



# Simply Stellar Sound

## Conrad-Johnson's MF2275 SE Power Amplifier

By Rob Johnson

After reviewing Conrad-Johnson's MF2550 SE amplifier, we walked away mightily impressed with the build quality, power handing and overall musicality it offers. Its smaller sibling, the solid state MF2275 SE, certainly reveals the family resemblance in physical form, circuitry and sound. Because these amplifiers are built with common topology, the main internal difference is the power rating. While the MF2550 pushes 250 watts per channel into eight ohms, the 2275 offers 135 watts.

In the smaller model, C-J maintains the use of a standard 19 inch wide faceplate. However, the other dimensions are trimmed down to 14.6 inches deep and 4.9 inches tall. At 33 pounds, the amp is substantial, but also very user friendly when loading it into an audio rack. Position of the heat sinks offers one more physical difference: in the 2275's case, they project out the back instead of the sides.

MF2275 has five internal fuses, protecting sensitive circuitry from potential damage. In the unlikely event a fuse is blown, it's nice to know that this can be easily accomplished by the owner without sending the entire amp back to the factory. Obviously, make sure to power down and unplug any amp before you consider removing the cover!



As with all C-J amps the MF2275 features a pair of RCA inputs on the back, and a set five-way speaker binding post; the amplifier setup is simple and straightforward. With merely the addition of a power cord, you'll be ready to rock in minutes. Once plugged in, a single, circular button on the front plate activates the unit. Conrad-Johnson recommends at least 15 minutes of warm-up before critical listening, allowing the amp to reach its sonic best. It's really about 45, but who's counting?

**The Sound**

From first listen, it's obvious the attributes we enjoyed most about the MF2550 trickled down to the MF2275. The sonic benefits described in that review certainly still apply. Building upon that characterization, the 2275's sound provides details a listener wants to hear from favorite tracks, yet it portrays elements like vocal or horn

crescendos without grating edge or harshness. Consider the amp's sonic character one click to the warm side of neutral.

While it can't magically heal a bad recording, it certainly attempts the feat. Done in the early days of digital recording technology, Peter Gabriel's "I Have the Touch" exhibits elements of digital glare and flatness baked in. Somehow the MF2275 embraces and builds upon the best parts of the recording, while simultaneously convincing harsher elements to relax a bit before they make their presence known.

In the bass department, the C-J's slight sonic warmth does not come at the expense of bass punch or heft. I found myself surprised at how well it handles the same Sonus faber Olympica III speakers used in testing MF2275's big brother. While the extra power of the 2250 offers more control of

the speakers, especially at lower volumes, the 2275 proves itself more than capable of handling the task.

As with many other tracks, the C-J's portrayal of Steel Pulse's "Roller Skates" reinforces how much there is to love about the amp and how little remains open for criticism. Not only does each musical element maintain a solid focus in the soundstage, but when multiple instruments and vocals occupy the same position left and right between the speakers, the C-J does a nice job rendering them as individual layers behind one another. There's a lifelike aspect to the music that not every amp can decipher. The 2275's ample detail retrieval acknowledges the reverb added to lead singer's voice, and simultaneously hints that similar reverb is more stringently applied to background vocals and instrument tracks. Many highly resolving amps reveal the same nuance.

However, that prowess often comes with an equal magnification on every aspect of a recording. That's not always a good thing. Some overly revealing components pull a listener's attention away from larger, cohesive musical experiences. It reminds me of my grandpa telling me as a kid, "You can't see the forest through the trees." For a listener seeking every bit of honest edge inherent in a trumpet or saxophone blast, this voicing may seem a step away from realism. But after several days with the C-J, trading out a bit of raw transparency for a significant jump in overall musical enjoyment is a welcome tradeoff.

**Summing Up**

With the beautiful musicality of its brother, C-J's MF2275 is easy to recommend as a fantastic choice for an all-around amplifier. \$3,850 is a substantial investment for most people. While there are amps that can exceed the capability of this

C-J contender, they regularly do it at a cost multiple times the price of the MF2275. It's refreshing to enjoy a product that brings marvelous performance, and a high pedigree, within the aspirational financial reach of most audiophiles. To my ears, the marvel of this amp resides in its subtlety, naturalness, and overall musical experience. It's a piece of gear I could live with happily for a long time. When enjoying the MF2275 SE in the audio chain, it's easy to get lost in a long, unplanned listening session.

Potential owners should consider a few small caveats. First is the amount of power it produces. Those with efficient, less power-hungry speakers will find this amp a terrific partner. However, those craving more forceful bass tangibility from larger speakers will be better off with something like C-J's more powerful MF 2550. You may find this C-J the roommate you've always wanted.

FEATURE



## Additional listening

Though many know Conrad-Johnson for vacuum tube amplifiers, their solid state efforts have been equally formidable. I have used their flagship Premier 350 amplifier as the anchor to my reference system here at TONE for almost the first six years of the magazine without a hiccup, and that amplifier was pretty much powered up the whole time.

As Rob mentioned, the MF2275 is slightly warm in overall tonal characteristic, where my Premier 350 was very neutral. This is an excellent thing 99% of the time, and personally, I'd always prefer a solid state amplifier to have a little more tonal saturation than not. Running a gamut of preamplifiers, both from C-J and others, proves this to be a very potent partner for your system and it even did a fantastic job driving the Quad 2218 speakers we now have in for review. Pulling my reference Conrad-

Johnson LP120sa+ out and substituting the MF2275 makes for a bit more slam with the Quads and a bit less soundstage width and depth, but that's an unfair comparison between a \$10,000 tube amplifier and an almost \$4,000 solid state unit. Those requiring a bit more warmth should consider a fine C-J tube preamp.

My PV-12, which was sent back to the C-J factory a while back for a Teflon capacitor upgrade proved the perfect partner for the MF2275, with both units providing incredibly high performance and a low profile on the rack as well. If vintage is not your thing, consider the C-J Classic or Classic SE preamplifier. About six grand new for the pair will put you in audio nirvana. Highly recommended. —*Jeff Dorgay*

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