very quiet phonostage, and an outstanding control app—all in one compact and beautifully built case. Just add speakers and a source to the AVM CS 2.2, and you'll have a highly capable and great-sounding music system. **Robert Harley**

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