MÉTRONOME

# TEST & REVIEW

# AQWO 2

## Hybrid DAC - SACD/CD - Streamer




Audiotechnique

Audiotechnique

Dec 16, 2024

# Métronome AQWO 2 CD/SACD Player, DAC and Streamer: Exquisite in Every Detail, Love at First Listen




As digital audio keeps evolving, streaming devices have multiplied in recent years. Choosing among them can be difficult, especially for listeners with a large CD collection. For them, sound quality on CD remains the priority when replacing a source, with streaming coming second.

As an experienced reviewer, I pay close attention to soundstage, imaging precision, transparency, detail, density, bass, and the balance between tonal signature and musicality. These criteria are second nature to me. Yet the value of an audio component cannot be judged by absolute rules alone: from the listener's point of view, it simply has to meet their own needs.

These considerations guide the choice of any new component, and they frame this presentation of AQWO 2, the CD/SACD player from Métronome Technologie.

## Love at First Listen

I first heard AQWO 2 in a friend's listening room, and its analog charm won me over immediately. Voices carried the emotional richness of native DSD, with high density, a precisely defined three-dimensional soundstage and remarkable clarity. Violins were crystalline and seemed to float in the air, the upright piano had a soft, flowing timbre, the bass was full and well articulated, and the double bass sounded vibrant and generous. The attack and rebound of the percussion were captivating.

Out of curiosity, I looked at the cabling: my host was using Increcable cables from the United States, which I know well for their neutrality. The exceptional sound was in fact coming from the tube output stage of AQWO 2. Each channel uses a 6922 tube, and my host had replaced the original tubes with carefully selected ones to fine-tune the sound.

At the time, I was already thinking about replacing my own source. My CD/SACD player, from the same brand, had been with me for more than ten years. Despite several upgrades, its sound had lost some of its freshness, and even with careful tuning it lacked the touch of emotion that truly moves the listener. AQWO 2 won me over from the very first listen.

From the first track, I was completely absorbed. I was then using an Auralic server with a network player, which delivered a very clean sound. Once I connected AQWO 2 to my network via Ethernet for streaming, the result was even better. Should my interest in streaming grow, I can always consider upgrading the streaming player later. That listening session convinced me to change my system.

## Product Range



From what I could learn, French company Métronome Technologie has deep expertise in digital audio. Founded in 1987, it has always focused on CD players. It later began adding vacuum tubes to the output stage to give the signal a smoother, more analog character, which became a signature of the brand's CD players.

In 2012, the company was taken over by Jean-Marie Clauzel. Under his leadership, the product range was restructured, and the Kalista brand became an independent label dedicated to the high-end market.

Métronome currently offers three product ranges:

CLASSICA: designed for newcomers to high-end audio.
Digital Sharing: dedicated to streaming.
AQWO: the high-end range, including AQWO 2 (CD/SACD player, DAC and streamer), AQWO 2+, t|AQWO 2 (SACD transport) and c|AQWO 2 (DAC).

## An Essential Soul

The tube output stage of AQWO 2 is an option that can be added later, either by the owner or through a dealer. I ordered mine with the tube output, factory-installed before shipping.

Admittedly, when you see the additional external power supply and the extra cost it involves, you may wonder whether it is worth it. In reality, the tube output is the soul of Métronome, and going without it would be a real loss.




About a month after ordering, I received the unit in perfect condition, in double packaging. AQWO 2 comes with its power supply, a remote control and a disc clamp made of Delrin, a

polyacetal known for its strength, stability and vibration-damping properties. The clamp reduces the load on the servo mechanism and limits unnecessary corrections from the servo circuit.

The underside of the clamp has a slight dome that fits precisely onto the spindle of the disc platter. A spiral antenna is also supplied for wireless use.

## Design



AQWO 2 weighs 17 kg and measures 415 mm wide, 130 mm high and 425 mm deep. Its standard width makes it easy to fit on any audio rack. The chassis is available in silver or black, with a gold finish also offered.

AQWO 2 features the longest top-loading tray Métronome has ever designed. The lid opens and closes smoothly, and the transport mechanism, made by D&M in Japan, reads both CD and SACD. A dedicated blue LED improves laser positioning for more accurate disc reading.

The sliding top-loader is designed for reliability, durability and excellent stability. The 7-inch color touchscreen on the front panel offers a clean, intuitive interface. It shows the active input, track time and much more. In streaming mode, it can also display the bit rate and sampling frequency.

Touching the top-left corner of the screen opens the settings menus:

- ✓ Digital: signal upsampling (PCM up to 384 kHz, DSD up to DSD256), DoP on the S/PDIF output, and full MQA decoding.
- ✓ DAC: choice of eight digital filters, analog output level (1.4 V, 2.5 V or 3 V), and activation of the tube output.
- ✓ Stream: metadata display, Wi-Fi settings, gapless playback, and display settings (screen brightness, five background themes).
- ✓ Other: serial number, firmware version and streaming board number.

All functions are available from the touchscreen, making AQWO 2 quick and pleasant to use, even with the remote control.

## Connections

The rear panel is clearly organized by zones. From left to right: main power switch, IEC mains inlet, and digital inputs on AES/EBU (XLR), S/PDIF (RCA), USB and Toslink.
For streaming, AQWO 2 connects to your network via Ethernet or Wi-Fi. A separate USB port is reserved for maintenance. Digital outputs include AES/EBU (XLR), S/PDIF (RCA) and $I^2S$ over HDMI, and both balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) analog outputs are provided. The chassis rests on three high-density silicone isolation feet that improve stability and reduce unwanted vibrations.

## Inside AQWO 2

Removing the top cover reveals the internal layout.
On the right sits the shielded power supply section, with an upper part dedicated to the tube circuit and a linear power supply. Below it, three small isolated modules handle voltage regulation and further reduce interference.
On the left, the conversion stage is built around an ES9039MPRO DAC chip, selected by Métronome after consultation with Jean-Marie Clauzel. This DAC delivers a precise, transparent sound rich in detail.

AQWO 2 also benefits from highly effective vibration control and carefully balanced weight distribution, limiting the influence of vibrations on sound quality.

## Performance and Innovation



AQWO 2 combines SACD playback and streaming in a single component. Its linear power supply (VULCAN eXtreme) provides stable current and drastically lowers electrical noise. With clear gains in dynamics, bass detail and soundstage width, AQWO 2 reaches an outstanding level of performance.

To optimize the analog output, AQWO 2 includes an advanced Noise-Trap filter, along with INCREDIBLE isolation feet that efficiently absorb mechanical vibrations.

Beyond SACD playback and streaming, AQWO 2 handles LAN and USB connections with ease, ensuring seamless network integration. With its refined design and exceptional sound, AQWO 2 stands as a reference for discerning audiophiles.

# Conclusion

This concludes an in-depth look at the Métronome Technologie AQWO 2 CD/SACD player, designed for high-end home listening.

To get the most from AQWO 2, it is worth investing in a high-quality power cable, whether silver or gold-plated. For optimal sound, try different tubes and pay attention to cabling. As described above, AQWO 2 fulfils every expectation, combining detail and dynamics. Rather than chasing extreme resolution or maximum frequency extension, AQWO 2 favours natural musicality and faithful emotional expression, offering a different, deeply immersive experience.

## Technical Specifications

- Network: 1 Ethernet port, built-in Wi-Fi
- Digital inputs: USB Type B (32-bit/384 kHz), S/PDIF 75 Ω (RCA), AES/EBU 110 Ω (XLR)
- Digital outputs: $I^2S$ over HDMI, S/PDIF 75 Ω (RCA), AES/EBU 110 Ω (XLR)
- Analog outputs: unbalanced 3 V RMS at 0 dB, 47 kΩ (RCA); balanced 3 V RMS at 0 dB, 600 Ω (XLR)
- Option: tube output stage
- Mains voltage: 120/240 V AC, 50/60 Hz
- Power consumption: 40 VA
- Dimensions (W x H x D): 425 x 130 x 425 mm
- Weight: 17 kg