



B-283 adds tube warmth to solid-state systems

IN REVIEW:**Grant Fidelity
B-283**

(<http://grantfidelity.com>)

B-283 Tube Processor: solid-state CD player, home theater, DVD, pre-amp and digital music processing, \$219 MSRP; currently \$150

REPORT CARD:

Value: The B-283 is an easy, effective system upgrade for a pittance compared to the price of replacing a system.

Final Grade: ★★★★★

A few issues back, we looked at a complete audio system courtesy of Grant Fidelity. The company's "Most Flexible System" was driven by the wonderful A-348 Integrated Tube Amplifier, an intoxicating entry into the world of tubes. Currently retailing for \$1,329 U.S. including tubes, the A-348 is an excellent value and an amplifier that could keep nearly any music lover happy. That's not just lip service. I purchased the review unit and the amp is now the centerpiece of my main stereo system.

In addition to the components comprising the Most Flexible System, Grant sent another of its very popular products that we'll cover here. When I initially spoke to Grant's own Ian Grant, he recommended not only the system but another product that he referred to as a "magic box." Grant told me that for less than \$200 he had something that could substantially improve playback of CD players, DVD players and pre-amps on non-audiophile type systems. I was intrigued. The magic box in question is Grant's B-283 Tube Processor, a unit that brings tube sound to owners of solid-state gear at an affordable price — read \$150.

Grant isn't the only audio company offering such a product, but there are surprisingly few tube intermediaries on the market. Most cost hundreds more than the B-283.

Who is this for? Do you have a collection of CDs that you really don't enjoy listening to anymore? The B-283 can help smooth the digital harshness by adding warmth and space to most discs. What if you'd like to upgrade your stereo system but don't have wads of cash to drop? Or you



dance back and forth between an iPod and old-school gear? Or you just want to know what all the fuss is about tubes? The B-283 is your huckleberry.

Out Of The Box

Like other Grant components I've had the pleasure of auditioning, the B-283 looks great and feels rock solid. Measuring 8 by 4 by 6 inches, the processor is small but still weighs in at a respectable 6 pounds. Its brushed face and top plates are classy and stylish and contrast nicely with the black chassis and tower. It's an attractive unit that you'll want to place somewhere it can be seen.

The B-283 comes equipped with a pair of Chinese 6J1 tubes. The twin tubes come packaged in a protective PVC pipe. Gently pull the tubes from the pipe, unwrap and gently but firmly push the tubes into place in their respective sockets. That's the install! Unlike tube amps, you don't have to worry about biasing the B-283 tubes, nor do they get anywhere near as hot as those on amplifiers. Put the tubes in place, and you're done.

That's not to say the B-283 is not for tube enthusiasts. Like other tube gear, tube

junkies can "roll" by replacing the stock 6J1s with other matching tubes to tweak for whatever sound is desired. Most users will probably be content with the stock setup, but the option exists.

The B-283 works like other components you've used. On the back are a pair of RCA inputs and outputs, where you feed your chosen gear. For example, if you have a compact disc player you want to "tube up," run the cables from the CD player's output into the B-283's input; then,

connect cables to the B-283's output and run into an amplifier or receiver. Doing so feeds the CD signal into the processor where it gets the tube treatment before being output for final amplification.

Though the B-283 is "limited" by a single pair of RCA jacks, users are not. In fact, if most of your music is collected on an iPod, the sound can be boosted by connecting the line out of the player into the processor, the same as for a CD player. If you have separate pre-amp/amplifier components, you can run all the pre-amp output signals into the B-283 and then into the power amp. Doing so brings tube sound to the entire system, whether from a turntable, tape-deck tuner or CD player — any source. A detachable power cord is included, giving owners the option to use other cords if desired. Once cables are attached, plug in, turn on and play.

Listening

I ran my Yamaha DVS-5770 DVD-Audio/SACD/DVD player through the processor and then into my Yamaha HTR-5850 receiver. These components power my current home-theater system — and

since they reside in my living room, they're called on for much dinner-time music and all music DVDs and regular movie offerings. The 5770 gives me the flexibility of a universal player and is a decent CD player on its own. I always have too many stacks of discs packed perilously around the TV and on speakers and so forth, so many musical choices are never far away.

In the last year or so, I've been going through the catalog of reggae great Burning Spear and discovering some amazing music. One of my favorite Spear albums is his 1975 release *Marcus Garvey*, a concept record of sorts dedicated to the influential Jamaican-born leader. Spear's vocal phrasing is inimitable and always surprises, but what floored me was the marked boost in bass and overall weight of the music played through the B-283. Immediately, the middle range of the music opened up. There was more "thump" in the bass, more space around instruments and a greater sense of proportion.

And it's not just Robbie Shakespeare and Aston Barrett's bass guitar that come to the front, but Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace's dragonfly-like drum accents and Richard "Dirty Harry" Hall's flawless horn playing, too. It's everything in the mix made better, more immediate.

Though New Age often gets a bad rap for being vapid, hot-tub music for yuppies, Windham Hill founder Will Ackerman remains one of my favorite acoustic guitarists. His ability to "find" a song in a strange guitar tuning is formidable, and I'm thankful that his little record label brought other remarkable musicians, including Michael Hedges and Alex de Grassi, to a larger stage. Ackerman's recordings were always intimate affairs and very revealing. I loved listening to old favorites being revisited and reinterpreted on the retrospective *Returning: Pieces For Guitar 1970-2004*. The lyrical beauty of "Bricklayer's Beautiful Daughter" and the haunting light surrounding "The Impending Death Of The Virgin Spirit" are even more exquisite than the originals, and are likely as Ackerman intended, heard "tubed" via the B-283.

On Amazon.com, one reviewer stated, "I want to live inside Will Ackerman's guitar." Here's the next best thing.

High Fidelity continued on page 43