MÉTRONOME

TEST & REVIEW

AQWO 2

Hybrid DAC + SACD/CD + Streamer



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Métronome AQWO 2 Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer on Test –

A Benchmark as a Universal Digital Player

This solution is designed for CD and SACD playback, offering exceptional signal processing thanks to a DAC that is also accessible to external sources. For online content, it features a streaming client. The new Métronome AQWO 2 has undergone an in-depth test by sempre-audio.at.

In summary, Métronome AQWO 2 represents the second generation of an exceptional solution from Métronome Technologie, combining a CD/SACD player, a DAC, and a streaming client.

The French high-fidelity brand Métronome Technologie can pride itself on offering an outstanding range of products with the Métronome AQWO series, whose latest addition is Métronome AQWO 2. This second generation follows a first version launched in 2018, which marked the beginning of this exceptional line. The Métronome AQWO series is one of the brand's most emblematic, perfectly embodying Métronome Technologie's expertise and craftsmanship. As a recognized specialist in digital audio, the brand targets the most demanding audiophiles with this range, seeking absolute sonic perfection.

The constant pursuit of perfection has been the driving force behind the development of a new generation of Métronome AQWO. While, at first glance, this new version may seem similar to its predecessor, it is fundamentally different: it is an entirely new development.

The Métronome AQWO Series: The Digital Reference

It should first be reminded that the Métronome AQWO series is one of the three current ranges of Métronome Technologie, alongside the Métronome Digital Sharing and Métronome Classica series. Although the latter two offer high-end solutions, the Métronome AQWO series remains the brand's reference, especially with AQWO 2, which stands as its new flagship.
Let's first look at the models that have marked this range, starting with AQWO, introduced in 2018.

AQWO was designed as a CD and SACD player, offering signal processing accessible to external sources, allowing it to also function as a DAC. At the time, the brand referred to it as the AQWO Hybrid DAC + SACD/CD.
Additionally, Métronome offered Métronome t|AQWO SACD Transport and Métronome c|AQWO D/A Converter, two components that split the functionality of AQWO into two

distinct systems.

With AQWO 2, the brand has once again integrated all functions into a single system, including a CD and SACD player, a D/A converter, and, as a new addition, a streaming client.

AQWO 2 – Everything you need around "digital"



A particularly remarkable feature of AQWO 2 is its flexibility. One could say that this solution is perfectly equipped to handle all tasks related to digital content, whether it comes from optical media, various source devices in the Hi-Fi chain, or from the network.

Do CDs and SACDs have a future?

For some, the question may arise whether a CD player, or even an SACD player, is still necessary in an era where streaming services are accessible anytime and anywhere.

The answer to this question, from Métronome Technologie's point of view, is a clear and unequivocal yes, without a shadow of a doubt. Indeed, Jean-Marie Clauzel, the owner of Métronome Technologie, stated in an interview with sempre-audio.at that his company would always prioritize CD and SACD. Even if no one else in the market offers such solutions, Métronome Technologie will always maintain a CD and SACD player in its catalog. This can be seen as a strong commitment to optical media.

And Métronome Technologie will not be the only one to continue prioritizing CDs and SACDs, there is no doubt about that. It is interesting to note that as quality expectations rise, the value of optical media is increasingly recognized by users.

Even though, in the minds of the general public, CDs no longer have a real place in consumer electronics—as they disappear from store shelves—they will remain an essential medium for audiophiles.

A completely reinvented product

As we have already mentioned, although the new Métronome AQWO 2 is, at first glance, clearly seen as the successor to AQWO, it is in fact an entirely new product, as the manufacturer explicitly states.

Everything, absolutely everything, is new here: starting with the chassis, the DAC processor, the entire electronics have been completely redesigned, as well as the firmware. Even details such as the new touchscreen for optimal use now set AQWO 2 apart.

What remains familiar is that, like its first-generation predecessor, AQWO 2 offers the possibility of further enhancement with a tube output stage—but we will come back to that later.

New Chassis – Proven Solid Construction

Although it may not be immediately apparent, AQWO 2 features an entirely redesigned chassis. This was necessary due to the completely reengineered electronics inside, as previously mentioned. What remains unchanged, however, is that it once again embraces Métronome Technologie's understated and timeless design language while being housed in an extremely robust casing.

According to the technical specifications, AQWO 2 measures 425 x 130 x 415 mm. Even more impressive is its weight, which is no less than 17 kg.

The origin of this weight is immediately evident: it lies in the device's proven solid construction, such as the massive aluminum front panel presented to the user. The rest of the chassis is also made of metal, with generously sized walls, and a single glance is enough to confirm it.

Top-loader with an exceptionally simple control concept



On the top, a cover is used to conceal the player, making AQWO 2 a top-loader. This cover is made of solid aluminum but slides smoothly and evenly when opening and closing. This provides a unique tactile feel, characteristic of high-end Hi-Fi systems. The same applies to the puck used to secure the CD or SACD, which, according to the manufacturer, is made of Delrin.

The front panel contains no control elements but features a generously sized screen, which, like the previous model, is a touchscreen. However, on
AQWO 2, the screen is new. It now has a 6.5-inch diagonal with a 21:9 aspect ratio, offering significantly higher resolution and an even clearer image. This makes it easier to read all

relevant information, even from a distance.

To be complete, it should be mentioned that just below the screen is the infrared diode for the remote control provided with the device, while the main power switch is located at the back.

Reading mechanism from D&M Group

Once again, the developers of the new Métronome AQWO 2 rely on a reading mechanism developed by the D&M Group, which is now known as Masimo Consumer after being part of Sound United LLC. Regardless of the current group structure, it is undeniable that these reading mechanisms are high-quality solutions, designed by experienced developers responsible for the premium Hi-Fi systems of prestigious brands such as Denon and Marantz.

The developers at Métronome Technologie use these reading mechanisms as a foundation to implement their own optimizations, thereby ensuring bit-perfect playback, as promised for both audio CDs and Super Audio CDs with the new Métronome AQWO 2.

Converter from ESS Technology Inc.

Signal processing is carried out using the D/A converter from expert ESS Technology Inc., specifically the ESS ES9038Pro DAC. This high-performance converter is capable of handling linear PCM signals up to 32-bit and 384 kHz, including DXD, as well as DSD up to DSD512. If desired, re-sampling can be applied to achieve the best possible quality.

Such high resolutions in signal processing are, of course, not really necessary for playing audio CDs or even SACDs, but they become essential when integrating AQWO 2 into the network.

Métronome AQWO 2 as a Flexible Streaming Client

One of the reasons why Métronome Technologie decided to develop a new generation of the reference AQWO system was the desire to equip it with a streaming client, thus providing users with a solution capable of handling all tasks related to digital content, with streaming now playing a central role in this field.

Although Métronome Technologie considers itself a digital specialist, one area where the company has chosen to rely entirely on existing components from other experts rather than developing its own systems is streaming. A reasonable decision, as there is little to reinvent in a streaming module when high-quality, proven solutions already exist.

Thus, the company relies on a streaming platform that primarily supports UPnP, the only true

industry standard in this field. As a result, users have a wide range of app options to easily control their device via smartphone or tablet, whether on Apple iOS or Google Android.

Thanks to the various applications, users can not only access their own content from the network but also various online services, as many streaming services are also available.

On the side of Métronome Technologie, the mConnect solution is highly recommended. This UPnP-based application for Apple iOS and Google Android is constantly updated and has proven itself over several years as a reliable and easy-to-use solution.

Thanks to the app, as previously mentioned, various streaming services are directly accessible, such as TIDAL, Qobuz, Deezer, as well as Internet radio via vTuner.

This app is also useful when you want to integrate AQWO 2 into a wireless network, as it has not only a Gigabit Ethernet RJ45 port but also a WiFi module. Integration into the wireless network can be done in just a few minutes with mConnect, without requiring any particular technical skills.

But it's not just UPnP that's available; Apple AirPlay support is also integrated. What is particularly important in the high-end hi-fi domain is that the new Métronome AQWO 2 is also Roon-ready certified, meaning it can be used directly with the media management and high-resolution multiroom audio streaming software from Roon Labs LLC.

Métronome Technologie has also established a partnership with the French software company Audirvāna SAS, whose Audirvāna solution is one of the most versatile on the market for managing audio data on a PC or Mac and playing it in high quality. Audirvāna SAS launched the "Plāys with Audirvāna" partnership program, which Métronome Technologie is participating in, meaning that gradually, French systems will receive the "Plāys with Audirvāna" certification, and probably very soon, AQWO 2.



AQWO 2 as a D/A converter

To integrate digital sources, the new Métronome AQWO 2 first offers an AES/EBU interface as well as optical and coaxial S/PDIF inputs. However, the most flexible solution remains the USB-B port, which allows using a PC or Mac directly as a source. Through this interface, it is also possible to access the full resolution of the ESS Technology Inc. DAC. For Apple macOS,

no driver is required, while for Microsoft Windows, the manufacturer provides all the necessary files.

It is worth noting that AQWO 2 also features several digital outputs, not only through a coaxial S/PDIF interface but also an AES/EBU output and even an HDMI port, allowing direct output of digital signals in I2S.

Upon request, with tube output stage

It is indeed somewhat amusing to note that, although Métronome Technologie considers itself a specialist in digital solutions and has built a particular reputation in this field, it offers an option on AQWO 2 that was not necessarily expected: a tube-based output stage.

Yes, the solution that Métronome Technologie developed as a reference system for all things "digital" is, upon request, equipped with a tube output stage.

From Métronome Technologie's point of view, this is nothing special. On the contrary, the company approaches it pragmatically, without dogmas, opting for solutions that, as a whole, deliver the best possible result. And for the exceptional sound we aim to achieve with AQWO 2, the optional tube output stage serves as the final touch.

Whether the output stage is transistor-based or tube-based, AQWO 2's analog signals can be output either in balanced XLR or unbalanced Cinch.

Sophisticated power supply design

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the developers have also chosen a particularly sophisticated power supply for AQWO 2, as the company considers it an essential component for achieving the best possible sound quality.

The foundation consists of a toroidal-core transformer with Schaffner filters, and the various system components are powered by no fewer than ten individual voltage regulators.

In practice

We have already had the privilege of enjoying many outstanding solutions from Métronome Technologie in our listening studio, and this time, we can already say that it was yet another particularly special experience.

The fact that the Métronome AQWO series is the product line that the French high-end Hi-Fi manufacturer considers its benchmark is immediately apparent in every aspect of the new AQWO 2. Everything is perfectly tuned: the design, the luxurious feel stemming from flawless

craftsmanship, and finally, the control concept, which is reduced to the absolute essentials.

It’s a true statement when a customer is offered a solution where, in the simplest case, they just need to open the top lid, place a CD, gently close the compartment, and playback starts instantly—allowing them to enjoy music of exceptional quality. This is true luxury, and that’s exactly what AQWO 2 delivers.

On this topic, we can actually return to the previously posed, somewhat provocative question: is a CD player still necessary in the age of streaming?

AQWO 2 impressively proves that a simple CD holds enormous potential, just waiting to be fully unlocked by the right playback device.



It was astonishing to hear the sound quality CDs can offer, with a richness of details, dynamics, and, ultimately, a vitality and power that this often-overlooked format truly provides.

The fact that the reproduction quality with SACDs on AQWO 2 is even at a higher level wasn't that surprising. What truly amazed us was seeing how the situation compares when directly contrasted with streaming.

What we want to highlight here may upset some, as those who settle for streaming music must be aware that they are not choosing the best quality available.

It is indeed sometimes almost frightening to realize how poor the quality of music streamed through common platforms can be, as demonstrated by a direct comparison made possible by versatile and flexible reference-class systems like AQWO 2.

We don't want to get into fundamental debates; in the end, it doesn't really matter, because what counts is the best listening quality you want to enjoy.

It is indeed undeniable that music enthusiasts, often with a true collector's passion, have long owned the best available: the original CD of a work, before it was compressed to the extreme to maximize volume, or perhaps an exceptional XRCD remaster, a special SACD edition. And these versions often far surpass anything streaming services, focused solely on mass appeal, can offer.

This obviously doesn't mean that streaming can't also offer high quality. Quite the opposite, when AQWO 2 receives the appropriate data, it can deliver music via the network with brilliance. High-resolution audio then becomes a true auditory delight, and terms like "Studio

Master Quality" suddenly take on real meaning, far beyond mere marketing slogans.

You've probably already guessed where we're going with this: with a solution like AQWO 2, you're perfectly equipped to freely choose the medium you want to use, in order to achieve the ultimate goal: true musical pleasure.

Once again, Métronome Technologie has succeeded in accomplishing what has always been the intent of the French designers of the Métronome AQWO series systems: to offer solutions versatile enough to perfectly adapt to the user's needs, whether they choose CD, SACD, or streaming. In all cases,
AQWO 2 is the perfect tool for this.

The AQWO 2 provided to us, with its optional tube output, delivered such a captivating performance, rich in details, that it truly excited us more and more with every passing hour. Many of you, dear readers, are probably familiar with those moments of joy, when selecting track after track, songs you've likely listened to hundreds of times, and you marvel at the fact that you've never heard them this way before.

It is therefore clear that the Métronome AQWO 2 receives an unreserved recommendation, with a perfect score.

Price et availability

The new Métronome AQWO 2 is already available at specialized retailers, offering customers a choice of three finishes. There are the standard black and silver versions, but the novelty is that Métronome Technologie now offers a version with a black chassis and a gold front, complete with a matching gold-colored mechanism cover.

In any case, all three versions are available at the same price of €19,990. If you'd like to add the optional tube output stage, it is offered at an additional cost of €2,190.

We think that...

AQWO, this name was inspired by the ancient Greek verb akouo, which means "to hear well," a perfect choice to represent the range that Métronome Technologie considers its flagship series. With AQWO 2, the company offers a completely redesigned system compared to its predecessor, built not only for CD and SACD playback, but also as a streaming client, while providing exceptional digital-to-analog conversion for external sources. There is no doubt that Métronome Technologie is setting a new standard here: a precision instrument that forms the ideal foundation for a top-tier musical experience.