

FEBRUARY 2007

METROPOLIS CD-4 SIGNATURE



Reviewer: Edgar Kramer

Source Digital: Sony XA-5ES as transport; Bel Canto Design DAC 2

Preamp/Integrated: Supratek Sauvignon with NOS RCA and Bendix tubes

Amplifier: NuForce Reference 9 Special Edition monoblocks

Speakers: Wilson Audio Specialties WATT/Puppy System 6

Cables: Cerious Technologies Digital; Harmonic Technology Magic Digital; Cerious Technologies; Harmonic Technology Magic and Truthlink Silver; DanA Digital Reference Silver; Eichmann eXpress 6 Series 2; Bocchino Audio Morning Glory interconnect cable; *PSC Audio Pristine R30 Ribbon* [on loan]; Cerious Technologies and Harmonic Technology PRO-9+ loudspeaker cables; Cerious Technologies AC; Harmonic Technology Fantasy; Shunyata Research Diamondback, Eichmann eXpress AC power cables; *PSC Gold Power MKII AC cable* [on loan]

Stands: 3 tier double width, partly sand filled metal frame/MDF shelved equipment rack

Powerline conditioning: PS Audio P-300 Power Plant (digital equipment only)

Sundry accessories: Burson Audio Buffer, Bright Star Audio IsoRock Reference 3, Bright Star Audio IsoRock 4 isolation platforms and BSA IsoNode feet; Bocchino Audio Mecado isolation diodes; Black Diamond Racing cones; Stillpoints ERS paper in strategic positions around DAC, Shakti On Lines; Densen CD demagnetizer; Auric Illuminator CD Treatment; ASC Tube Traps

Room size: 17' w x 35' d x 12' h in short wall setup, opens to adjoining kitchen

Review component retail: US \$14,500 AU \$19,000



1983 - Year Zero One

Back in the heady days of the early eighties, a new format arose that promised everlasting perfect digital sound in a world then ruled by analog. As enticing as that sounded and as much as we wished it to be so, the reality at the time was far removed from the marketing blurb. The flawed new golden child of the Compact Disc wasn't a mere patch on its contemporary vinyl opposition, however. This digital Big Bang was to change the face of the audio world forever and could in fact be the last hard data carrier we have now that it's 25 years later and digital downloads to hard-drive or memory cards are proliferating.

The post Bang shock waves had hit the Aussie market by mid 1983 when our shores were further impacted by Pavarotti, Thin Lizzy (my all-time favourite 70's rock band) and David Bowie. And moi, suited in white head to toe à la Miami Vice, surrendered that year to Cupid and bid adieu to bachelorhood.

Sony had released the CDP 101 in October 1982. Philips, Marantz and Meridian released their own visions of the new format but first generation CD players were nothing but valiant attempts to extract good sound from a pre-pubescent technology. These vanguards of the new format struggled to produce an acceptable quality of sound to compete with the analogue establishment. But with the astute and far-sighted support of the software companies, the infant format prevailed and marched onwards to evolve in giant steps to its present golden era.

Nevertheless, I was a late adopter. I struggled against temptation from the digital world for many years. But in the twilight of my own analog days ten years later, each trip to the music store in 1993 made resistance more futile when I was faced by the diminishing selection of LPs. I finally yielded to the dark side after hearing about a new Sonic Youth release. Landing my X Fighter at the music store pod port, I hurried to the counter with anticipation only to be told that *Goo* would only be stocked in the CD format. As a special favour, they might be able to obtain a vinyl copy for me. Waiting period 6 to 8 weeks. And dude, don't make it a habit.

I ordered a Marantz CD 50 that afternoon. And you know what? The sound wasn't half bad.

Throughout the 90s, Mark Levinson, Krell and Wadia were the stand-out state of the art examples that were to later become classics. Nowadays, great digital sound can be obtained from entry level and modest players that make yesteryear's most ambitious and expensive machines sound nearly broken. In the 21st century, SOTA digital players come from such companies as Reimyo, Zanden, Esoteric, dCS, Meitner etc. From the land of the Gauls with famous brands like Audio Aero, JMLab, Jadis, Triangle and Cabasse, I now present to you Metronome Technologie.



C'est ci bon

Metronome was founded in 1987 by chief designer Dominique Giner. Dominique and his Metronome team have created a gorgeous piece of industrial design with the CD4 Signature that sits within the middle of the Metronome range of digital products which also include stand alone transports and DACs. From the beautifully brushed and curved face plate and stout chassis to the hefty aluminium remote control to the included trio of Delrin cones and pucks, build quality is second to none. The top drawer action is smooth and glides frictionless as if on ice skates. Every function, action and physical feature on this player reeks of top quality. The two ergonomic nitpicks would be the oversight of a fast forward/rewind mode which makes mid-track access unavailable and lacking visual indicators for the volume setting if used in variable out mode (volume control is in the analog domain and adjustable in 1dB steps over a 96dB range).



Internally the song remains the same - high quality parts, intelligent layout, solidity. The massive separate power supplies include 4 transformers for the digital, analog and related sections and 10 independent regulating stages. Further, there is a continuous ground link from the disc itself to electrical ground for static charge suppression. All operating controls are ergonomically located on the top panel where they are in logical proximity to the top-loading mechanism and keep the fascia clean and simple. The CD4 Signature uses an in-house modified and extensively fortified Philips CDM 12 PRO II v6.8 mechanism and upsamples information to 24 bits and 192kHz with a claimed 120dB of S/N ratio "at the converter". Around back are the balanced and unbalanced outputs, IEC receptacle, on/off switch and an SPDIF digital output. In addition we have a small toggle switch for display on/off and another for volume control on/off, a feature that gives the CD4 its Signature tag and which enables it to be directly connected to a power amplifier.



If there is sin against life, it consists in hoping for another life and eluding the implacable grandeur of this life - Albert Camus

Some products impress from the get go. Others need time for savoring and although they don't immediately saturate your palate with a multitude of flavours, they subtly penetrate over a longer period to leave you with an ecstatic after taste. The Metronome does both. Initially and immediately, you hear a tremendous amount of frequency-wide detail and transparency that brings out subtleties and nuances previously hidden within the music. Bass is quite massive and superbly detailed and solid. As you settle in for the longer haul and over ensuing listening sessions, yet more subtleties reveal themselves mainly in timbre and spatially. The CD4 has an uncanny ability to resolve the textures and harmonic content of acoustic instruments. It gives more guitariness to your guitar, more brassiness to your brass and more pianoness to your piano (throw me out of grammar school for that).

The CD4 also has uncanny resolution and separation powers. The rest of the system and the speakers in particular better be of requisite resolving power to transmit what the Metronome is giving. Nothing fazed this player no matter how complex the music got. Put Tito Puente, Arturo Sandoval and Steve Vai in the same room at the same time and let them rip at full speed. The Metronome won't even raise a bead of sweat. It'll resolve each individual instrumentalist within a solidly formed image yet somehow still retain the musical whole. And Tito will be well served as the dynamic envelope with this player is truly humongous. Whether voice or instrument, when the music soars upwards so does the Metronome. It never shies away from the most demanding and loudest of passages and crescendos.



In addition, the CD4 is Ferrari fast, very much in the PRaT Naim style where music flows with toe-tapping speed but even more so in the way that it translates inter-note transient minutiae without obscuring or exaggerating their amplitude. It's the stuff audiophiles relish to hear to confirm a system's abilities. The little tongue and spittle noises, the steel string buzzes, the hammer felt strike and the creaking floors and even the air conditioning compressor in the pub next door are all there.



At this level of price and performance, things like bass quality and control are a given. The CD4 dives into the darkest oceanic depths with a white-knuckled grip that -- amplifier and speaker permitting -- extracts immense amounts of detail and chest-thumping wallop. Woofers will hate it but will just have to cope. Image and soundstage are on par with what I would expect from the best in haute fidelite. I'm talking wide panoramas with perfect image placement. Stage depth is tunnel deep and width is Champs Elysees wide.



One feature I briefly touched upon earlier and would like to examine further is the increasingly prevalent amplifier-direct volume control. Burmester, Mark Levinson, Krell, Wadia and of course my last review subject, the Bel Canto DAC3, are all proponents of this feature. The Metronome handles it a little differently. The CD4 contains two internal preamplifiers, one for each balanced/unbalanced side, and uses polypropylene capacitors providing high bandwidth and low impedance. This of course means level control is done in the analog domain. Level range starts at -96dB and increases in 1dB steps with a maximum gain error of 0.12dB.

If left on stand-by, the last volume setting is recalled, however if you turn the mains off, you start from scratch at the full attenuation of -96dB. Another odd operational quirk is the omission of any graphical interface to visually gauge the position of the volume control. I'm afraid you'll be using your ears - which is what this player encourages anyway.

In active volume control mode, the Metronome is reminiscent of the Bel Canto DAC3. Detail to the max, absolute minimum loss of dynamic contrasts and an impression of utter transparency. What my active Supratek preamp adds to the equation when in the chain is that hard-to-describe but immediately recognizable quality we audiophiles like to call image body. I'm talking about that roundness and physicality of image and stage. Add to that a little bass weight and power and you begin to savor an even more total sonic buffet.

Barring the above, talking the usual HiFi attributes with this player is nearly redundant. Attempting it is like isolating a chapter in a literary masterpiece or dissecting into ingredients a Master Chef's banquet. It's all pretty pointless and petty even. Sure, the deconstruction of such elements can teach or inform about the final product but in my opinion, such analysis ultimately takes away from the grandeur of the final whole. The checklist of positive sonic traits such as bass quality, soundstage, imaging, detail, extension and transparency are all a given with this player. More useful would be to mention the increased presence and palpability that is transmitted from the plastic discs. No stone seems left unturned as the CD4 delivers maximum detail and resolution and proves itself a master of timbre. The impression is one of several veils lifted from over the speaker drivers, tweet to woof. The combination of these elements when reproduced to such a high level of fidelity results in a substantial step closer to live music and the studio event. It's like a Big Brother reality peep show in 3D around your ribbon chair.



Impossible isn't French

The Metronome CD4 Signature has demonstrated to me what is possible from the digital format at the top tier. What separates players of this caliber from the lower rungs is not necessarily more bass or better treble -- although in this case it's certainly so -- but more frequency-wide sonic reality top to bottom. Add to that superb build, promised longevity and a graceful design and you have a winner sitting on your top shelf if you can afford it.

Metronome's CD4 Signature - *signé, cacheté, a livrer, je suis à vous!*



Edgar Kramer

Manufacturer's [website](#)

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