

## Densen Beat B-800

# Simple tuner with a sound that sets it apart

With all the interest in digital radio, a high-end FM tuner may seem an anachronism, but the brand-new Densen makes a very strong case for itself, says Andrew Everard



Densen's styling plays it simple, but within is a very high-quality FM tuner

When was the last time you saw a new FM tuner? These days all the effort seems to be going into ever more affordable digital radios, such as the Pure DRX-702ES or the likes of the Cambridge Audio budget tuners, and analogue radio is rather on the back burner. After all, why build a high-quality FM tuner when you could just as easily make an upmarket DVD player, complete with all the latest visual tips and wrinkles, and sell plenty of units?

That kind of thinking doesn't seem to have distracted Danish company Densen, but then this has never been a manufacturer driven by the more obvious market trends. Densen is yet to embrace home cinema, let alone Super Audio CD or DVD-Audio. The nearest it gets is a four-channel power amp designed to be used with its existing stereo models for 5.1 or 6.1 channel operation, but you'll still have to source your surround processor elsewhere. The company's range is still based securely around CD players, stereo amps – integrated or pre/power combinations – and now this tuner.

It's been a while coming: Densen was founded in 1988, and launched its DM-10 amplifier in 1992. But the kind of performance the company strives to achieve is pretty simple to understand. As it says in its brochures, 'Our main focus is to achieve the best possible "air guitar factor"; only when your equipment sounds so good that it makes you want to stand up and play the air guitar or become an "air-conductor" – only then have we achieved what we wanted: to create musical experiences so great that you forget everything and focus 100 per cent on the music.' Any questions?

There's a romantic approach to audio at Densen: describing the genesis of its £850 tuner, it says that while there was pressure to build a tuner just to complete the Beat system, 'we all remember listening to airwaves in the late nights during our youth and discovering new music. That made the whole project a challenge.'

So, the B-800 was born out of memories of listening under the bedcovers, or so it seems, and the result is a special tuner. The B-800 looks very simple, in basic black with minimal controls on the fascia – a silver version is on the way at a £100 premium – but switches on the rear panel allow wide/narrow IF bandwidth, DX/local operation giving selectable sensitivity, allowing even distant stations to be pulled in.

And with 99 presets on offer, it's clear Densen intends you to fill your tuner with every station it can possibly receive. The antenna input is an F-type connection, and in addition to conventional analogue outputs the B-800 has a pair of system connections, allowing unified remote control with other Densen components and the amusingly named Gizmo handset, and an input for a forthcoming external power supply, able to enhance the tuner's performance.

The tuner has a hefty power supply with a custom-made transformer, capacitors and transistors, laser-trimmed resistors and a Class A output stage with no feedback – neither local nor global. Signal paths are as short as possible, the main circuitboard is made of Teflon for optimal signal transfer, and all soldering is done with silver. In other words, it's all designed to give the cleanest, most involving sound.

The control of the tuner is by Densen-developed software

with fuzzy logic to give better searching, and is all programmed onto a separate chip for easy replacement should extra facilities or improved software versions become available in the future.

### Performance

Setting up and using the Densen couldn't be much simpler. Well, it could, but that would involve the use of a remote control to allow you to do everything from the comfort of your armchair – as it is, 15 minutes crouched in front of the tuner should allow you to seek, check and store every FM station available in your area. What you can receive will be as much down to your aerial as the tuner itself, using narrow IF bandwidth and the DX setting with maximum sensitivity, all sorts of strange and distant stations were pulled in alongside the usual suspects – the BBC nationals and locals, Classic FM and the like. The quality varied – some were in clean stereo, others all but unlistenable due to feeble signal levels, but the Densen certainly pulled a lot of them in!

With a good strong signal, however, it's possible to hear this tuner at its best. And its best is on a par with some of the finest analogue radios around – and here I'm thinking of the likes of the classic Naim NAT01, the Audiolab 8000T of blessed memory, and US-made super-tuners such as the Fanfare FT-1 and the celebrated range of radios made by Magnum Dynalab. These represent some of the finest radios I've ever had the pleasure of using, and the Densen, while it costs less than all but the least expensive Magnum Dynalab, fully deserves to be mentioned in the same breath.

What it does so well is do away with any feelings that what you're hearing is 'just radio',

or is to be considered in any way a second fiddle source to your CD player. In the UK, where some of the best classical music broadcasting available in the world is still available, courtesy of Radio 3's live and recorded concerts and Classic FM's own evening events, a tuner like this would be a joy to own. It delivers the music with a delicious combination of generous warmth and pin-sharp detail. The frequency range of FM radio is still limited compared to CD, whatever the quality of your system, but listen to a live event pouring from the speakers and the sense of communication with the performance overcomes any consideration of what's not being transmitted or received.

This tuner is musical – it's as simple as that – and lives up to its manufacturer's aims of involvement and passion. Provided you have a good aerial, and a system fully able to do it justice, this is a radio you have to hear. ●

### DENSEN BEAT B-800

**Type** FM tuner

**Station presets** 99

**Price** £850

**Tuning** Manual/auto, with switchable sensitivity and DX/local selection

**IF bandwidth**

Wide/narrow switchable

**Connections** F-type aerial input, DenLink, analogue stereo on phonos, IEC mains

**Dimensions** (W x H x D)

445 x 70 x 320mm

**Made by** Densen Audio Technologies, Randersvej 28, DK-5700 Esbjerg, Denmark

**Tel** +45 (0)75 181214

**Fax** +45 (0)75 453938

**web** www.densen.dk