

CHORD DSP 8000R/SPM2400 ♦ £6,500/£5,000 (Approx) ♦ 01622 721 444 ♦ www.chordelectronics.com

# Deadly and dynamic duo



Alan Sircom is left shocked and dumbfounded by Chord's 'stripped down' AV processor and power amplifier double whammy

In a sane world, the Chord DSP 8000R would be the flagship product in an exotic line-up. Chordworld is less sane than most; this £6,500 processor is merely the stripped down version of the company's DSP 8000. Similarly, the £5,000 SPM2400 power amplifier is dwarfed by the truly mental SPM 3005. So, in a way, this combination is an £11,500 starter system. It's also a bargain, if exotic is your middle name.

So, what has been 'stripped down' on the DSP 8000R and the SPM2400? Well, on the preamp, not a lot on the face of things. The casework isn't quite as sublime (the 'R' version lacks the blue peepholes in the top-plate) but both products have the distinctive Chord processor trait of mounting the connections through the right side of the processor instead of the back. In pure technology terms, the DSP 8000R lacks the professional ALPS rotary encoder as volume control, but that's it.

So, I may need to redefine the phrase 'stripped down'; any processor that supports every Dolby and DTS mode (barring Pro-Logic IIx, a forthcoming upgrade), 96kHz A/D conversion for stereo analogue signals, lip-sync adjustment and both balanced and single-ended inputs and outputs is not easily classed as 'stripped down'.

Add the 10 analogue inputs, seven digital inputs and six video inputs with a downmix circuit from S-video to composite video and a fully configurable touchscreen remote, and the product becomes 'bewilderingly complete' instead of 'stripped down'.

The SPM2400 is more immediately distinguished from its bigger brother. It delivers a mere 139W into its five channels, instead of the 300W/350W per channel in the SPM 3005. It also features a regular switch-mode power supply instead of a 4kW sample and weighs just 20kg instead of the 40kg monster.

### Balanced connections

Chord's background is distinctly professional; the company began life making power amplifiers for the BBC to use in its studios and outside broadcast units. As such, Chord makes a big play about its balanced XLR inputs and outputs. And justifiably so, too. Unlike many pseudo-balanced connections found in high-end audio, Chord uses true balanced connections. This means the amplifiers can be separated by vast lengths of cable without noise being introduced.

Of course, a quintet of XLR cables racks up the price of the wires in the system, but if you are considering spending more than £11,000 on amps, I doubt you will quibble over a few hundred quid on cables when the overall sound is entirely noise-free.

### LAB REPORT

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Manufacturer's Rated Output				
135W per channel				
Measured power @ 1kHz				
2ch driven: 151W into 8Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 139W into 8Ω	✓			
2ch driven: 251W into 4Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 120W into 4Ω	✓			
Fidelity firewall @ 1kHz/2ch				
136W into 8Ω (0.05%THD)	✓			
Distortion @ 1kHz				
0.036%THD @ 50W (8Ω)	✓			
Frequency response				
20Hz-20kHz +/- 1dB	✓			

### HCC PRACTICAL TIP

What is 'balanced connection'? If you were setting up your cinema in a recording studio setting rather than in the home, the chances are it would be connected using balanced connections. The three-pin XLR connector is used to hook up practically every link in a studio – from microphone to amplifier. Balanced connections have a dedicated connection for forward, return and earth, instead of the forward signal and combined return signal and ground connector found in single-ended cables. Balanced operation ideally requires a complete revision to the whole circuit. But, the results are worth it. It drastically drops the noise floor of any electronic product, including digital ones – a DVD player may be digital, but if used through its six-channel outputs, there is extra noise added through the analogue audio stages. This immunity to noise is why the cable is so popular with studios, as you can run vast lengths of balanced wire without difficulty.

### RATINGS

**Highs:** Built to order, built to last, fantastic styling too  
**Lows:** If you like svelte, sleek charm, look elsewhere

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★



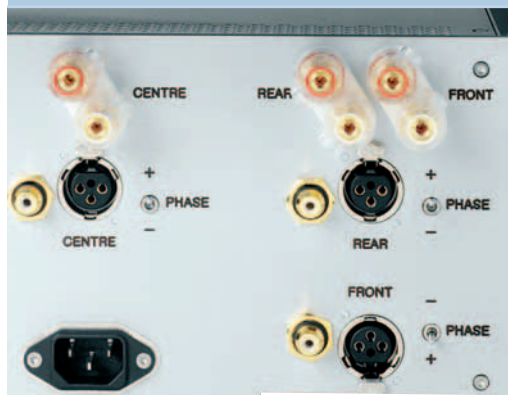
## AVProcessor



You can order the legs and side rods to your own specifications



The universal remote control has its own LED display



Use unbalanced, or more expensive balanced cables to connect



The distinctive Chord styling looks nautical - but nice

## 'An extremely subtle pair that can blow apart a speaker as easily as working at whisper-quiet levels'

As you might expect, these are hand-built, custom specified products; although they are constructed to standard lines, they are built to order, with the option of different side rods or rack mounting. The products under test have the smart four-leg Integra system and this whacks £540 on each product.

### Effortless power

The custom nature of the internal electronics means the combo is more complex than the average processor/power amp setup. As such, the instruction manuals that accompany the processor are as thick as *War & Peace*. The amp has a measuring microphone input, too; no cheap and nasty microphone here, it's an actively powered microphone that is almost good enough to use for recording voices. This makes the setup more accurate than other mainstream products, even if you have to jump through a few more hoops to get it working.

This is a big amplifier combo, and the performance matches the size. It has a sense of effortlessness and sureness about the sound, no matter how complex or dynamic the disc played. You can play music or movies at full-on levels without strain, meaning your speakers and ears will give up long before the Chord does.

If this implies that this is a brute, then it's the wrong implication... this is an extremely subtle, deft duo, albeit a pair that can blow apart a speaker as easily as subtly working at whisper-quiet levels.

A useful by-product of all this power in reserve is that the scale of the sound never changes whatever the volume level. Too often, as the volume level rises, so sounds seem bigger and when the volume shrinks to night-time listening levels, the sound becomes tiny. This can be highly disconcerting when playing a soundtrack that includes sounds where the scale is well known; Pierce Brosnan's voice, for example,

should match that of a 6ft tall man, not a hobbit or a giant. Whatever the volume level, though, the Chord has a right-sizing effect that gives the sound an extra sense of vitality and authority.

There's a transparency and solidity to the audio, too. It hangs in the air with almost holographic realism, bolted in place and absolutely precise. Its images stand well clear of the loudspeaker boxes, injecting sound into the room and making surround effects really enveloping.

As such, it is ideal for both music and movie systems, and we suspect many Chord combinations will be used in systems that are geared more towards Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio than most. This amplifier system will pass muster in a THX system, but it is so strong at delivering audio that it seems almost like you're limiting the performance by just using it in a home cinema setting.

One of the reasons why this amplifier is brilliant at both music and movies is that it is extremely coherent. This is a rare thing in any amp, but in a big, multichannel design, it's almost unheard of.

Sounds are articulate and natural, but this coherence is something more. It's a sense of being accurate from the deepest bass to the highest treble, and is





*Unconventionally, the processor's bank of inputs is on the side of the panel*

something that seems trivial on paper but is absolutely vital once heard. It makes lesser systems sound like electronics, while the Chord sounds like cinema.

The duo are capable of resolving so much information off the disc, it seems like every other amplifier comes with its own blankets to place over the speakers.

You have to be very careful about matching components with the Chord because of this detail retrieval. Place a soggy sounding DVD player on the sharp end of the Chords and the sound suffers,

while partnering it with inconsistent or uneven sounding speakers leaves the audio almost worse than usual because of the stark clarity and detail of the system.

### Conclusion

Only a fool would consider using £12,000's worth of amplification with a cheap DVD player or duff speakers. This is the centrepiece of an extremely high-end system, and in such a context, the Chord amps are up there with the best in home cinema amplification, whatever the price ■

## FEATURES

**Specifications:** Custom finish with optional side bars (DSP 8000R): Advanced bass management system; Stereo g6 mode: 96kHz A/D for stereo analogue signals; lip-sync adjustment up to 100ms; auto calibration via supplied capacitor microphone; learning; programmable remote control (SPM2400): 5 x 200W RMS into 8Ω

**Surround formats supported:** Dolby Digital 5.1; Dolby Digital EX; Dolby Pro-Logic; Pro Logic II; Pro-Logic II Cinema & Music; DTS 3/2.1 and DTS-ES Matrix; Neo:6; Neo:6 Cinema & Music; proprietary music modes including Concert, Party, Music; proprietary Cinema Equalisation system

**Connections:** (DSP 8000R): Ten analogue audio inputs; tape loop; two record outputs; second zone audio output; analogue 7.1 input; analogue 7.1 output (all phono connectors); stereo balanced audio input; balanced 7.1 output (XLR connectors); four coaxial (phono) digital audio inputs; two Toslink optical digital audio inputs; AES/EBU digital audio output (XLR connector); Toslink optical digital audio output; six composite video inputs; composite video record output; composite video monitor output; composite video zone output; six S-video inputs; two S-video monitor outputs; S-video record output; three component video inputs; component video output; RS232 port; two IR link ports; three DC trigger ports (SPM2400): Five phono audio inputs; five XLR balanced inputs

**Dimensions:** (DSP 8000R): 480(w) x 180(h) x 450(d)mm (SPM2400): 420(w)x 135(h) x 320(d)mm **Weight:** (DSP 8000R): 25kg (SPM2400): 22.9kg

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