

hardware review

Trilogy 925: a sophisticated beast of an amp

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Trilogy 925 integrated amplifier

We live in a world where obsolescence caused by constant product updates is common. So it's refreshing to review a product where the review sample dates back to 2008. I'm told the spec hasn't changed since then. Manufacturers often make subtle improvements over time, and only significant changes warrant a model update or name change, but that's not the case here. Some may see this as a lack of development; others will be of the opinion that if the designer and manufacturing team get a product right the first time, there should be no need to mess with the formula.

So why did I request to review an amplifier that has been in production for so long? I have been impressed with this amplifier every time I have heard it at hifi shows, often driving speakers which cost far more than the Trilogy 925's not inconsiderable £18,500 price tag. Having read and enjoyed our esteemed Editor's review of the Trilogy 914 & 994 pre/power combo, I scoured through the site to see if anyone had reviewed the 925, which, to my delight, they hadn't; hence you are reading this now.

Trilogy's Richard Bates described the 925 as a behemoth, which isn't inaccurate. Still, thankfully it proved far easier to accommodate than some of the competition, for example Musical Fidelity NuVista and higher-end T+A amps, not to mention the back-breaking Vitus RI101 Mk2 I had the pleasure of living with last summer. Indeed, it slotted onto the extended height shelf of my Quadraspire rack, vacated by my Moon 600i, with ease. A word of warning, especially if you buy a used Trilogy product: you'll need an unlock code to get it up and running – it took me a while to find that.

The Trilogy 925 is a hybrid design, fully balanced and biased towards Class A operation. The input stage uses 6H6Π tubes, which Trilogy calls 'super tubes'. This triode input stage

operates in pure class A. The zero-feedback output stage uses a hybrid MOSFET/bipolar transistor arrangement, putting out a healthy 135 watts into 8 ohms.

Design & build

I have to say there's something about the design of Trilogy's products that looks just 'right' and exudes quality. As you can see from the photos, my sample is in the standard silver, although a full range of custom colours is available.



The bright red display won't have you reaching for your glasses to make out what it says across the average listening room. There's a surprising amount of info available across the menus, including output level meters, a 'warm-up' timer and diagnostics. Interestingly, you can invert phase via a button on the remote. Speaking of which, the remote is nicely solid and has a good range. The remote will likely be your main way of operating this amp and it frustrates me when manufacturers provide cheap, plastic handsets with expensive components costing five figures, so hats off to Trilogy here.

The volume pot is a fully digital potentiometer, operating in 1dB steps. The control knob itself has a satisfying weight and smooth action. Other than this, there's just a standby button and a pair of buttons for menu navigation purposes on the front panel, along with the display, of course. I almost forgot to mention the retro-style 3.5mm input – remember iPods? I didn't try this; my iPod Shuffle has long since expired.

Due to the combination of thermionic tubes and a heavy Class A bias, Trilogy 925 runs pretty warm to the touch. It's fair to say that if it isn't hot, it sounds far from its best, so be sure to power it up for 30 minutes or so before critical listening. It is possible to set a timer, via the menu, to switch the amplifier on at a scheduled time of the day – you can even set different times for different days.

Being a fully balanced design, there's a plethora of XLR inputs, well three anyway on the rear panel, along with the same number of single-ended RCA inputs. Our editor often prefers single-ended, but my Moon 780D streaming DAC tends to sound best via its balanced XLR output, so that's how I connected it, via a pair of Townshend Fractal F1 interconnects. I also used Townshend F1 speaker cables.

Legendary performance

I have had a revolving door of amplifiers in my system these last few months. In this case, however, the Trilogy 925 replaced my usual Moon 600i, which, despite being long discontinued, was launched after this amplifier from Trilogy. The Moon has always worked brilliantly with my Totem Forest Signature speakers; however, back in the day, both brands worked quite closely together. My initial text message back to Richard at Trilogy was that it produced music in a big, dynamic and expressive way. He reminded me I'd heard this amplifier at the Bristol hifi show, filling a big space with a large pair of Wilson benesch speakers. I recall Jason's notes about that



system producing a soundstage to die for, and that pretty much summed up my initial impressions with this amplifier in my system.

Not only is that soundstage exemplary across all dimensions, music flows completely without edge or anything close to hardness, unless the track in question was recorded that way. You are left with a naturalness across the entire frequency range, which acts as an open window into each recording. Transparency and even handedness are key here, but this amplifier also offers great dynamic contrast; even small shifts in a performer's volume are revealed.

Timing cues between performers are well rendered and revealed, although not pointed out in the same way as certain amplifiers do – perhaps due to the lack of leading edge exaggeration. Whilst we are on the subject, it is fair to say the music isn't pushed along the way certain amplifiers do, such as the Vitus RI101Mk2 or Gold Note amplifiers we've reviewed this year. That is not to say this amplifier sounds slow; merely, you don't get that sense of the music being driven by the system as you do with the examples I've given.

What you get here is a beautifully painted picture of the recording, without being manipulated in any way by the system. Take Dead Can Dance's *Into The Labyrinth* (SACD rip); here, I'm rewarded with instrumental texture of the highest order. The recorded acoustic is fully rendered and revealed in a natural, rather than hyper-focused, way, which makes it far more believable. The vocal articulation and emotional inflexions were laid bare, holding my attention like I've not experienced for quite some time from this much-played album.

My eldest son often hijacks my system, sometimes when I really wish he wouldn't. On one recent occasion, I was introduced to Liverpool's metalcore band Loathe with their latest album *A*



Trilogy 925

Stranger To You (Qobuz 24-48). A scan of reviews of this album revealed criticism of the production, suggesting it sounded muddy. To that, I can safely say the reviewer didn't listen on a system that included a Trilogy 925, because what I heard was an intricate, holographic soundstage that revealed a dense yet intricately detailed rendition of the recording. The music had speed and impact, hitting hard and keeping me gripped through the entire album.

The Trilogy 925 is one of those amplifiers that gives you what is on the recording, with



nothing discernible added or subtracted. Hence, albums such as Idris Muhammad's *Power of Soul*, which, in the case of my CD version at least, sounds somewhat flat, are reproduced that way. My Moon 600i, which adds a little more kick to the low frequencies, reproduces this recording with a little more verve and drive. Paradoxically, my original CD of Marillion's *Fugazi* proved a revelation through the Trilogy. The CD version of this album doesn't generally get much love, and, through lesser systems, I mistakenly thought the 2021 Steven Wilson mix in 24/96 improved upon it.

This amplifier told me how wrong I had been. Here, it dug deep into the murky original mix and delivered the music with newfound focus and verve. Not only that, this amplifier's superior resolution, especially around the leading edges of notes, cut through what had previously been a harsh, brittle top end. The Trilogy 925 revealed the more recent remix sounded overblown and unnaturally forward by comparison, lacking the original's dynamics.

The Trilogy 925 worked the same magic on many recordings I usually struggle to listen to, including David Bowie's Berlin Trilogy (*Low*, *Heroes*, *Lodger*) in 24/96, which I listened to in one sitting and thoroughly enjoyed. Again, it stripped away the harsh edges and laid this complex mix bare. The third part, *Lodger*, features guitarist Adrian Belew, which inspired me to move on to another album he contributed to, Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*. This CD rip again sounds more dynamic than the recent hi-res remaster, but many systems can make the earlier CD sound somewhat muddy by comparison.

Again, the Trilogy 925 comprehensively opened up the soundstage here. This was not due to any lift in the high frequencies, although the Trilogy 925's reproduction of high frequencies is particularly airy and extended. The difference here is down to pure resolution and lack of smearing, which is the mark of a particularly fine amplifier in my book. Tracks like Born Under Punches feature particularly bouncy bass lines, which it reproduced well and helped to drive the music along.

Conclusions

I am thoroughly enjoying having the Trilogy 925 in the system. Its combination of transparency and the complete absence of fatigue, along with peerless soundstaging skills make it easy to see how it has remained in production for so long. The review sample is 18 years old, which is unheard of in my experience. Yet it feels like it could easily be around for another 18 years; it exudes quality and solidity.

This amplifier has been faultless and always enjoyable to listen to. The occasionally noted slight lack of drive in the low frequencies is linked to recordings with a softer balance, which other amplifiers with a slight mid-bass lift may make up for. My feeling is that this amplifier is neutral to the source and the recordings it's fed.

The Trilogy 925 represents a significant investment, but it could easily be the last amplifier you buy, which makes it better value than it first appears. If you value neutrality above sonic fireworks, transparency, dynamic light and shade and a glorious soundstage, this amplifier has few peers. I see no reason why we won't still be reading about this amplifier in a couple of decades' time.

Pros

- Exceptional soundstaging across all dimensions, with a natural, holographic quality
- Highly transparent and neutral — doesn't add or subtract character from recordings
- No listening fatigue; music flows without edge or hardness
- Excellent resolution, especially around note leading edges, cutting through harshness in recordings
- Reveals fine dynamic contrast and instrumental texture
- Solid build quality with a substantial, well-made remote
- Long-term consistency of production
- Extensive menu options (level meters, warm-up timer, diagnostics, scheduled power-on)

Cons

- High price
- Large and heavy so needs a solid equipment rack
- Runs hot due to Class A bias and tubes; needs ~30 minutes warm-up for best sound
- Slight lack of drive/kick in the low frequencies on softer-balanced recordings
- Doesn't 'push' or drive music along the way some rival amps do

