



AUDIO FORUM
by Liu Han Sheng

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Le Player 4 - Le DAC 2

"The name of the French brand Métronome isn't easy for the general public to pronounce. But for musicians, it sounds natural, as the term refers to the metronome, a tool they use every day."

Why choose such an unusual name?
There's a real reason behind it.

The founder of Métronome Technologie, Dominique Giner, was a carpenter. Out of passion, he began crafting his own speaker stands and loudspeakers. His stands sold very well, and his very first pair of speakers — 40 cm tall bookshelf models — looked like a metronome. He sold over 1,000 units.

Building on this success, Dominique Giner founded the company Métronome in 1987, naming it after that first loudspeaker.

Discovering this story, don't you think the French truly have a romantic side?

A Collaboration with Jadis

As Métronome Technologie's factory was located not far from Jadis's, the two brands collaborated in

their early days. Métronome Technologie designed and manufactured several CD players and DACs for Jadis. The very elegant JD 1 CD player, for example, was the result of this partnership between Métronome and Jadis.

In 2013, Dominique Giner met Jean Marie Clauzel and Christian Bat (a financial director from the automotive industry). The following year, in 2014, he officially sold them the company.

Jean Marie Clauzel, who took over the company, has been passionate about hi-fi from a very young age. As early as five or six years old, in the mid-1960s, he was already listening to vinyl records on the family turntable. At 14, he bought his first stereo system with money earned during the summer holidays. At 20, he acquired his very first high-end system: a complete setup from the German brand Continental Edison, including a turntable, cassette deck, integrated amplifier, and matching speakers.

Although Jean Marie Clauzel had always loved music and high fidelity, he originally trained as an agricultural engineer and worked in the agriculture and agri-food sectors until 2012. It was only in



2013, when he met Dominique Giner—who was then preparing for retirement—that his passion for high-end audio was reignited. He decided to take over Métronome Technologie and begin writing a new chapter in the company's story.

A New Era Under the Leadership of Jean Marie Clauzel

Just a few years after taking over Métronome Technologie, Jean Marie Clauzel began to fully showcase his talents. He first launched the EA speaker, followed by the development of the DreamPlay series. Although he is not an electronics engineer, he sets the product directions and validates the results—by ear. The company's engineers handle the technical design.

In fact, as early as 2003, Métronome had already introduced the Kalista CD player with a dedicated stand. The name “Kalista” comes from Greek and Latin, meaning “the most beautiful.” This player, crafted from transparent acrylic and metal, featured an elegant triangular shape — a design that has become the signature aesthetic of the Kalista brand to this day.

That's right: Kalista was already established. In fact, this story had already been told during the launch of the Kalista DreamPlay. But under Jean Marie Clauzel's leadership, the Kalista range took on a new dimension. He didn't just continue the original CD player — he expanded the series by adding a CD transport, a digital-to-analog converter, and, most importantly, repositioned Kalista as a distinct brand in its own right.

Today, Métronome Technologie carries two complementary identities:

- Métronome, which continues to offer high-end products at more accessible prices;
- Kalista, dedicated to ultimate excellence, with exceptional, luxurious, and exclusive creations.

Affordable and High-Performing Products

Today, Metronome offers its products in three main series:

- The AQWO series, which includes AQWO 2, AQWO 2+, t|AQWO, and c|AQWO;
- The Classica series, featuring Le Player 4, Le Player 4+, Le DAC 2, and Le Streamer;
- The Digital Sharing series, composed of DSC, DSS 2, and DSC mini.

All these devices are digital sources: CD or SACD players, DACs, streamers, transports, or separate power supplies — digital functions that can be combined or separated depending on the needs and the product lines.

For example, Le Player 4 is a CD transport with a built-in upsampler, while Le DAC 2 is a digital-to-analog converter. The fact that they are part of the same series clearly reflects the brand's intention: to offer a coherent and complementary two-piece solution.

But users aren't required to buy the full combination. They can also choose Le Player 4+, an all-in-one CD player, or opt for Le Streamer to enjoy music via streaming. It's even possible to add a streaming module to Le Player 4.

In short, Metronome's philosophy is clear: to offer outstanding sound quality and true modularity, with products designed to evolve according to each user's needs and preferences.

Made in France

Métronome Technologie emphasizes that all its products are made in France, which reassures many



consumers. It's not about suggesting that products made elsewhere are of lesser quality, but for many buyers, “Made in France” carries an emotional resonance — a sense of connection and attachment.

Le Player 4, for example, is built with a 10 mm thick aluminum front panel and a 2 mm thick chassis. Its front face is dominated by a large display screen.

To be honest, its design doesn't really evoke French romanticism: it has a sober, square, and sturdy aesthetic. But after looking at it for a while, you come to appreciate its understated charm.

Loading with a sliding lid

Le Player 4 is a straightforward CD transport. For those who absolutely want to listen to SACDs, they'll need to turn to the AQWO series, which offers SACD/CD-compatible transports or players.

Le Player 4 features a sliding lid system: simply slide the "drawer" on top of the chassis backward to access the CD compartment. Inside, you'll find a custom reading mechanism supplied by Austrian company StreamUnlimited Optical Storage, along with a magnetic CD clamp made of Delrin, a material similar to POM.

As a simple CD transport, Le Player 4 stands out for its particularly robust construction: the lid and chassis base are quite thick, and the unit is notably heavy.

On the top panel, there are control icons: on the left, four classic symbols for CD playback, and on the right, two buttons for upsampling.



Honestly, I don't understand why there are two buttons for the same setting, since one would be enough to control the function. A design mystery? Perhaps a subtlety intended by the manufacturer.

Built-in Upsampling Function

Upsampling is a divisive topic: some consider it essential, while others believe it doesn't bring significant sound improvement. The Player 4 takes an open approach by offering a wide range of upsampling options, letting each user listen and choose according to their own preferences.

Three upsampling modes are available:

- Multiples of 44.1 kHz, up to 32-bit / 352.8 kHz
- Multiples of 48 kHz, up to 32-bit / 384 kHz
- DSD, with different options depending on the output used:
 - Via traditional digital outputs (S/PDIF, AES/EBU): up to DSD128 (using DoP)
 - Via I2S HDMI output: up to DSD256, in native DSD

Note: Traditional digital outputs transmit DSD as DoP (DSD over PCM). Native DSD is only possible via the I2S HDMI connection.

Connection via I2S HDMI port

The DAC 2 has an exterior design identical to the Player 4, with the only difference being that it lacks a CD compartment and front panel controls. It also features a large display, with two up/down arrows on the right used to select the input.

When the Player 4 is connected to the DAC 2 via the I2S HDMI port, the DAC automatically displays the same upsampling mode selected on the Player 4. I highly recommend using this I2S HDMI connection since both devices have this port on the back. Moreover, HDMI cables are much more affordable than traditional digital cables, making it a cost-effective choice.

Connections on the rear panels of the devices

On the back of the Player 4, there are RCA and AES/EBU outputs, as well as an I2S HDMI port.



There is also a USB port, but it is reserved solely for maintenance purposes.

The DAC 2's connections include an analog RCA output, a balanced XLR analog output, plus AES/EBU, coaxial RCA, USB Type-B, optical inputs, and the I2S HDMI port. In other words, the DAC 2 also functions as a USB DAC.

The manufacturer recommends using the third-party control software mConnect to operate the system.

Reading mechanism mounted on an anti-vibration base

When opening the top lid of the Player 4, you'll see that the entire reading mechanism is mounted on a thick 10 mm T-shaped acrylic plate. This plate is suspended on three feet, providing excellent vibration isolation.

Beneath this support are the servo control circuits for the reading mechanism as well as the upsampling circuits. The power supply design is

particularly refined: two toroidal transformers, four groups of power supplies made up of small filtering capacitors, four independent regulators, and EMI/RFI filters. For a CD transport, this power supply design is truly “high-end.”

Inside the DAC 2

Opening the DAC 2 reveals an even more impressive design: three toroidal transformers and ten groups of small capacitors for the power supply. The DAC uses an ESS 9026 Pro chip, an 8-channel converter, perfectly suited for a fully balanced architecture.

High-performance power supply

To be honest, the power supply design of the Le DAC 2 closely resembles that of the separate power supply of the Dream DAC I previously listened to, albeit slightly less “armored.”

Since Métronome and Kalista are made under the same roof by the same team, I believe the sound performance of Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 is very promising.

It’s also worth noting that both devices rest on three Delrin feet (two in front, one at the back), which enhances their vibration isolation.

Listening Conditions and Cabling

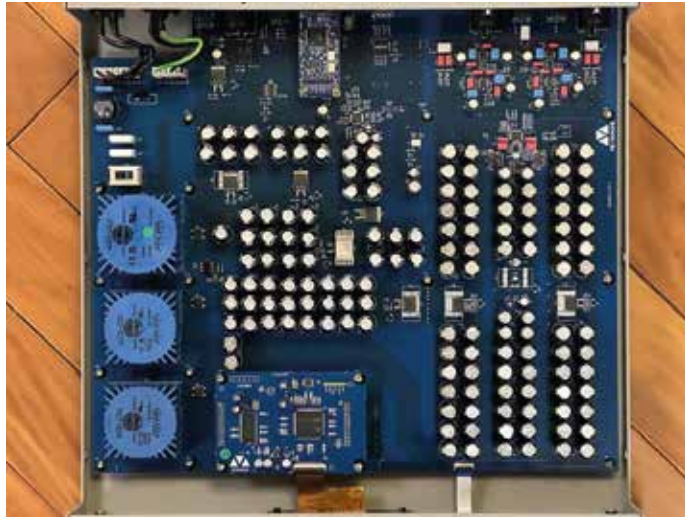
I tested this digital source in my large open living space at home, paired with a Spectral DMC 30 SS preamplifier and active ATC SCM 100 ASL speakers in bi-amping configuration.

Regarding digital cables, I tried several RCA coaxial and XLR models, and ultimately the AES/EBU ZenSati #X cable (with XLR connectors) proved to be the best match. The sound gained in openness, fullness, and vitality. The soundstage is well layered, imaging precise, and the audio quality superb. ZenSati truly lives up to its reputation.

I2S HDMI Connection: The Best Option

However, the AES/EBU ZenSati digital cable I mentioned costs over 300,000 New Taiwan Dollars, which is far more expensive than either Le Player 4 or Le DAC 2 individually. Such a setup is clearly “unrealistic” for a typical system — hardly anyone would invest that much money in a cable alone.

That’s why I ultimately chose to connect Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 using the I2S HDMI port, since an



HDMI cable is much more affordable.

Theoretically, using the I2S HDMI connection to link a CD transport to a DAC is superior to other types of digital cables, and in listening tests, this is indeed the case. That said, to be honest, it lacks a bit of “charm” compared to other connections, but the value for money remains very high.

What is I2S?

Both Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 are equipped with I2S HDMI ports, which is a definite advantage for the user.

I2S stands for Integrated Interchip Sound. It is a digital transmission protocol developed by Philips, used to carry digital audio data between integrated circuits (ICs) inside devices.

I2S is also commonly used inside CD players to carry PCM signals from the reading head to the built-in DAC.

The main advantage of I2S is that it transmits the clock signal and the audio signal separately, which significantly reduces jitter (signal instability).

In comparison, the S/PDIF protocol transmits the clock signal and the audio signal combined in a single stream. This means the signal must be separated and recombined at the receiver end, adding two extra processing steps compared to I2S.

What cable is used for I2S?

Since I2S was originally designed for internal transmission within devices, there is no official dedicated cable for it.

The most common solutions are:

- Use an RJ45 connector with an Ethernet network cable.
- Use an HDMI connector with an HDMI cable.

Metronome chose the second option, equipping both Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 with a dedicated HDMI port for I2S transmission.

A desire to listen again and again

While listening, I kept recalling my impressions from hearing the Kalista Dream Player. Honestly,

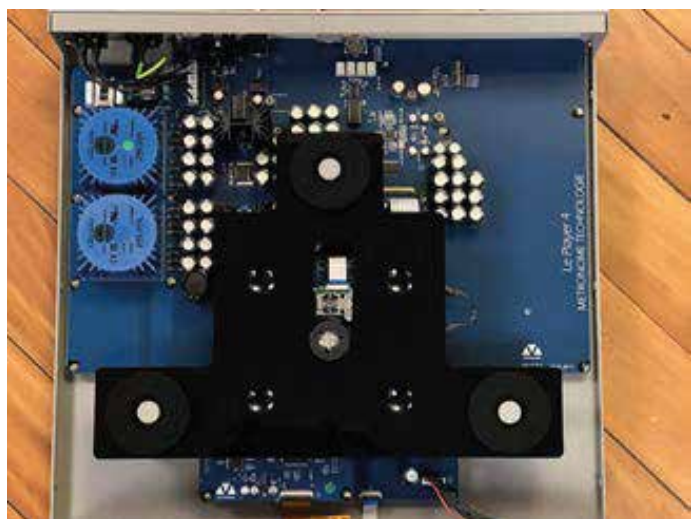
the Dream Player often delivered a strong “wow” effect. In comparison, Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 don’t evoke that immediate surprise, but with careful listening, you realize they are very precise and perfectly balanced in all their performance aspects.

To verify this, I used Accuphase’s sixth test disc, renowned for its “normal,” true, and neutral musical pieces, without any artifice or exaggeration—ideal for testing audio equipment.

How to listen?

If the music makes you want to keep listening again and again, then the equipment is good: it means it is balanced and reveals the beauty of musical harmony.

On the other hand, if the playback sounds unpleasant or even tiring, it means the device fails to bring out that balance.



I have tested this method with several Accuphase discs, always successfully—it is a reliable test.

Le Player 4 and Le DAC 2 confirm their reliability: although they don’t deliver an immediate “wow” effect, they make the sixth Accuphase test selection very pleasant to listen to. From the beginning of *The Marriage of Figaro*, through violin, piano, vocals, Grieg’s suites, and even jazz, everything sounds captivating. Nothing boring, nothing dull, no sense of “weak” sound. This is exactly what you expect from good equipment.

Rich harmonics for violin and piano

I then listened to the album 無垠之鏡 (Infinite Mirror) by Huang Junwen and Huang Hailun, released on the Naïve label. This CD captivates not only through the beauty of its music but also thanks to its outstanding recording quality. The violin and piano sound authentic and natural, with occasional standout sound effects that are particularly striking.

Le Player 4 beautifully reproduces this work: the harmonics of the violin and piano are rich and detailed, and every dynamic nuance from the performers is clearly conveyed. Even though this album features only violin and piano, it never becomes boring; on the contrary, you find yourself drawn into listening continuously.

A warm and natural cello

Next, I listened to *Cello Dreams* from Harmonia Mundi. The cello’s wooden tone, its subtle breath, and its resonance are well balanced, never overdone. The cello’s sound is captivating. The piano also sounds natural and authentic. Both instruments exhibit rich harmonics.

Being able to make a cello sound appealing is an essential criterion for good audio equipment. With this Métronome digital source, the test is once again a success.

A delicate, fragrant quality

I then listened to *Music of the Angels* on the Hyperion label. This Baroque repertoire, performed by an early music ensemble, exudes a very special timbre. I often say that this music sounds “fragrant”: it’s extremely delicate, soft and silky, with a tactile sensation of the bow rubbing the strings. The sound is neither harsh nor sharp, blending delicacy and firmness with great balance. Simply superb!

A warm and voluptuous album

Then I listened to *Let It Go* by Clair Marlo. Originally, this album was a well-known reference at Speaker Flower; here, I listened to the CD reissue restored by Hyper Analogue Production. From the very first track, that seductive bass is ever-present: smooth, rich, and expansive without ever being overpowering.

The vocals, soft and velvety, retain all their delicacy, making for a very pleasant listening experience. Moreover, the sound transparency is excellent, as is the overall quality of the reproduction.

A Double Bassist with a Bouncy Style

I then listened to the album *La Contrabbassata* by The Bass Gang, a CD entirely dedicated to double bass performance. This recording puts to the test the system’s ability to reproduce low-frequency finesse and the texture of the musicians’ playing.

It’s well known that low-register instruments are difficult to render in a lively and bouncy way, but this recording manages to capture every detail of the double bass sound: the texture of the bow on the

strings is clearly highlighted, and the springy rebound of the string tendons is perfectly perceptible.

Player 4 and DAC 2 excel in this reproduction, offering a clear and dynamic bass without merging the low frequencies into a muddled blur. This ability to deliver precise, vibrant bass fully confirms their sonic quality for me.

Lifelike and Realistic Instruments

I then listened to the famous album Pawnshop Jazz in its Audio Nautes edition. From the opening track, Prologue, a strikingly realistic sense of space filled the listening room. Tiny sonic details emerge in three dimensions, creating a vivid sense of depth.

Each instrument — piano, saxophone, double bass, clarinet, vibraphone — sounds remarkably vibrant, with precise placement within the soundstage.

Player 4 and DAC 2 succeed in conveying the atmosphere of the recording venue with lifelike energy, far from anything static or artificial. One can truly feel the dynamics and warmth of a live performance — something difficult to put into words, yet unmistakable when listening.

This ability to reproduce even the subtlest nuances and volume shifts reveals an exceptional level of refinement, confirming the outstanding quality of this digital source.

An Unbroken Sonic Flow

Next, I listened to orchestral music with the album Russian Delights performed by Ashkenazy. This CD features works such as Capriccio Italien, Francesca da Rimini, The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Flight of the Bumblebee, and the Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor. These symphonic pieces are grand, brilliant, and full of passion.

Player 4 manages to unravel every detail with remarkable finesse, while delivering rich energy and explosive power with immediacy. The sheer scale of the music is breathtaking, and the energy flows endlessly — to the point that one almost forgets to breathe.

Extreme Dynamics and Airy Details

Finally, I listened to Ar Jiao Gu (阿姐鼓), an album known for its extremely wide dynamic range, alternating between very quiet and very loud passages. Many subtle details float within the soundstage, almost ephemeral.

Player 4 and DAC 2 are able to bring out these micro-details with clarity, and the quality of the electronic sounds is particularly well rendered. Being able to reproduce such a soundscape is

already a great source of satisfaction.

20% of the Price, 80% of the Performance

This was my first experience listening to Métronome's digital sources, and I wasn't expecting such sound quality.

What's more, the prices are very reasonable: Player 4, a CD transport, is sold in Taiwan for 289,000 TWD (around €8,100 before tax). DAC 2, the digital-to-analog converter, is priced at 259,000 TWD (about €7,430 before tax).

Honestly, the Taiwanese distributor offers a truly generous pricing, which absolutely deserves our support.

These prices represent only a fraction of what Kalista products cost, yet in terms of sound reproduction, I'd say they easily reach 80% of their level.

Having listened to many digital sources, I can confidently say that Player 4 and DAC 2 offer outstanding value for money.