

# audition

equipment review

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## Redgum Sonofa' Gum SG5500

### Integrated Stereo Amplifier

**S**tunning, breathtaking, bizarre . . . all words I've heard used to describe Redgum amplifiers; and I should know, I use to sell them during my time in retail. It was always an unpredictable thing selling Redgum equipment. Arguably it was the best sounding stuff in the shop, so you'd naturally want to demonstrate it to people, even if they'd never head of it. Just what the customer's reaction

might be however could be almost anything. Some would look at the timber-fronted boxes with the key, no remote or readout and just glaze over. "You've got to be kidding me haven't you? I thought this was a hi-fi shop." Yet others would flip. "Look at the timber! Look at the key! Listen to the sound! Why have you been keeping this stuff from me?"

There is no doubting that Redgum produces some of the most idiosyncratic hi-fi systems available today. But whatever conclusions you come to about its appearance/useability, the absolute key to any Redgum system is the sound. It is equipment for true lovers of the playback of recorded music. And at least on this last point, I think there is one adjective that best summarises the Redgum experience - 'uncompromising'. Or at least that was until now.

The Redgum Sonofa' Gum (Sonofa' gun . . . get it?) is a new kind of Redgum amplifier in more ways than one. For starters, it comes with a remote control; one of the most basic remotes I've ever used admittedly, but a remote nonetheless. There are small diodes on the front facia that illuminate to let you know which input is selected at any given time. The volume knob is even motorised! But undoubtedly the biggest seismic shift in Redgum lore is the

**Redgum heads  
East for its  
latest  
affordable new  
integrated  
amplifier**

By Michael O'Connor

#### Vital Statistics

**Dimensions:**

430 x 365 x 100mm

**Weight:**

9.2kg

**Price:**

\$799 (\$699 for limited period)

**Distributor:**

Redgum Audio Pty Ltd  
Factory 3, 25 Clarice Road  
Box Hill South, VIC 3128

**Telephone:**

(03) 9897 1277

**Facsimile:**

(03) 9897 1399

**Website:**

[www.redgumaudio.com](http://www.redgumaudio.com)



'made in China' label on the back of the amp. Made in China! But isn't this the same Redgum which proudly incorporates a map of Australia in its logo? Isn't this the same Redgum which sent back a job lot of hundreds of key fobs, simply because they weren't made Down Under? Isn't this the same Redgum, which uses actual sand from around Uluru in its printed circuit boards . . . probably? Well, yes apparently. To explain some these changes, I spoke to Redgum's Lindy Gerber.

"Lindy, Redgum already makes a number of amps. Why another?"

"The Sonofa' Gum is a new kind of amplifier from Redgum. It is the first of our junior range. The amp contains several features which would be considered a departure for Redgum, not least the origin of manufacture.

"Why make it overseas?"

"The simple answer to that is price. Over the years, we have meet any number of people who have fallen in love with the Redgum sound, but have been unable to afford it, simply because of the stage of life they are in; kids, divorce etc. By utilising manufacturing overseas, we are able to introduce an amp for only \$799, allowing even more people to experience the joys of Redgum ownership."

"It doesn't even have a slab of timber on the front. Will people be getting a 'real' Redgum amp?"

"Absolutely. The sound of the Sonofa' Gum is unmistakably Redgum. We have our own Australian consultant in China (John Reilly of Axis Loudspeaker fame) who ensures each unit is made to Redgum's exacting standards. Then once each amp reaches

Australia, we open them up in our factory in Melbourne and make further modifications. As always with Redgum amps, the proof is in the listening."

Lifting the new Redgum out of its box for the first time, it was apparent that most of the cosmetic details were on the table during the design phase. The facia of real Redgum timber is gone on this model and the key switch is out too. In its place is a black box of prosaic looks. On the right are two large dials; one for volume control and the other an input selector. To the left are five small green LEDs that correspond to each of the inputs. A further LED lets you know when the amp is switched on. The back of the case is more familiar as that of a Redgum. All of the connections are gold plated for better conductivity. The inputs are via RCA plugs and the speaker terminals are large, chunky screw down affairs. Otherwise there is a detachable IEC power chord and switches for AC 220/110V conversion and the power. At least to look at, the Sonofa' Gum reminds me of some of the legendary integrated amps of the 70s, such as the NAD 3020 or the Rotel 840. Squat black boxes all of them. They avoided visual bling to deliver a solid sonic impact.

Most of the internals of the Redgum are similar to those of its locally made stablemates. It delivers 55 watts RMS into 8 ohms along with a beefy 15 amps of current. The output stage uses discrete transistors whereas the preamp stage is passive as is the case with all Redgum amplifiers. A large toroidal transformer capable of 180VA powers the engine room. The amp doesn't shy away from gold plate, which not only covers the binding posts and RCAs, but

also the relays between the input switches. I've frankly always had my doubts about just how much real audio difference you might hear with gold relays, but it's probably worthwhile using anyway as corrosion is never going to be an issue. If nothing else, it's a sign of quality and attention to detail. For those really interested in the design and performance of their audio equipment, something to do early on is to lift the lid off the unit and have a look inside. You can see just what it is you are listening to. This is something I'd recommend to anyone interested in gaining a greater

## Technotalk

**Product Type:**  
Integrated amplifier

**Number of Inputs:**  
5 x unbalanced, line-level

**Power Output:**  
55 watts per channel RMS

**Harmonic Distortion:**  
0.09% (below clipping)

**Peak Current:**  
More than 15 amps per channel

**Signal To Noise Ratio:**  
More than 80dB

**Frequency Response:**  
0.8Hz-80kHz (-3dB points)

**Recommend Loudspeakers:**  
4-8 ohm nominal load

**Cabinet Finish:**  
Black anodised aluminium fascia, black steel chassis

**Power Supply:**  
180VA torodial transformer

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

involvement with his or her equipment. But it's a particular delight with Redgum amplifiers. Even for someone such as myself who wouldn't know a soldering iron from a waffle iron can appreciate the simplicity of such a design. So far as I'm concerned, the fewer the parts, then closer you are going to get to the music and the Sonofa' Gum looks to be paired right back to the essentials.

Set-up was pretty much as fuss free as it gets after connecting my CD player to a pair of inputs and screwing the binding posts down on the spades of the speaker cable. After that I just fired it up and let it run. My memory of Redgum amps was that they had good dynamic drive and timing, so I started off with some pop music in the form of Fleetwood Mac. From the first note, that familiar Redgum sound was there. The music was lush and involving with wonderful immediacy. The rhythm section of John McVie's bass and Mick Fleetwood's drums pulsed along; picking the drivers up and making them run in time to the music. Part of the allure of the Redgum sound no doubt is the bass, which is full and extended. Having good clout below sets an excellent foundation for the rest of the sound. On the *Rumours* hit, *You Can Go Your Own Way*, the entire five piece kicked away through verse and chorus.

I next explored the Sonofa' Gum's capabilities with the Miles Davis Freebop classic *Miles Smiles*. Miles' quintet was really getting into some loose forms of expression by the mid 60s (to put it mildly), and I find that it typically takes sure-footed equipment to keep pace and make sense of it all. The Redgum was largely up to the task. Describing just what it is you hear between different pieces of equipment is of course something of a challenge and part of the art of hi-fi reviewing, but to summarise the relative strengths of the Redgum, the sound was fast, lucid and detailed, with good imaging and clout below. In short, it's a proper hi-fi sound from what is admittedly, a pretty small, integrated amplifier. With the acoustic Miles Davis recording, all of the constituent parts of the quintet held together well. The various solos from Miles, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter had good shape and

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definition. Each stood out in turn from the rest of the band. And with that timing, the performance of course swung. I find that if I'm to make any sense of complex music such as this really, then I need to be close to the beat. More middle of the road equipment tends to get mixed up and muddy the sound. The Redgum got me close enough.

Honestly, this is the amp I would have killed for when I was in college jamming my Nirvana and Green Day albums. Discrete and understated to look at, but with gobs full of resolution and timing. Not to say that I couldn't find a use for it now.

Performance like this is always welcome. And get this! As its Redgum's 10th anniversary, the price of a Sonofa' Gum is only \$699 for a short while. Reason enough to check out this son of Redgum. **AVL Ancillary Equipment:** Naim CD 5 CD player, Naim Flatcap 2 power supply, Legend Joey 4 loudspeakers, Nordost cables

## O p i n i o n

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

**“...whatever conclusions you come to about its appearance/ useability, the absolute key to any Redgum system is the sound.”**

### Performance

★★★★

### Build Quality

★★★★

### Compatibility

★★★★

### Value For Money

★★★★