



MÉTRONOME LE PLAYER 4 AND LE DAC 2 REVIEW

We take a listen to French brand Metronome's latest CD/streamer and DAC combination.

Métronome is a French company founded in 1987, headed up by Jean-Marie Clauzel and based in the town of Montans, just North East of Toulouse in Southern France. All their products are handcrafted in France which, as with JADIS and others, is a big deal.

The two Métronome products we have here at HiFi PiG Towers to play with are both from the Classica range, which is Métronome's entry-level, in the form of the Le Player 4 and the Le DAC 2. Le Player 4 is 8,100€ and the streaming option + 2,000€ and Le DAC is €7,340 giving a combined price of €17, 440. Both are available in Black or Silver and packaging for both products was excellent.

LE PLAYER 4

Le Player 4 is a top-loading CD player and combined

streamer in one rather lovely looking box. Personally, I really like the idea of a CD player that has streaming capabilities as it allows for just one box (other than a DAC) to deal with all your digital music sources. There is a Player 4 available which is a CD transport without the streaming option and 4+ with an onboard DAC and again, the streaming option. Our Le Player came with three Delrin cones for placing under the unit, and a remote.

This is a very nicely put-together bit of kit and the whole is housed in a 2mm steel housing with a 10mm solid alloy front plate into which there's a blue display.

The top-loading CD mechanism is a SUOS-HiFi affair that has been customised by Metronome. I love the toploader. There's a sliding door that covers the actual

mechanism and when you place your CD on the spindle you secure it with an included puck and then slide the door closed. It's tactile and somehow it's a very satisfying experience to put on a CD. In front of the mechanism itself are a series of touch-sensitive buttons (very cool) that deal with the usual play, stop, pause etc.

Around the back you have a range of digital outputs that include S/PDIF (RCA), AES (XLR), Optical, and a I2S via HDMI connector. These connections will allow connection to pretty much any DAC you fancy using, but for the purposes of this review we are going to use Le DAC. There are inputs for LAN and USB for connecting to your network and to external storage.

Inside Le Player you have a couple of toroidal

transformers, with both having Schaffner filters for EMI and RFI protection.

LE DAC 2

Le DAC 2 is built, not unsurprisingly, to match Le Player and has the same stylish and minimalistic aesthetic. From the front it looks pretty much identical to Le Player and shares the same 2mm steel housing and 10mm alloy front plate. You also get the same sized display on the front and this has cool touch buttons to scroll through the menu options.

Inside the box you have an ESS ES9026Pro Stereo converter, a power supply with EMI and RFI filters and ten independent regulation lines for power.

The DAC will decode up to 32bits/768kHz (dual mono) and outputs to either RCA or balanced XLR analogue outs.

Digital inputs include all the usual suspects of S/PDIF, AES/EBU, USB type B (for PCM and DSD signals from 44.1 to 384kHz), and the less common I2S input via HDMI

for SACD.

Both Le Player and Le DAC have a USB port for servicing.

Delrin cones and a remote are options as per above.

Overall Le DAC and Le Player look rather splendid on the rack and have a minimalist and sleek look that will appeal to those that appreciate good looks but without the need for going down Le Rue Du Bling. Personally, I think they look fab and that they look like proper HiFi, though obviously pretty high-end HiFi.



SET UP OF MÉTRONOME LE DAC AND LE PLAYER

Set up is pretty obvious but instructions are included in the packaging.

I plugged our router switch into the back of Le Player, XLR outputs from Le DAC in to our Music First Preamplifier, and then the two units were interconnected by USB and AES/EBU cables.

Le Player is not Roon ready as yet and Métronome recommend you use Audirvāna on your Windows or iOS machine of choice. I'm a big fan of Roon and it has been my



go-to interface for ages now and we are assured accreditation is under way. You can also run the streamer on Le Player using uPnP players of your choice.

SOUND OF THE MÉTRONOMES

The system used for the duration of the review was our Music First Preamp (review to follow shortly), Total DAC AMP 1 power amplifier, and Audiovector R6 Arreté loudspeakers. Cables were from Chord Cables, Atlas, and Tellurium Q. Power conditioning was the usual Torus Power unit. All units were powered through the Torus Power and all ethernet connections were through a Russ Andrews ethernet switch. I used a variety of Red Book CDs and streamed from locally stored (ripped) files and Qobuz.

First of all let me say that the CD transport on the Metronome is, like the other Metronome CDs I've had the pleasure of testing, an absolute

pleasure to use. There is a certain satisfaction to pushing back the solid cover to reveal the mechanism, popping your CD on the spindle and then placing the pick on top of the CD. Everything feels exceptional right and damped in a way that a nice car's doors shut satisfyingly. It feels expensive and it feels luxurious, which, let's face it, this CD player is. The soft-touch buttons are also nice to use and being on the top panel, don't spoil the look of the front panel of the CD player.

This mechanical solidity is carried through to the sonic presentation, with Ship Of Fools' excellent Let's Get This Mother Outta Here being underpinned by a solid but not overblown bass throughout. Sound effects rumble at the start of L=SD2 before the rock solid drum track comes through. Here the solid feel to the rhythm section is emphasised by a speed that really plays to the strengths of the Audiovector R6 Arreté speakers and lays a foundation

on which the space rock guitars and synths play over. Nothing seems to get confused here despite there being a whole lot going on with this album and it feels that the Metronome kit is presenting the pre/amp combo with a clean and uncoloured signal with excellent dynamics and speed. Comparing the sound to our Lampizator Big 7 with the Stack Audio streamer in place, I would suggest that the Lampizator has the edge on a more "pleasing" sound, but the Metronome, I would suggest, is a smidge less coloured – which you prefer is going to come down to which you prefer personally, though the Metronome would be considered more HiFi in its sonic signature. The amount of detail getting through to the speakers is in no doubt with the Metronome pairing, and small details in this record were easy to pick out and with good spatial presentation of sounds in the mix. Nothing dominates the presentation and sounds pretty flat – not flat as in boring, flat as in nothing in the frequency range is being over-emphasised.



Playing Bruce Cockburn's If I Had A Rocket Launcher on the 2 Meter Sessions (check it out) label is a track that is simply but beautifully recorded with just two microphones. What I'm listening for here is the small details like movement across the strings of the guitar and the "steeliness" of the strings. And the Metronome duo captures it all and presents it in a fashion that is what I would describe as being natural sounding. I've spoken about this before, but it's quite "easy" to give the impression of detail by pushing the higher frequencies which leads to a presentation that soon becomes tiresome. The Metronome doesn't do this and the effect is one of being able to dig deep into listening to a recording without it feeling

overblown or too much for your ears/brain to comprehend. There is what I think to be the right amount of steeliness to the strings and you hear (and can almost visualize) when he is bending the strings – it's a very life-like presentation that doesn't sound like it is being embellished to add bells and whistles that aren't there in the recording. Cockburn is a very accomplished guitar player and I'm sure that those more versed with this level of play will be able to appreciate what he is doing on this set up. There's also a deathly quiet between songs and this exceptionally low noise floor allows things like the fading sounds at the end of this tune disappear to absolute silence. What I also got with the Metronome pairing in the system was an impression that the sound stage was a little more extended down the sides of the room that had me once or twice look up to see where the sounds were coming from – another small detail but an important one that many will appreciate.

Killing Joke's Wardance sounds incredibly well produced with the Metronomes in the system and there is excellent separation and layering to the sounds in the mix. The effect on Jaz Coleman's vocal that gives it a slight metallic edge is very clear to hear, but it's also very easy to discern the vocal itself beneath/with the effect. Feedback noise over to the left of the mix is heard as a separate entity too, where it could have become a homogenous mush that gets lost with the rest of the track – or worse the rest of the track gets lost within the feedback. And this is something I like about Le Player and Le DAC, they allow you, as I've said before, to listen into a recording and hear what is going on in the mix over and

above it just being another record to listen to.

When I hit play on Dre's 2001 album there's that sense of dynamics and speed, cleanliness and detail to the



presentation which echoes what I've spoken about before in this review. Precise placement in the left to right mix is solid and unmoving, which again leads to a sense of overall solidity to the tunes you are listening to. That sturdiness is from top to bottom (hats down to the bass kick) and gives a sense of the metronomic (pun intended), locked-in beats having a feel that draws you in and emphasises the groove on which the tunes are built. There is nothing sloppy here with the way the Metronomes play tunes and it's certainly something you are going to listen to and know you are listening to a piece of high-end equipment. Now, that latter point may be misconstrued as I have found that some so called high-end systems seem to concentrate on the mids and upper-mids that sound great with relatively unchallenging tunes but sound lacking at the bottom and top end – that's not what the Metronomes are about!

QUIBBLES

Le Player is not Roon Ready yet.

A remote is included and it's functional rather than in-keeping with the

electronics' boxes, but it's a long way from the worst I've seen.

CONCLUSION

On the face of it (and if you believe all the negative hype) it would seem that introducing a new CD player in this day and age is a pretty brave move on the part of Métronome, but whenever I've asked or seen questions on social media asking if people are still using and buying CDs there still seems to be a lot of love and a lot of support for this format. However, I do think it is a sensible move for this French brand to include streaming option onboard to allow people the best of both worlds – I know that I have many more CDs than rips from CDs, if that makes sense. What will make this an almost ideal solution is when Le Player gets full Roon accreditation as it has been my UI of choice for the last couple of years or so.

Sonically, Le Player and Le DAC are a dynamic and clean sounding partnership. The levels of detail from top to

bottom in the mix is excellent and presentation is uncoloured and meticulous. Basically, I'd suggest that what you hear is what is on the CD you are playing. This detail and dynamics are carried through to the pair when you switch to streaming, though some may well prefer presentation that has a little more flavour than the Metronome DAC brings to the party.

One of the key features of the sound of the Metronomes for me was how the mix was presented left to right with individual elements remaining exactly where they should be but with panned elements moving cleanly and without smear across the soundstage – speed again.

Personally, I really enjoyed this French CD player and DAC but for me the current lack of Roon on the streaming front would have me hesitate to a degree as my main sources are streaming and vinyl. However, to those who still love to play their CDs with streaming being a bit of a sideshow then I can certainly see how the Metronomes would be a very strong contender for their hard-earned. Once Roon certified I'd have the pair in a heartbeat!

Fit and finish can't be faulted in any way with these two boxes and they look fabulous in a classy and understated way.

I'm giving this pairing our 5 Hearts award based on the sonic excellence, fit and finish. They would almost certainly have got our top award had the remote been better and Roon accreditation had been in place.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Top-notch build quality throughout with the casework certainly being a step-up from many others

Remote is not in-keeping with the quality of the electronics



Top loading mechanism is a joy to use

Blue LED display is clear but some may find it a bit much or out of date

Easy to set up and use

No Roon as yet.

Sound Quality:

Son clair, précis et propre.
Très détaillé sans jamais forcer sur certaines fréquences.
Signature sonore équilibrée et captivante, sans artifices inutiles.

Value For Money:

It's not a cheap pairing at €17,440 but the pair perform exceptionally well and have the kind of high-end finish you would expect at this price.

We Loved:

The effortless and yet detailed sound matched with an equally classy build.

We Didn't Love So Much:

No Roon and the remote is a bit lacking.

Elevator Pitch Review:

French brand Metronome present their mid-market CD/Streamer and matching DAC for a combined price of €17,440. They are beautifully finished and should be bought as a pair as they complement each other so well. Sonically they are an easy to listen to pairing with the sonic signature being one of fine detail presented in a relaxed, solid and engaging manner.

Price:

Le Player 4 (with streaming option) – €10,100

Le DAC – €7,340

Combined price – €17,440

