

Metronome Technologie Le Player 3

CD Transport

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I will readily admit that in many ways I am a digiphobe. Sure, I have shelves of CDs, SACDs, and about two terabytes of lossless music on hard drives, but nothing drives my passion for audio like my rows and rows of vinyl records. So, when I was presented with the opportunity to review the latest CD transport from the boutique French manufacturer, Metronome Technologie, I was intrigued.

I have heard very high end digital before, but was a CD transport really capable of producing drastic change in my modest system? Enter Le Player 3, the newest member of Metronome's 'entry level' Classica range priced at **\$5500**. Metronome head Jean Marie Clauzel stated that this unit was filling a large demand by customers for a pure transport at this price level, and this unit's electronics were designed specifically for Le Player 3, with little to no recycled circuitry from previous Metronome products.

Features

Unboxing Le Player 3, I was met with hefty, solid metal construction with the unit weighing over 24 pounds. Design-wise, it is understated in its simplicity, but highlighted by a striking 10mm thick alloy front plate and perhaps the most sturdy-feeling metal buttons I've ever encountered on a digital audio product.

Setting up was quite simple with the supplied Delrin cone feet that snapped into place magnetically on the bottom of the unit. Three feet are used as opposed to the traditional four, resulting in great stability and rigidity. Serious enthusiasts may want to couple these feet onto some type of vibration control system; I could see them working well with products from Stillpoints and IsoAcoustics.

Under the hood, the player boasts two toroidal power transformers as well as four independent regulation lines. The transport unit is a modified Philips GF8, found in many CD players in this price bracket. The front face has manual controls for disc play as well as tray functions. This is also where the controls for upsampling are found. Strange enough, the slim and glamorous remote lacks this particular control but it does contain an on/off button missing from the front face (but found on the rear of the unit). In terms of connections, Le Player 3 offers you a choice of coaxial, optical TOSLINK, I2S HDMI, and AES/EBU XLR outputs. I was a little disappointed by the lack of a USB output but I'm sure there are legitimate engineering reasons for the exclusion.



A key feature of Le Player 3 is its upsampling capabilities, not only reaching all the way to 192/24 in PCM but also to DSD 128. Upsampling is becoming a more common feature among transports and streamers nowadays, and the technology is not without some controversy. However, given that the Metronome allows the listener to select any frequency they desire, including the original redbook 44.1 KHz, there should be no complaints from any upsampling supporter or detractor.

My Use

I was slightly intimidated connecting Le Player 3 to my modest digital setup. The most powerful DAC I had available to me was the twin 32bit ESS Sabre 9018 chips in my Oppo 105D Universal Disc Player. I connected the transport to my 105D via a DH Labs Silver Sonic D-750 coaxial cable. This way I would be able to directly compare the performance of Le Player 3 with the transport in my Oppo player using the same DAC. While the 105D is capable of 192/24 PCM and DSD, it only allowed up to 96/24 through its coaxial input, so that was the highest upsampling rate I was able to test in this review.

Sound

After considerable burn-in, I sat down to do some dedicated listening and what I heard surprised me. In particular, I played Jimi Hendrix's seminal live recording *Band of Gypsies*. The Metronome excelled here, particularly in rhythm, highlighting the forward drive and momentum of the drum kit, with a deep, energetic kick drum I could feel in my chest, a big compliment given that I was listening on KEF LS50 mini-monitors.

Hendrix's guitar amp had a shine to it that reminded me of hearing a tall Marshall stack in a live club with lots of reflective surfaces to ring off—one of the more realistic electric guitar timbres I've heard in my system. Switching back the transport in my 105D, the rhythmic drive was still there, but drum hits and kicks didn't have the same percussive feel, and Hendrix's amp felt like it now had a blanket over it. Tone was still largely the same, but air around the instruments was reduced or not present. I noticed just how much instrumental separation was present before now that it was so reduced through the Oppo.

I next played a recent CD release by Christopher Rousset and the early music ensemble Les Talens Lyriques playing Francois Couperin's *Les Nations*. This wonderful acoustic recording highlighted the 3's ability to create a sense of space and untangle the instrumental ensemble from a rather warm and reverberant chamber recording. The air in the upper treble had a shimmer that the Oppo just couldn't retrieve. Le Player seems to excel at detail and information retrieval, pulling the maximum amount of refinement from whatever recording it is fed. Switching down to a 44.1 sample rate did take away some of that quality—transient attacks became a little more muted, yet still more detailed than the Oppo drive. Bringing down the sample rate on the Metronome may help warm up some overly bright and shrill recordings.

Finally, I put in L'arc-en-Ciel's 1996 CD *True*, whose thick instrumental overdubs gave Le Player 3 an excuse to further show off its detail retrieval. Acoustic guitars here had a visceral metallic twang while horns and trumpets sprang out of the texture on tracks like 'Fourth Avenue Café'. The lower frequencies had the same vivid detail separating the kick drum from the electric bass which is often a problem in congested pop recordings. All this detail does give the Metronome a slight

forward and 'tipped up' quality, but the sound never became harsh, and the air in the treble prevented any hint of grainy quality. This presentation is definitely something to keep in mind when pairing electronics.

Final Thoughts

The CD may technically be on the decline as a music format, but don't tell that to the throngs of audiophiles with walls of treasured recordings. For many listeners, their CDs *are* their music library, and I can't imagine why someone with the space to store and own physical music would want to give that up for streaming or a music server. There is something still incredibly ritual and satisfying about playing a physical disc—it's definitely something I would not want to part with.

For playing Red Book CDs, I'd have trouble thinking of a device so simple, classy and rewarding as Le Player 3. It does one thing very, very well, and could easily be paired with a world class DAC and amplifier for a reference quality digital system. I don't know if I'll ever ditch my vinyl fascination, but after hearing this unit, I'm more than intrigued by the expanding possibilities of digital audio.

The **\$5500** Metronome is a lively transport that excels in detail, rhythm, and control. Transients are quick, and the pacing will leave your toes tapping. It is one of the most transparent digital presentations I have ever heard in my system. I can only imagine what a player like this could do with a powerful class leading converter like Metronome's own Le DAC or the [Mytek Manhattan DAC II](#). If you've invested heavily in your digital audio conversion but haven't yet explored the world of disc transports, you owe Metronome's Le Player 3 an audition.