

## Audiophilia

### Métronome Technologie DSS Network Player and Streamer



Whether we want to admit it or not, streaming has grown up. The libraries of high resolution digital files out there in the ether are growing. Red Book CD-quality streaming, once the domain of niche services, is now being rolled out as the universal minimum among almost all mainstream providers. The once clunky digital electronics needed to maintain a home ecosystem of files and internet music servers are becoming smaller, more well integrated, and are sounding better and better. To further drive home the point, this spring a small box from Métronome Technologie arrived on my doorstep. Perhaps, a further unsubtle cue to do something about the mess of CDs and hard drives strewn about my small apartment. But, before we Marie Kondo our beloved digital artifacts, we have to ask: does this little box spark joy?

This is Métronome's newest digital front-end device, the DSS (for Digital Sharing Streamer) coming in at a retail price of **\$4200**. The high end French company is no stranger to me or readers of this magazine, having reviewed both their **Le DAC** and **Le Player 3 CD Transport** units, the latter of which was one of the best digital sources I have ever heard. The DSS is the smallest and most economical of their three digital sharing units. It contains no DAC, no touch screen, and no front face controls. Instead, we are treated to a minimalist front face of modernist rectangles that bears an uncanny resemblance to the Notre Dame de La Salette church I would walk by on my way to the grocery store back when I lived in Montreal.

The rear, of course, has a little bit more utility, with two USB and one LAN network inputs and a plethora of digital outputs including AES/IBU, Toslink, I2S/HDMI, and S/PDIF Coaxial to connect to your DAC of choice. No USB output however, a deliberate choice by Métronome as they suggest the connection type has sound compromising limitations. Not a huge concern for most, as I doubt anyone is going to be using the DSS with a \$99 desktop USB DAC. Also on the rear is an IEC power cable socket situated below the units power switch, and an added USB port for servicing.



So, with a striking but minimalist front face, how do we actually use this magic box?

The DSS is completely software controlled. It is UPnP, DNLA, and Apple Airplay certified, as well as being Roon Ready. In layman's terms, this streamer can be controlled by your media software of choice. Métronome recommends the mConnect app, a common and affordable streaming app available on a variety of devices. The DSS plays up to PCM 192/24 and DSD64, which in all honesty is all 99% of what streaming users will ever need. It is also fully MQA compatible if you have a DAC with similar capabilities.

There's no getting around it, the DSS is a very expensive little box, and has mostly the same features as many cheaper streamers. However, once you get inside the chunky steel housing and peak under the hood, the price makes a little more sense. The power supply is handled by a toroidal transformer from Talema, and feeds multiple capacitor banks. File recognition and playback are handled by a Korean manufactured board made specifically for Métronome, and clock duties are given to an AKM AK4137 chip. The company has spared no expense in assembling a streamer with impeccable build quality, fed by a dedicated and massive power supply to a first rate set of parts. You will not find these things in your cheap and cheerful Bluesound streamers, and this is how Métronome has distinguished itself in the digital source domain.



### **My Use**

The Métronome DSS is the first true standalone streamer I have used in my system. Prior to this, my non-disc digital music was produced in a number of ways, usually from a USB hard drive plugged into the back of my Oppo BDP 105D Universal Player, sometimes streamed from Tidal on the same player if the six year-old software decides to work, and sometimes (if I'm feeling especially lazy) streamed from Tidal on my Roku smart TV. Compared to this arrangement, the DSS was a relatively simple affair. I connected the unit to my router via a generic ethernet cable and ran a digital output via I2S to my [Denafrips Pontus II DAC](#).

Now, Métronome only claim support for their I2S connection with Métronome DACs, but luckily my Denafrips read the I2S from the Métronome just fine. Finally, I unplugged my USB music hard drive from the Oppo, and connected it to one of the two USB inputs on the back of the DSS. From there, I simply downloaded the mConnect app on my iPhone 11—it recognized the Métronome without any hesitation as my phone was on the same WiFi network. Using the mConnect app with the Métronome, I had access to both Tidal and Qobuz, and could also browse the entire USB file library connected to the physical unit, all from my phone. I didn't have a tablet handy for this review, but rest assured, mConnect will work with those as well, and probably make navigation even easier.

Many people who are likely to invest in a high end streamer such as this will probably be interested in, or are already devotees of Roon; the pricey, subscription-based streaming software that seems to be taking over HiFi. I admit I had never used Roon before, but this review seemed like the perfect opportunity to dip my toes into the water. The Métronome DSS is a Roon Ready device, meaning that your Roon software will automatically recognize the DSS as long as they are on the same internet connection. Having never used this software before, I was prepared for a big learning curve, but the process was painless and simple. I setup Roon on my aging Macbook Pro, connected my USB SSD of music files, logged into Tidal and Qobuz on the app, and I was off running. Roon is unique in that the software seamlessly integrates all the music available to the listener in one easy to browse library. What this means for me is that when searching for an artist or album on the software, I am able to see any and all results from my own personal file library, as well as options from Tidal or Qobuz on the same screen. This is much more simple than on the mConnect app, where each streaming service and your hard drive library are separated out and must be browsed individually. Like most things, you do tend to get what you pay for.

To those on the Apple bandwagon, rest assured, Apple Airplay works just as well with the DSS as Roon does, and streaming via Airplay from Apple Music is quick and easy. Currently Airplay only supports up to CD quality 44/16 bitrates, and Apple Music has only just begun offering its service in lossless quality, but like everything in digital, we should be on the lookout for fast improvements.

## **The Sound**

Métronome have built a name for themselves primarily from their digital sources, so, I had high expectations for the sound of this player, particularly after Le Player 3 blew me away last year. It had a sound that was incredibly controlled, powerful, and detailed. I think based on my memory, that sound signature carries over on the DSS streamer to a significant extent.

After a lengthy passive break-in period of roughly 100 hours (something very easy to do with a streamer), I started to listen to the DSS with a more critical ear, revisiting albums on my hard drive that had been collecting virtual dust. The first album I took active notes for was H.I.M.'s 1997 debut album *Greatest Lovesongs Vol. 666 (44/16)*, an album I hadn't put on in years, but came rushing back to me like memories in an old photo album. I had heard this album many times on everything from an old Sony boombox to a very nice Pono Player/PSB headphone rig, but listening to it on a proper 2-channel fronted by the Métronome DSS was a completely new experience. Guitars from Linde Lindström had more crunch and body than I could ever recall hearing. On 'Our Diabolikal Rapture', the kick drum impact was massive and full of body. Transients were sharp and followed the heavy drum hits without smear or bloat, and the bass was simply incredible; deep and well defined with lots of punch. Ville Vallo's vocals were articulate and possessed all the fragility required during the delicate passages of his flips into head voice. On 'It's All Tears' the DSS followed every tonal twist and turn with agility and control. The pre-chorus of this song contains a very odd low vocal doubled by a low fuzz drenched guitar line, and I had never heard this section so distinct and articulated until now.

What drew me most to the sound however was the rhythm and timing, no matter the tempo the Métronome always had a coherence of timing that impressed me and allowed me to follow the groove of the musicians in the studio. Something that continued when I played Neil Young's *After the Gold Rush* on Qobuz (192/24) where 'Till the Morning Comes' impressed in the same way with entirely different musical style. On 'Oh, Lonesome Me', the harmonica had bite with really dense texture which reminded me of my Bob Dylan MoFi LPs. You know, if I'm favorably comparing a digital source to analog, this streamer is doing something right. Acoustic guitar body had real satisfying ring and vibration, and the image of the band was rock solid with good depth. Did it have the warm liquid midrange of my Bernie Grundman cut LP? No, I have yet to hear digital that can do that. But, on all other fronts, the sound was equally compelling, making me sit up and take the idea of streaming as a primary audio source seriously for once in my life.

On Qobuz I spent some time brushing up on the latest high resolution classical releases (something I often miss in my hunt for the cleanest 1950s and '60s London bluebacks and Mercury maroon label pressings) finding myself listening to Olga Pashchenko's recent fortepiano recordings of Mozart's *9th* and *17th Piano Concertos*. While fortepiano recordings of repertoire we are used to hearing on modern grand pianos might not be everyone's cup of tea, I found the recordings particularly enjoyable due to Pashchenko's theatricality and musicality on the instrument.

The unique timbre of this instrument was rendered in perfect image along with the Il Gardellino baroque orchestra in all their period instrument glory. The real appeal of the DSS was felt in the cadenza of the first movement of *Piano Concerto No. 9 in Eb*, where the full timbre of the fortepiano was explored, from the most delicate high legato to the percussive thwacks in the bottom end that modern pianos no longer display. Every bit of dense color and mechanical creaking here was easy to discern, was distinct, and none of it was biting or overly abrasive.

If I had to summarize my overall impressions of the Métronome DSS it would be with the two words: Power and Control. This little streamer seemed to bring out all the gusto and guts in every recording I threw at it, but it never smeared the image, or distorted into an unpleasing tonal balance.

### **Final Thoughts**

I think anyone that claims they hear no differences between digital file players need hear the Métronome DSS (**\$4200**). Yes, the differences in these kinds of players can be more subtle than the differences in DACs or preamps or the like, but they are definitely there.

The DSS brought an image stability and level of clarity and control (especially in the bass region) that was something I was not expecting out of a streaming music player. Like Le Player 3, the DSS is very detailed, and leans just a hair on the vigorous side of neutral, but it never once found its way into anything resembling harshness, and it played surprisingly well with more poorly engineered fare, which is why I can recommend it without reservation.

If you have taken the time to assemble a thoroughly resolving system and have invested in a proper DAC, the Métronome DSS is the perfect small and versatile device to take your high-end audio into the 2020s. Yes, at **\$4200** it is a pretty sizeable chunk of change, but in this case I think Métronome have easily justified their asking price through performance, build, and function. A powerful knockout in an unassuming package, or as they might say over at Métronome: *L'habit ne fait pas le moine*.

