

# Among the gum trees



Named after a tree, and partly made from one, the Redgum Magnificata is as much a work of art as a piece of electronics.

## SUMMARY

Redgum Magnificata  
pre/power amplifiers

Price: \$24,500

- + High power output
- + Low-impedance capability
- + Hand-made in Oz

- Stick-on labels
- Balance control



Redgum's 'Magnificata' system (comprising two monobloc power amplifiers and a stereo passive preamplifier) is released to celebrate the occasion of Redgum's 21st birthday. It is not exactly a new design, since the power amplifiers are heavily based on the company's 'Signature Series' RGM300ENR (released in 2004) and the pre-amp on the one used in Redgum's Splendens system. We're not privy to any of the minor changes that have been wrought by Redgum's designer, Ian Robinson, but he says the major changes to each monobloc include larger (1kVA) power transformers with a higher current capability, the use of 12x250W MOSFET output devices (up from just four), and an increase in the size of the power supply's capacitor bank to 100,000µF (up from 40,000µF)... which translates to mean very high power output and the ability to drive speakers whose impedance drops to 1 ohm.

The most visible change is the use of Redgum's 'sine wave' heat sink which is located (somewhat controversially, about which more later) underneath the chassis on all three components, even the preamp.

## Equipment

First, why that strange-sounding name, Magnificata? It is no mere superlative —

being a proud Aussie who lives and works in rural Victoria, Robinson named his company after a tree that is Australia's most widely distributed eucalyptus species, the river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). After many years of using letters and numbers to identify its models (see above!), the company decided to name models in its Amplifolia range, all made in Australia, after other Eucalyptus genuses: *stellulata*, *articulate*, *splendens* etc. This particular amplifier is named after the Eucalyptus genus *magnificata*. (Numbers and letters are still used to identify Redgum's 'Black Series' amplifiers, made in China.)

Redgum also manufactures the front panels of the Amplifolia range from river red gum. They look superb, though labelling is then necessarily in the form of 'stick-on' labels which, no matter how well they're done, always look as if they're 'stuck on'.

Alongside the Redgum logo (also stuck on) is a keyed switch. This was once used as a mains power switch, but these days it's only a secondary switch: the main power switch is located on the rear panel.

In addition to its unusual choice of switches, Redgum also provides owners with an extremely unusual way of adjusting channel balance — separate left- and right-channel volume controls. By adjusting these individually, it's then possible to adjust

channel balance. Unfortunately, this also makes it nigh-on impossible to adjust the two controls for identical gain, something for which Redgum has been criticised. The company subsequently addressed this issue by motorising the two controls and fitting a microprocessor that, once you had set the level in one channel, could be instructed to automatically adjust the volume of the other channel to deliver exactly the same gain (to within ±0.1dB, according to Redgum). This is now a standard feature on all remote-control models. If you choose a non-remote control model, it's suggested you wrap an elastic band around the two volume controls, so that moving one moves the other... somewhat Heath Robinson (no relation). Another alternative is to order your Redgum with only a single volume control by special order.

Not only does Redgum provide two volume controls, it also provides three remote controls! Two are identical low-cost 'credit-card' style remotes. The other is a touch-screen learning remote made by Sunwave into which Redgum has pre-programmed all the Redgum codes. Originally, only the small remotes came with the unit, one being a spare in case you temporarily 'lost' one down the back of a couch. Then, when the company switched to the Sunwave remote, some customers thought

it was too difficult to use, so Redgum started supplying all three. Redgum then developed another option, which was a free app you could load onto your mobile phone, so you could control the system with your phone. Its drawback was that it could only be used with phones that had infra-red 'blasters' built in, which ruled out all iPhones and many Android phones. However, assuming your Android phone has an IR blaster, you can certainly use it to control the Magnificata. And, in news hot off the press, you'll soon be able to use any mobile phone at all, because Redgum has commenced development of a Bluetooth remote control option which will work with all phones and may be available by the time you read this review. And, remember, despite all these options for remotely controlling the Magnificata, you can always 'go retro' and operate the system manually using the front panel controls.

As for that controversy surrounding Redgum's 'sine-wave' heat sink (the curved finning visible under all three Magnificata components), it was for several reasons. Firstly, it's *underneath* the power amplifier, a location that is — thermally speaking — the worst place to put a heatsink. Redgum's designer, Ian Robinson, agrees that it's illogical, but says it's there because he likes the look of it there, and that it's so big — and therefore so thermally efficient — that it really doesn't matter where he locates it, because it will dissipate heat from the amplifier so effectively that it will "never get hotter than blood-warm". The other part of the controversy is that because all the internal components are located above the heatsink, those components will run hotter than they otherwise would. Robinson's answer to this is that he makes sure that all the components he uses — capacitors, resistors, diodes, capacitors, etc — operate well within their manufacturer's temperature ratings, and points to Redgum's seven-year amplifier warranty as proof of guaranteed product longevity. (Although the lead photograph of this review shows the three components stacked atop each other, this is for illustration purposes only. Always place them on separate shelves on your equipment rack!)

## Performance

Firing up Redgum's Magnificata system is a whole load of fun, because after applying mains power you will first hear a 'beep' then a 'whooping' sound whose pitch slowly increases, followed by some more 'beeps', the number of which indicates which firmware version is being used by the microprocessor that's performing all these tricks, followed by a further series of clicks as all the relays and circuits are tested for correct operation. At



the same time the microprocessor checks the position of the volume controls, and if they're set more than halfway up, rotates them to below one-quarter rotation.

This same microprocessor does many other fancy tricks, such as remembering the volume level you've set for each input, ramping the volume up and down, maintaining a balance offset if you've set one, adjusting between normal muting and variable muting, setting a preferred switch-on input and more. And if you use the 'Magic' button on any of the remotes, all options are reset to factory default, after which it plays a series of tones that is the motif of the children's song 'Baa Baa Black Sheep.' We're not kidding.

But what really brought a smile to our faces was when we started listening to the Magnificata — because it sounds truly amazing. Your first impression will be of the amount of effortless power on tap. Most people are unaware that if you don't have a powerful amplifier, musical peaks will not be reproduced accurately even if you're listening at low volume. And, of course, if you listen loud, it's absolutely essential that you use a high-power amplifier! This Redgum Magnificata system is so powerful that no matter what speakers you use, how large your room, or how loud you listen, you'll enjoy all the power you'll ever need... and then some!

To test this, we fired up Prince's 'Purple Rain' with the volume dialled up, and wow did the sound of the drum kit power through! Equally impressive was the sense of air around the sound, particularly in the introductory bars. The wail of Prince's guitar was absolutely sensational. The speed of the Magnificata was proved with yet more Prince ('Sign 'O' the Times') thanks to the syncopated beat and synthesised sounds which the Magnificata reproduced exactly... so exactly that it was really exciting to hear. So exciting that we were motivated to add additional percussion, using the arms of the listening chair.

All that power was just crying out for some organ music, so we fired up Christopher Wrench's recording of Bach's Organ Sonatas, beautifully recorded on SACD by Melba.

The sound of the Carsten Lund organ (in Garrison's Kirke, Copenhagen) was fabulous. The tonal quality of the Nasat 3' stop Wrench uses in the Sonata No 4 is outstanding, as well as being a true work-out for any tweeter. Also, listen to the sound of the Quintadena 8' stop in Sonata No 3. Glorious! The deep bass was also exceptional, particularly the 16' Sub-bass, whose lowest notes were a tad more forward than we're used to, so we suspect Robinson has tweaked the low-frequency response, but as the overall sonic balance actually improved as a direct result, this suited us just fine.

Further sessions with a wider variety of musical genres proved that no matter what we played, the Magnificata always performed impeccably, delivering tight bass, a beautifully sensuous midrange and treble that simply soars... and all accompanied by totally silent backgrounds that let the music hover in the air between the speakers as if by magic.

## Conclusion

Yes, Redgum's Magnificata is pricey, but you are buying a unique, quirky, beautiful-sounding — and extraordinarily powerful — three-piece amplifier system that is personally hand-crafted in Australia by the designer himself. It's as much a work of art as a piece of electronics. *greg borrowman* +

### SPECS

**Redgum Magnificata** \$24,500

**Frequency response:** 0.8Hz–80kHz (–3dB)

**Power output:** 350W/ch (8Ω), 550W/channel (4Ω), 900W/channel (2Ω)

**Peak current:** >450A

**THD:** 0.009%

**IMD:** 0.005%

**Signal-to-noise ratio:** >100dB

**Overall system dimensions (HWD):** 435 × 420 × 350mm

**Total system weight:** 60.5kg

**Warranty:** 7 years

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