

Review of Le Player 3+, Le Player 3 & Le Dac, by Srajan Ebaen, 10/2020 on:



AUDIO REVIEWS



Le PLAYER 3 + Le DAC vs. Le PLAYER 3+



Le trio français. "The current situation with sales isn't bad. It's *managing* them that's becoming un cauchemare with many suppliers getting further and further delayed. We have the orders but can't ship on time for lack of parts. Still, what about reviewing our new Le Player 3 and/or Le Player 3+, a CD transport and CD player/DAC respectively? Perhaps an even more fun test would be to compare Le Player 3/Le DAC against Le Player 3+?" That was Jean Marie Clauzel of Métronome Technologie with a not indecent proposal. I didn't know how to say 'threesome' in French. Trio isn't exactly it. But I did know oui. Love in the time of covid? Whilst such a gig may not have seemed properly agrarian to our sheep-herding neighbors, sampling integrated vs. digital separates sounded properly *plaisir* to me. I'd leave agrarian to the real farmers.



Spinning physical discs would be a Philips GF8 mechanism modified by Métronome either way. Conversion to analog would be by Asahi Kasei's AK4493 chip for 384kHz PCM and DSD256 either way. Le DAC accepts 75Ω coax, 110Ω AES/EBU, Toslink and USB. As a pure Redbook transport, Le Player 3 omits a USB output but adds I²S via HDMI whereby CD can be up-converted to DSD128 and output as such. Gender fluidity. It's très chic right now.

Le Player 3+ bundles the lot into one case. That means a reduction in le source de courant. If HigherFi had just one technical emphasis to go with its snazzier cosmetics, it would have to be beefier power supplies and higher capacitance for greater instantaneous current. Though one goes no faster, higher torque means greater dynamic range and better bass. Speaker crossovers and back electromotive force put a foot on the brake while an amp is on the gas. More current and low-impedance power overcome such secondary braking to improve load control. That's true even for source components which mustn't drive reactive speaker impedance/phase but the fixed high input Ω of a pre or integrated amplifier. We'd thus expect that going digital separates should be audible in the same or very similar ways.



For Métronome whose sub brand [Kalista](#) would be Lexus to their Toyota had the Japanese more flash, today's models represent their Prius range. Hovering around ±€5k, that's of course relative. For this brand which doesn't manufacture in China like Jay's Audio or Denafrips, it's simply the most affable way to buy in. Let's get the keys and go for a ride.

Before we do, let's cast a quick glance at Métronome's Bentley in the same garage. It's their Kalista DreamPlay Twenty-Twenty, an ambitious project to extend the company's digital expertise to the highly complex mechanics of vinyl replay.

Without a single record in our crib, you wouldn't blame Jean Marie for withholding those keys. Before we ignite today's digital engines, there's the obligatory look beneath their hoods to document what hardware your money buys; and how their respective power supplies diverge. That's where we expect the majority differences.

But first, the small print. Moving parts and critically aligned laser assemblies age with use. For just €200, Métronome offer a peace-of-mind 5-year warranty. For the Player 3/3+, you'd be a fool not to get that. Whether you'll want to spend €45 on three optional Delrin footers or €53 on a remote control is a question of luxury not an essential decision. But do protect your investment in drawer transport mechanics. Two-way shipping and replacement sleds or repairs surely would cost you more. Again, friends don't let friends drive the spinning digital highways without proper insurance. And Métronome's is very proper. Cheers.

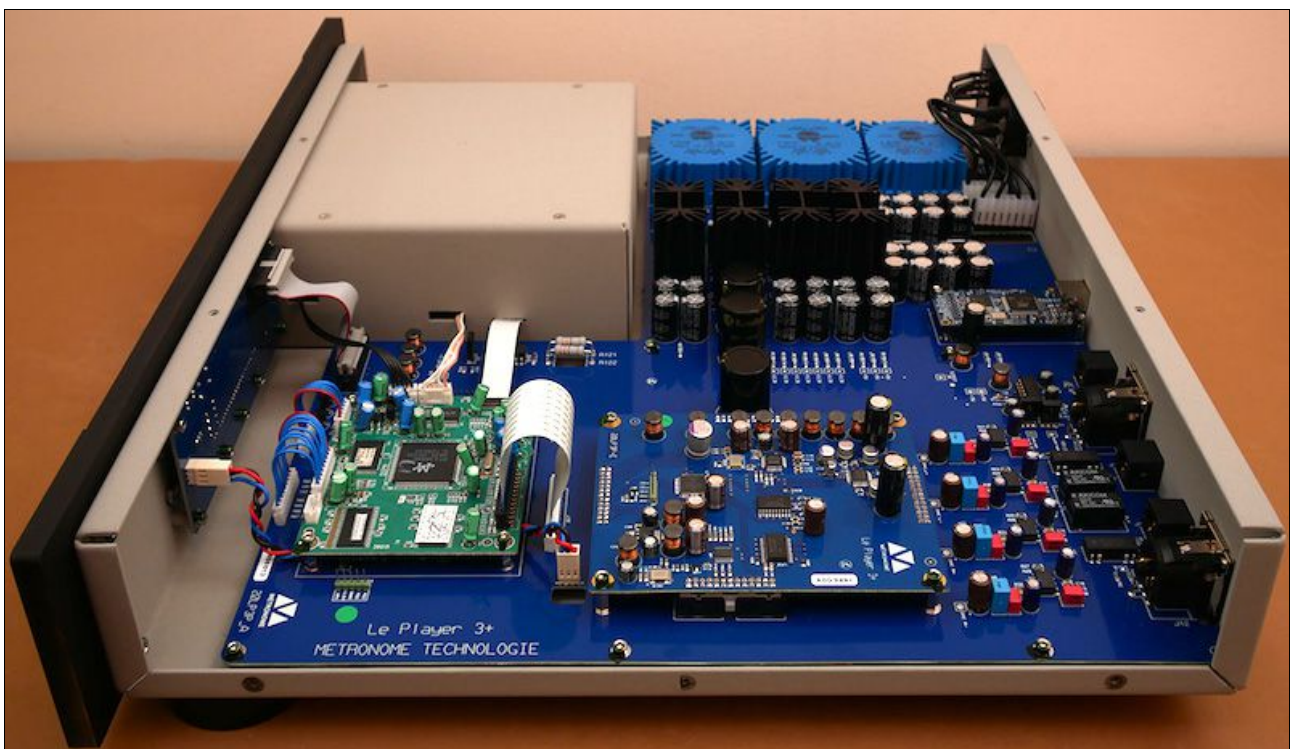
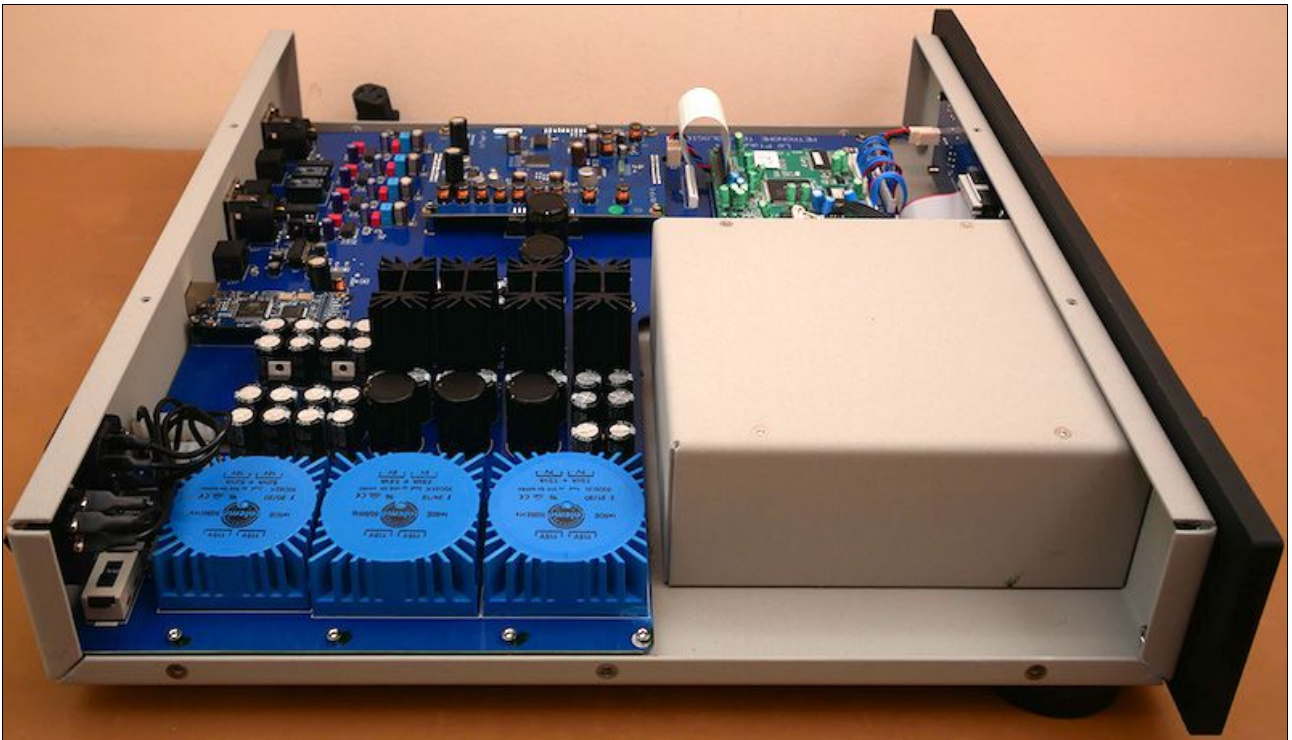


The one-box Player 3+ allows coax and USB access to its built-in DAC.

Le Player 3+, the one-box DAC/CDP here in black livery and still looking for a non-existing disc in its drawer ...



... packs 1 x 5VA and 2 x 7.5VA transformers plus 40 smaller capacitors. The encased transport mechanism is obviously shared with the pure transport.

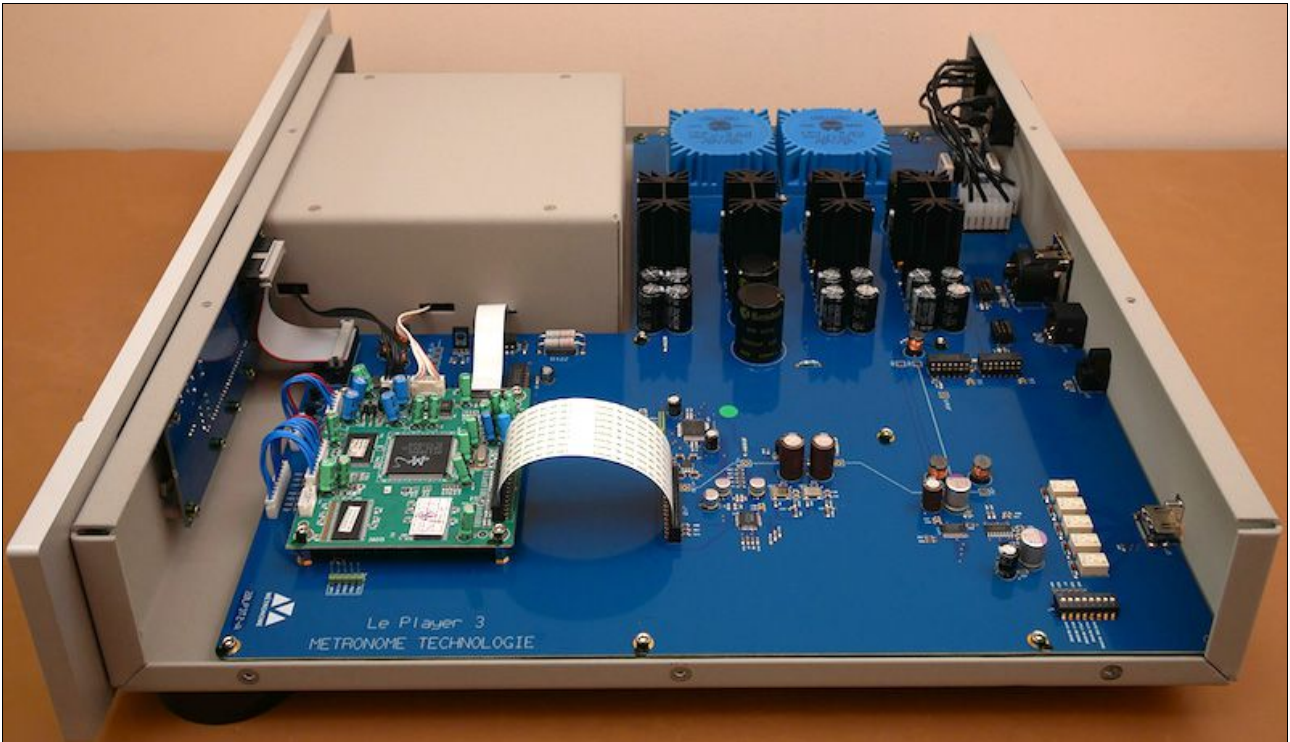


The Player 3 transport...



... gets 2 x 7.5VA transformers plus the same four voltage regulators with finned heat sinks as the CDP/DAC.

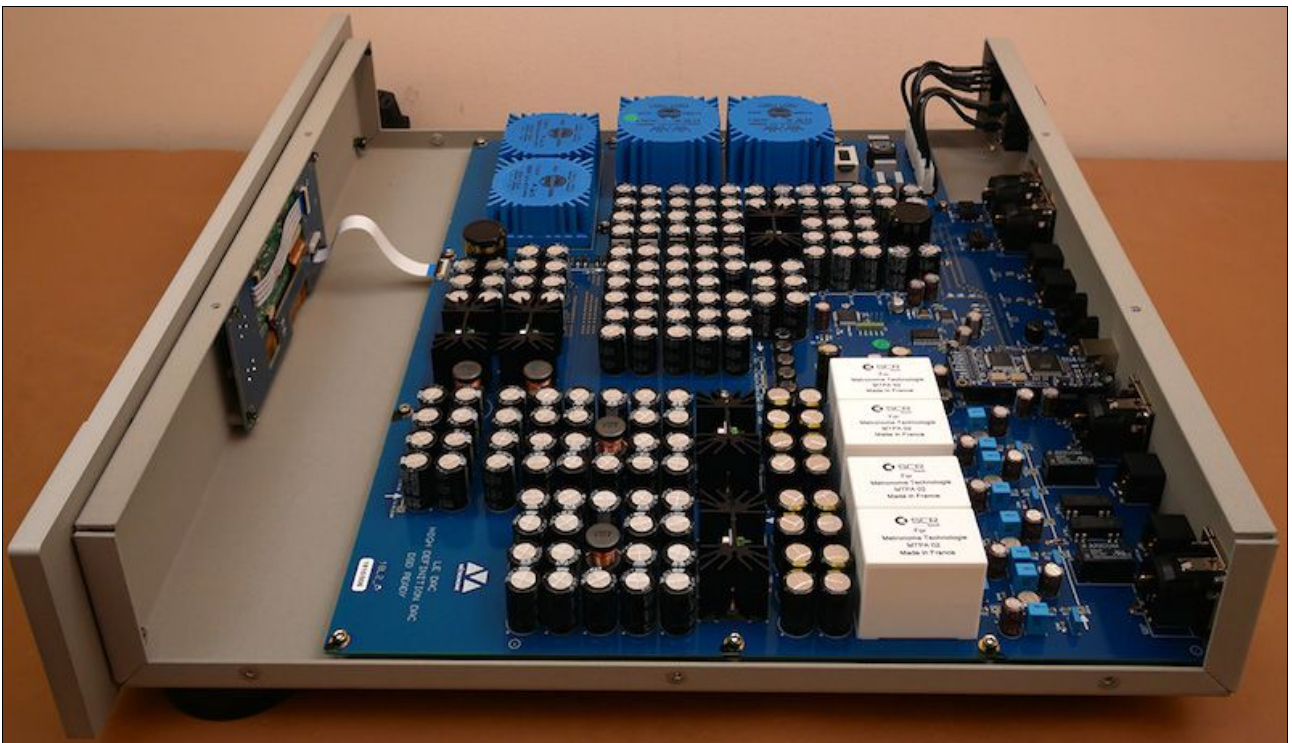
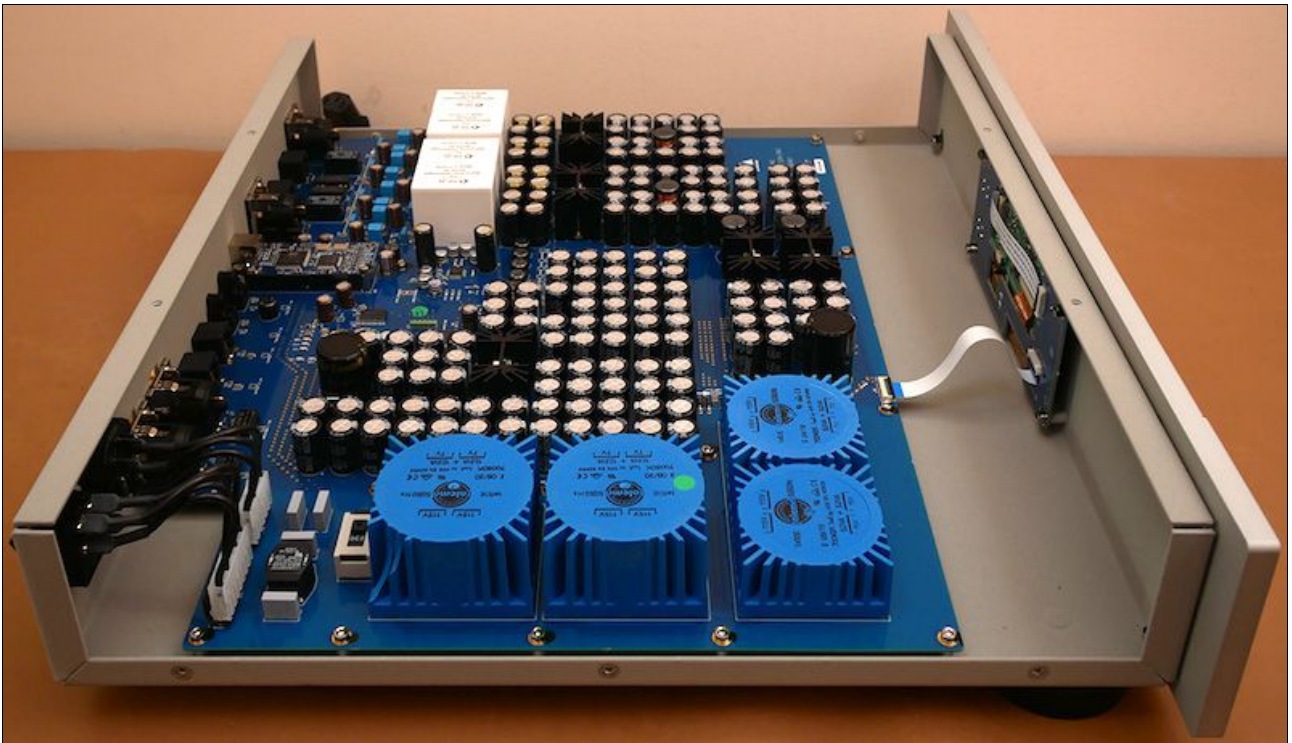




Le DAC then packs 2 x 5VA and 2 x 12.5VA transformers plus 158 of the same caps we saw in Le Player 3+ plus 4 x SCR MTPA 02 caps, the big white cubes which Nagra are fond of as well.



In short, the separates get *twice* the number of transformers and *wildly* more capacitance/filtering. On the latter score, Le DAC actually looks like a Denafrips. It sports the same phalanx of massively paralleled capacitor warriors.



There's no doubt at all what the extra coin for the separates buys if you go that way.

Here's the remote control and back of Le DAC...



... followed by a sideways glance at what's beneath the transport hoods. The 2mm bent steel sheets of these chassis are rather thicker than standard. That adds weight and rigidity to each machine. A bit peculiar? The cerulean display of Le Player 3 far from matched the azure tint of its DAC mate. Likewise for the latter's lack of matching I²S-over-HDMI input. Why block the transport's PCM □ DSD feature in the DAC? Not that the included remote had a key to enable this function. Odd too that Le DAC's display showed 48kHz PCM for an incoming CD signal as though an upsampler was engaged. There were more oddities. The two transports mixed their capital/minor letters as in 'no dISC' or 'OPEn' or inserted a gap for ' PA USE'. Meanwhile Le DAC had a capital 'N' to spell out 'No Signal'. Gallic laissez faire over two different displays? In this portfolio these are clearly companion decks. Won't their shoppers expect them to match both cosmetically and functionally?

"For Le DAC's 48kHz frequency, Le Player 3's upsampler must be set to 48kHz. Click on its lower right button to return to 44.1kHz. About Le DAC, I agree with your comments. It launched almost two years ago to explain its lack of HDMI and the use of an older display. The next generation will of course correct this." Better informed, I now pressed the transport's □ button. Voilà, I could toggle through its internal up/resampler including DSD64/128. Without I²S on the converter to instead use its AES/EBU input, 352.8/384kHz and DSD conversion were off the table. I set Le Player 3 to 176.4kHz. Time to slip this trio into a system for a few turns around the listening track.

These machines tapped either USB from our iMac's hybrid drive via PureMusic —below we see Le DAC receive such 352.8kHz upsampled signal—or silver discs commercially pressed or burnt to CDR on Apple's SuperDrive. My first impressions of Le DAC in either mode were most reminiscent of our original Denafrips Terminator prior to the later processor board upgrade. As such it differed from the Terminator Plus' most current resolution enhancements *particularly* when clock-sync'd to our Soundaware D300Ref USB bridge.



Key attributes were chunky, organic, dense and relaxed. This wasn't a forward adrenaline show with aerial acrobatics across exploded treble. Instead it promoted minor darkness and languor, then built around that with tonal weight and a rounder softer fuller personality. As the days passed by, this characterization stayed put. We might call it deeply informed by DSD conversion and the tube buffers which factor in the company's dearer models. Here the enablers were simply PCM and transistors pure.



Métronome □ **Vinnie Rossi L2 Signature with Elrog ER50** □ **LinnenberG List t monos** □
Aurai Audio M1 □ **Allnic Audio ZL cable loom, Vibex AC/DC filtering**

It's a welcome reminder. A clearly defined aural aesthetic is the required foundation upon which engineering knowledge pursues its manifestation. Chosen tech and building blocks are secondary. Primary is the possession of a detailed sonic blueprint to manipulate parts and circuit layout until they overlap. Measurements won't recognize when that occurs. My deliberate exposure setting and color saturation of the system photos attempt to suggest exactly this aural milieu with its darker backdrop, yellow not bluish lighting, softer contrast and receding detail over distance like in the curtain print, floral arrangement and palm leaves.

Call it more sumptuous than spiked, more elegiac than energetic, more rotund than ripped. How would those values scale down and back when one switches to the one-box machine with its smaller power supply and much reduced capacitance?

Starting with a deliberately poetic track—"Dajti Mountain", the evocative opener from Redi Hasa's *The Stolen Cello*—switching from 'small' to 'big' Métronome was telling. Going my separate ways, soundstage depth rolled out to show farther venue reach behind the multi-tracked instrument. Microdynamic nuance and inflective rippling as the bowed cello's ebb 'n' flow or accents of pizzicato lines grew more pronounced. Overall tone weight enhanced. While cut from the same general cloth design, the twosome had the higher thread count, its fabric more weight. In the spec wars relative to the amplifier power that's required for 'realistic' dynamic range, the focus is on how loud grand peaks can get. Here sales people and makers of muscle amps pull the kilowatt card.

Unless we do Western classical music—its contemporary stage is the modern film score—dynamic range beyond 15dB is rare. Much Pop flickers at 6dB. It's not that 16/44.1 is incapable of more. Tony Minasian of Tonian Labs records up to 50dB (!) to his CD. Most mastering engineers simply cater to prevailing sound-louder demands. That applies heavy compression. When everything is almost equally loud, forget all about macrodynamics. It's the narrow band of remaining microdynamics that concerns us. The more gradations we discern, the less rigid and stiff our music feels on an energetic level. And it was that oft-overlooked discipline where the twin chassis beat out the single. That technical aspect translated to greater expressivity. It was about motion not of physical player movements but *inside* his melodic arcs or rhythmic accompaniment. During playback that added an 'e' for greater e-motion. As such, it went beyond what triggers visually critical listeners as greater image specificity or micro detail. It became relevant also to casual listening where one doesn't zero down but goes with the flow. The flow of the separates was livelier like when Smetana's famous *Vltava* tone poem of the great Moldau river hits the rapids with these young players.

If one does do grand symphonic like Bruckner's *9th*, here Sergiu Celibidache's slow reading with his favored Munich Philharmonic, one will of course notice superior athletic conditioning and bigger lungs on extended crescendos and massive climaxes. But for general civilian purposes not gala and pomp, the realm of dynamic micro variations in small-scale music is far more meaningful. That's why it's not bombastic but simple music which becomes the real yardstick when listening late at night and at low volumes. How much emotional interest survives now? With Le Player/Le DAC, more than with Le Player 3+. And the separates also played it weightier. That delayed the inevitable thinning out—the shift to winter'y monochrome after fall's color spectacle—when I dialed back playback levels.



Rather than more resolution as the perhaps typical expectation for more upscale digital, the primary advantages I heard for beefier power supplies and output stage were dynamics and weight. A secondary benefit was more evolved soundstage depth and scale. My few musical examples then deliberately cover shared virtues. This French kit, either as the single box or separates, prioritized rich colors. They are the differentiators and celebrators of timbre. The virtual season is autumn with its deeper half shadows against summer. This kit also heightened the fluid not choppy elements of music making.

In closing, if I was asked who the ideal target audience for today's three components might be, I'd single out classical music lovers, no question. That's because all other music styles too benefited from the same subtle enhancements toward that aesthetic; if I'm allowed to say such a thing. For relevant competition, I'd point at Denafrips converters prior to their latest Terminator Plus (the latter goes beyond on resolution and timing to sit in a different tier as it should for the surcharge). But Le DAC is a direct competitor to Terminator, Le Player a direct alternative to Avatar. Here's a challenge they're thus equal to: a Baroque concerto for the shiny penetrating piccolo clarinet.

Ready to attend Le Mét in your best suit or dress? Hello Métronome digital.

[Srajan Ebaen](#)