

Review of Metronome' Player 4+  
by Barry J.Johnston, 07/2023 on :



## Metronome Technologie Le Player 4+ CD Player/DAC



On the 6th of January 1987, Astronomers at the University of California witnessed the birth of a Galaxy for the first time, and later that month, Ronald Reagan signed a secret order permitting covert sales of arms to Iran. Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, Bill Haley and B.B.King were in the company of greats being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and it was a year that saw 80s rock reach new heights, with the likes of Whitesnake's 1987. Movies like Full Metal Jacket, and Robin Williams' iconic performance in Good Morning Vietnam, made their mark on pop culture history, and a small audio company, Metronome Technologie, was birthed in the beautiful French town of Toulouse.

## Pardon My French

A small group of audiophiles decided to take on the giants of the Hi-Fi industry and share their “joie de vivre” with the rest of the world. For over thirty years Metronome Technologie has been at the top of the game, producing some of the best of what France has to offer, and indeed has earned a place beside the most respected in the industry.

So as the Le Player 4+ CD Player/DAC entered the room, I had some expectations. The striking aesthetic, the complex simplicity, the reassuring build, it all flirted with my senses, but did this French beauty have substance? Let's find out.

So, let's get the technical geekery out of the way. The pickup in the Le Player 4+ is a unit from Austrian manufacturer, Stream Unlimited, a leading player in the field of Chromecast built-in, Google Voice Assistant, Amazon Alexa, Apple AirPlay2, in fact you probably have a device at home driven by its technology. The Le Player 4+ is the “all in one” solution in the Classica range, which includes the Le Player 4 transport, and Le DAC 2 as separate box solutions, and a market specific version of this unit, called the Le Player CD10.

The Le Player 4+ is a top loader, with several digital input options to access the internal DAC. USB input supports up to 32-bit/384 kHz and DSD512, and there's 24-bit/192 kHz from the singular optical, RCA, and AES-EBU inputs. Streaming is possible also via ethernet input and an optional streaming board option. One thing to mention, is that the internal convertor is indeed dual mono.



For the past couple of weeks, I have been playing this side by side with my Gryphon Audio Scorpio, and considering the Gryphon does not include any external access to the internal DAC, this presents a real value proposition at this price point, for a high-performance CD player and DAC/digital hub. The Metronome design is very much to my taste and I think its simple, modern and clean design will fit into any system and indeed any modern architectural environment, as a distinctly prominent talking point. It's beautiful.

Shakespeare himself once said, “Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good; A shining gloss that fadeth suddenly; A flower that dies when first it 'gins to bud, A brittle glass that's broken presently.”

However, I am still utterly enamoured by the aesthetic of this unit, and the brushed steel front facia ensures no fading gloss!

The unit comes with three Delrin Cones for the isolation feet, and an AQWO CD clamp to keep that plastic disc in place. The Delrin cones really add to the elegance of the stance of this unit and they somehow help convey an air of subtle functional elegance. Considering this CD player costs as much as a small car, or indeed a ten-year-old BMW 3 series, then you'd want it to at least look the part in your home.

As a company with a 30+ year heritage, Metronome has a well-defined and recognisable design language, and a strong reputation for quality components, choosing chips from Japanese manufacturer Asahi Kasei for reliable translation of data from the digital media fed from the device, into the component chain that eventually presents moving air particles, in a miraculously well organised pattern of propagated sound waves, which translate into musical bliss in your brain.

I spent some time working with Theatre du Capitole in Toulouse while working across Europe as an engineer and consultant in 2013, and my experience of the people, the place, the architecture and the romanticism of the locale is one which will never leave me. Just as I had fallen in love with the depth and warmth of the Midi Pyrenees, I think it's pretty safe to say that the Le Player 4+ and I have a connection too.



*Le Player 4+ atop Noisy Head isoLED 50 LED-lit acrylic isolation platform*

## The Real Deal

Let's talk about performance. Now, this is where it gets interesting for me, as comparing this to my Gryphon Scorpio, which costs about the same in dollar terms, the performance is a little more on the lively side of neutral, but certainly still very well composed, and indeed not so far from the Gryphon's performance for me to have a strict preference.

As a CD Player it is an absolute pleasure to use. The top loading sliding panel is smooth and presents as a well-engineered component. No waiting for a drawer to open, close, and for the pickup to read the table of contents. This is a much more immediate ceremony, tactile, reassuring and devoid of frustration. When manufacturers present items like this, then the expectations can often be high, and all too often the performance and overall experience is underwhelming. The end user can often relate price with performance, expecting units over ten thousand dollars to offer "other worldly" experiences compared to a component costing a few hundred dollars, or a couple of grand.

The fact is, that mass manufactured units from global powerhouses have the benefit of huge resources and profits spread over mass distribution, whereas boutique, specialist manufacturers such as Metronome, produce much lower unit numbers each year, made from high quality materials, resulting in products that perform well, but also maintain their performance level and relevance for much longer, albeit at elevated price points, due to cost of production of each unit. Consider that the Classica range is the entry level to Metronome, and you get a picture of their place in the food chain.



Playing tracks from Röyksopp's *Profound Mysteries II* album shows the fantastic dynamics of tracks such as "Oh Lover" and "Tell Him", demonstrating the endless depth and subtlety of Susanne Sundfør's vocals, the painfully accessible portrayal of her emotional delivery, and simultaneously flawless presentation of the synth-wave-inspired, electronica.

The results are the same with Rickie Lee Jones' album *The Evening of my Best Day* with tracks such as "Second Chance" providing an intimate experience with Jones' famously seductive voice.

One of the debates we seem to see more regularly now, is that CD players have an edge over streaming devices and external DAC units, and I have always wondered if this is defined in the price point comparisons, the results of psychoacoustics, or just wishful thinking. Now I have indeed heard CD players that are far superior to streaming units. I've also had the Linn Selekt Edition HUB dual mono in my system, playing side by side with CD players at half the price, and the performance was indeed similar, but the Linn of course offers far more functionality.

So, considering the Metronome Le Player 4+ has a DAC that is accessible via USB, I connected my MacBook and played *Answer* by Sarah McLachlan, on CD, and decided to compare it to the same track via Spotify and Tidal. Now this is a track which has presented so incredibly differently on several devices. The piano and vocal can present quite harshly on some streaming devices and, on one such previous review sample, I had to turn the volume down due to said harshness of both the female vocals and piano, while the listening level was around 85dB.

The Gryphon Scorpio presents this immaculately, as does the aforementioned Linn. So, I was interested to see how this would turn out. I have packed some other units away due to their inability to present this track in a manner that is enjoyable, without distorting the midrange, or failing to resolve the vocals without cringing. They all have their strengths, and I have an eclectic taste in music, but some tracks really demonstrate a unit's flaws. This track is one of them. So, I placed the disc in the tray and played the track simultaneously from both mediums.

As I expected, the performance from both the CD and the digital streaming file was identical. I could not decipher a great difference in the subtle loose snare in the background of the track, nor the beautiful subtleties of the harmonies in the chorus, which wash over you blissfully, carried on an ocean of bass. Each harmony should be intimately connected to the main vocal, while being independently intelligible, soaring above the low frequencies, while deeply connected to their weighty, momentous depth. The Metronome did a great job. The vocals were perfectly balanced, never spoiling the moment, and always allowing space for every other entity in the mix. A perfect translation of data.



The unit has no particular weaknesses, from symphonics, to audiophile favourites such as Dire Straits, everything sits just right. Perhaps my only gripe was that the remote control doesn't match the same quality as the unit itself, something Gryphon Audio does exquisitely.

So how does all of this weigh up in just a few words in a review? The Le Player 4+ is a solid, well-built, no-nonsense performer. It's a striking piece, bold, yet subtle in its aesthetics, and similarly characterised in its sonic presentation. Metronome Technologie has been doing this for over 30 years and it shows.

Yes, AU\$15K-plus CD players are not the norm. Even when units are now exceeding \$100K we must keep some semblance of reality. These may indeed be the esoteric highs of the industry, but they are not something we will see in everyday homes. Alexa, Google, Siri, and goodness knows how many other tech devices that come and go from our lives, are becoming more commonplace than über high quality music reproduction.

So where does this leave the high-end, and indeed the "Hi-Fi" market? I believe there is enough demand, and indeed wealth in the world to sustain ever increasing developments in the esoteric, but I believe that the high-end market is more sustainable at this level. The fact that a \$15,000 CD player and digital hub would probably point to a system valued at \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more in total, is still a price point out of reach for most, but at this price point, and indeed level of performance, there can be no doubt that Metronome Technologie has a winner. Even compared to the high-end Kalista DreamPlay, the Le Player 4+ is more my style, and I think this will prove to be the case with many others. It fits, and it works as a holistic offering.

## Conclusion

There is a point of music reproduction that we can achieve before we enter the “more human than human” realm of Blade Runner. I think we have an enormous number of choices that lead to very much the same outcome, and the rest is personal taste. With the Le Player 4+ it feels like a great balance of visual aesthetic, quality build, premium product, future proof integration and pure and simple enjoyment. I love everything about this unit, from the ceremony of interacting with it physically, to its form, function and performance.



As a comparison to the Gryphon Scorpio, it's on par, and perhaps better value considering external access to its DAC, but of course there is no wireless streaming ability, and that may be the point where others choose an alternative, competitive device. But as I mentioned above, there is the ability to add a network card and, from there, you can stream using a multitude of other solutions, perhaps indeed a more future proof decision.

This is a solid offering from Metronome Technologie and one that is technically extremely capable. No matter what your ego tells you, this unit is killer. If you have the dollars, and you're looking for a new CD player, or an upgrade, I highly recommend the Le Player 4+. Vive La France!

... *Barry James Johnston*