MÉTRONOME

TEST & REVIEW

DST - DSC mini

Transport CD - DAC



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Métronome DST + DSC mini: unlocking the supreme value of CD

Founded in 1987, Métronome Technologie saw its founder Dominique Giner decide in 2014 to bring his personal entrepreneurial activities to an end. In the summer of that year, after the company was handed over to its new partner-operator Jean Marie Clauzel, Métronome faced the wave of renewed interest in music playback with an entirely new posture. Today, beyond setting company policy according to Jean Marie Clauzel's innovative vision and launching, under Kalista, the in-house brand that has evolved into an independent high-end label, the Kalista DreamPlay XC source processing system, which brings together CD/SACD playback, network music streaming, DAC and digital preamplifier functions in a single unit, the company has also, in response to market demand, successively developed for Métronome the three major product ranges AQWO, Classica and Digital Sharing.









Since each range simultaneously offers a variety of different component pairings and choices, music lovers can therefore select, from among the various products across the different ranges, the equipment that meets their individual requirements, according to their own domestic environment and listening habits. On this occasion, using DST pure CD laser transport newly released by Métronome together with DSC mini decoder caters especially to that group of audiophiles who own large CD collections and cast their vote in favour of the physical disc!

Never chasing the new at the expense of the old110

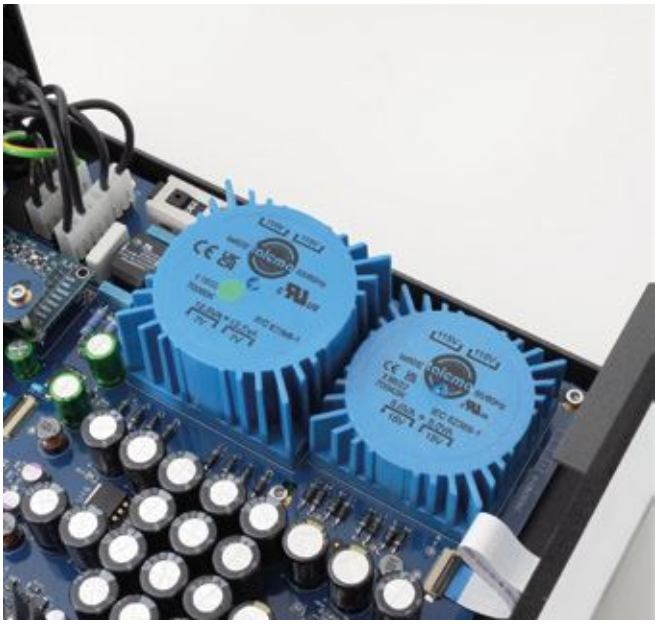
DST, from the Digital Sharing range, arrived only after DSS 2, the network music player of the same range released as early as 2019 and upgraded into its second generation in 2022. Its aim is to give consumers, alongside their embrace of streaming, one further alternative source option, so that from this moment on, whether they are devotees of the physical disc or of network music, users can each take what suits them and let the distinctive appeal of DST or DSS 2 come through in the particular strengths each possesses. This is simply because, under more than thirty years of rigorous oversight in the research and manufacture of high-end audio, whichever category of Métronome source component it may be, the core technology derives from the latest generation of Kalista, and all of them share without distinction the fruits of the same working team's research in digital technology over many years. Therefore, whether the Métronome product is of a higher or lower tier, its quality and performance absolutely cannot be overlooked. Even the Digital Sharing range, slender in build at a mere 250 x 70 x 250 mm, is in fact just as loaded as the high-end products with digital refinements of very high technical content. Each model possesses its own hard-to-replace merits and appeal!

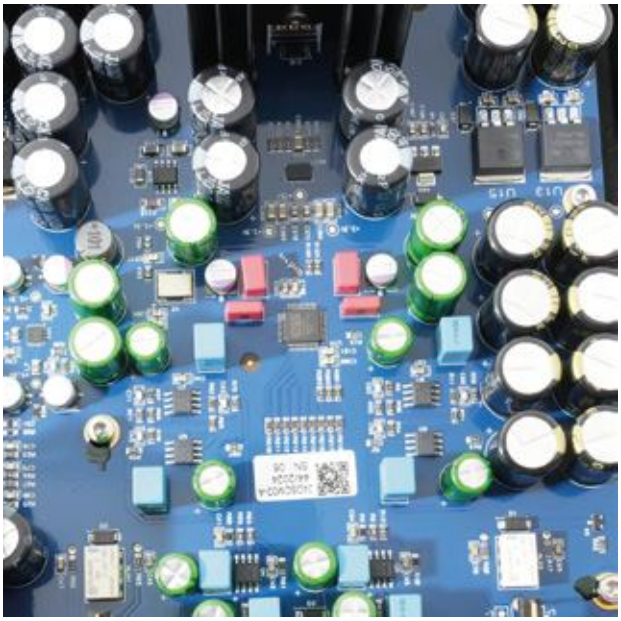
Contemporary styling with an industrial character

DST's chassis is precision-crafted from stainless steel and aluminium alloy, its styling echoing that of DSC Mini and DSS 2 to consistent effect. The range's distinctive alloy front panel breaks with tradition by adopting a vertically arranged rectangular structure of multiple forms resembling independent storage hard drives, making the three contemporary products look for all the world like a RAID memory storage unit. Among them, the DSS 2, which lacks an LCD display and is fitted only with function switches, is the most alike; the DSC Mini decoding system, whose panel is equipped with a 3.5-inch display, comes next; while the DST laser transport, newly added to the range this year, only dispels any visual misapprehension or illusion once the large screen and the Slot-Loading disc slot sit side by side. Paired with a display of 480x128 resolution capable of showing text clearly and precisely, it brings DST users adjustment and operating functions that are more readily mastered. A design that values performance and effect while retaining clean, spare lines about the body allows every Digital Sharing product of industrial character to present, under refined manufacturing craftsmanship, an ineffable sense of French contemporary style.









Equipped with a precise, compact structure

In terms of functional equipment, DST uses the JPSL-33 slot-loading transport mechanism from Austria's SUOS-HiFi (formerly StreamUnlimited Optical Storage; in 2024 StreamUnlimited spun off all its CD component business to SUOS-HiFi GmbH, while StreamUnlimited, founded in 2006 by former Philips personnel, was itself a company that came into being in response to the closure of Philips' optical disc storage division). Its design characteristic is that the transport mechanism can be installed directly onto the chassis base, with no moving parts (such as a sub-chassis) existing in between, which helps achieve vibration-free, noise-free CD playback operation and ensures that the DST is excellent in both signal-reading accuracy and stability. The CD servo and function control microprocessor system is placed above the slot-loading transport mechanism and the circuit board developed by Métronome specifically for the DST. One can see that an NXP SAA7826HL decoding front end and an AMTEK AM5810FM signal amplification chip are used here in conjunction with the

JPSL-33 mechanism. As for the DST's resampling system, power supply and audio circuits, these are each kept separate, so as to ensure that no mutual interference arises.

Output of up to 384kHz or DSD256 data via I²S

DSC mini decoder paired with DST on this occasion was in fact developed specifically to receive native high-resolution digital music files from the I^2S output of the manufacturer's own DSS 2. DSC mini's decoding system therefore did not stint in carefully selecting the ESS Sabre ES9026PRO DAC. Using DST pure CD transport and wishing to make full use of DSC mini's potential, one naturally needs to adopt the I^2S interface for the connection. This is because, whether it be the CD's original PCM 44.1kHz/16bit data or digital audio upsampled to 384kHz or DSD256, so long as the two are linked by an HDMI cable, the music information picked up and processed by DST can be conveyed completely and seamlessly by way of the I^2S interface. Even digital audio upsampled to DSD256 can all be transmitted straight through to DSC mini decoder without any detour and issued natively, unaltered. However, if one instead uses AES/EBU, S/PDIF or Toslink to link the two, the situation is just the same as connecting DSC mini with DSS 2: DST + DSC mini will go through an additional layer of data conversion procedure by way of DoP, and whether transmitted by AES/EBU or SPDIF, the maximum reaches only DSD128 and cannot attain the DSD256 level, while Toslink stops further back still at the 192kHz and DSD64 level, unlike the I^2S transmission method which reaches the DSD256 level. This is perhaps one of the reasons why DST does not even provide a Toslink digital output.

The complementary effect of two swords joined as one



To have high-resolution music data processed by DST expressed natively, one needs to enter DST's Setting procedure by remote control and activate DST's data resampling function via the Sample Rate function. In this way one can freely select PCM or DSD mode according to one's personal taste in

listening to music, and once DSC mini, ideally matched to it, has obtained the relevant data, the precise processing programme developed by Métronome specifically for this purpose can bring the complementary effect into play. This is simply because DSC mini, which places very great emphasis on power supply and voltage regulation systems, employs several groups of LDO high-PSRR independent regulation and rectification of excellent linearity, including onsemi 7915ACD2T, and is furnished with precise working circuits, ideally coordinating every section so as to produce a mutually reinforcing effect. At the same time, Métronome has moreover specially selected audio-grade capacitors to match with it, which helps reduce electrical interference and signal noise problems to a minimum and ensures that data processing attains its finest state under clean power. Among these, the two extremely high-efficiency Talema toroidal transformers used are further sealed in resin. The first toroidal transformer supplies power to the digital circuits, while the other supplies power to the analogue output stage and the I/V conversion circuit of the DAC output. The high-efficiency, low-loss design naturally generates particularly little heat, which is especially advantageous for digital products requiring high-speed computation. Moreover, DSC mini additionally uses two pairs of op-amps at the analogue output stage, converting the positive and negative signals from the DAC's left and right channels into voltage output, ensuring information is abundant and energy plentiful.





Offering diversified sound mode options

Since the sonic performance of DST + DSC mini combination will differ to a certain extent with the resampling mode selected and with resolution, audiophiles absolutely need to choose with care. Put simply in dichotomous terms, the sound quality presented in DSD mode is comparatively rounded, smooth and fine, and rich in musicality, while PCM mode sounds richer in detail with a particularly strong sense of texture. Personally I tend to use PCM mode most often, and it is not necessarily essential to activate its resampling function either, simply because under the precise reading and decoding provided by DST, the unaltered 44.1kHz/16bit effect of CD itself is in fact sufficient to deliver a highly faithful sound. And after upsampling processing is carried out on the original signal, this theoretically helps restore the details of the sound waveform, making it possible for the sound to become harmonious and refined, for the separation between instruments and

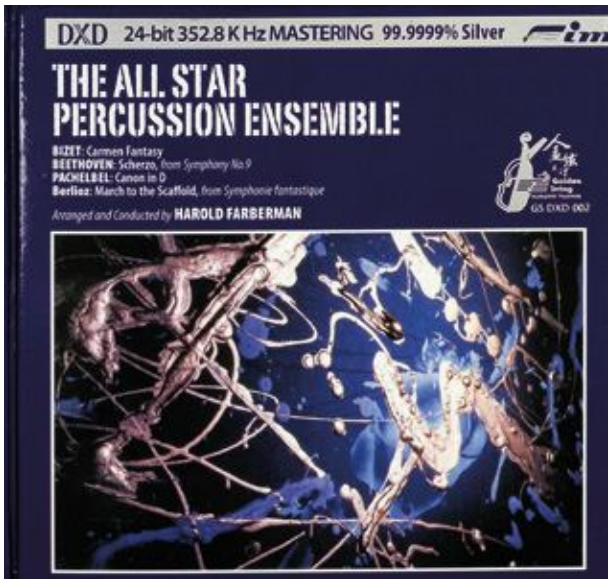
voices to be better, for lines to be clearer and the sense of space stronger. Most importantly, the Métronome upsampling technology used within DST is indeed quite out of the ordinary, being able to nurture a sonic performance that tends more towards the natural and flowing while adding absolutely no colouration or digital noise. DST therefore offers a large number of Sample Rate resampling options, which does indeed help bring a more diversified presentation to precisely processed music signals.

Just as on this occasion, with DST + DSC mini paired with a Dan D'Agostino Momentum pre/power amplifier used to drive Dynaudio Evidence Platinum loudspeakers, the breadth of frequency response and the magnitude of dynamic variation presented were such as to make one exclaim in delighted surprise. This Métronome separates laser disc player, only the size of a mooncake box and very easily overlooked, was able without the slightest difficulty to spur into full play the potential possessed by pre/power amplifiers of far higher price, at every moment able to drive out a performance full of impetus yet without any loss of musicality. The well-balanced yet expansive and natural soundstage was extremely persuasive. On replaying〈Three Kingdoms〉by Kodo Taiko-za, it reproduced with immediacy and vividly in three dimensions the taiko sounds distributed at different positions of the soundstage. The firm, powerful drum sound came forth with commanding vigour, its form and outline particularly cohesive, and the moment the large taiko positioned in the middle sounded, it captured one's mind and spirit tightly in an instant, simply because the low frequencies reaching straight to the earth's core were, in terms of both sense of volume and shattering power, such as to make one marvel. Moreover, the low frequencies continuously descending further also set off against the bright but non-piercing shinobue (Japanese short flute) sound. Under the broad frequency response of this Métronome separates laser disc player, majestic momentum and varied tone colour came together as one seamlessly, and paired with the passage of shamisen playing full of flavour that followed, the overall sound full of vitality brought together physical energy and endlessly varied technique, giving fullest expression to this Japanese cultural performing art that fuses strength, rhythm, movement and spiritual power!



Driving a musical beauty of swaying grace

Sound firm and rich in sense of space, Métronome reproduced the four selected classical pieces given percussion treatment within《The All Star Percussion Ensemble》, conducted and arranged by Harold Farberman. The interlacing sounds of the percussion instruments were presented three-dimensionally, with everything great and small left out. Sound of



extremely low noise floor, pure and free of impurity, let the details within flash and gleam while remaining interlocked thread by thread. The firm, commanding forte passages surged and welled up, appearing resonant and powerful. One could see that Métronome combines firmness and gentleness in equal measure, its aptly judged presentation making the dramatic tension of every work still more taut, as though swords were drawn and bows at full stretch. As for Jennifer Warnes' 〈Bird on a Wire〉 and 〈Famous Blue Raincoat〉, mixed by George Massenburg, these were strong in texture yet elegant in style, both performing with exceptional ease and liveliness under Métronome's free and unrestrained sound, full of energy yet not lacking in musicality. Among them, 〈Bird on a Wire〉, which combines instruments of all kinds such as jazz drum kit, bass guitar, saxophone, shaker and electronic synthesiser, was like a fresh breeze carrying spirits soaring, simply because the positions occupied by every instrument were all presented in orderly fashion front to back with distinct layering, and never turned muddled and indistinct into a confused mass. The well-ordered three-dimensional layering effectively let Jennifer Warnes' singing, positioned in front of the instruments, and the backing vocals placed further back in the soundstage, be equally firm and clear. Paired with the overall atmosphere created by the electronic synthesiser, judged just right, it made this work seem still more radiant in appeal. As for 〈Famous Blue Raincoat〉, accompanied by piano combined with double bass, cello, viola and violin, it naturally and fluently conveyed a musical beauty of swaying grace, overflowing with feeling.



CONCLUSION:

Not a few audiophiles still today speak with relish of the first-generation Kalista pure CD transport from French-made Métronome. Therefore, although Métronome has now released network streaming music players and SACD machine options of quite refined and mature design, Métronome has in fact not forgotten the mark it originally left in successfully breaking into the hearts of high-end audiophiles. Now, Métronome has passed down this manufacturing spirit of steadfastly holding to the CD camp into DST, yet in keeping with the changing times it has simplified the styling and structure, attempting instead a different,

simple and easily accommodated style to make its way into modern homes. Therefore, within an aluminium alloy chassis only the size of a mooncake box, DST, like the manufacturer's high-end products, densely packs in electronic components carefully selected by Métronome specifically for this purpose and applies specially developed precision circuitry. Moreover, advancing with the times and closely following the trajectory of the age, it is furnished with an I^2S interface capable of conveying high-resolution data straight through to DSC mini of the same range, so that digital audio upsampled to PCM 384kHz as well as DSD256 can now, by way of I^2S, exert a direct processing effect upon DSC mini with no data detour of any kind, bringing digital music playback of particular precision and effectiveness.

In fact, Métronome means metronome, and the beat is a key element making up a musical work. Métronome Technologie, which specialises in developing digital source systems of all kinds, took Métronome as its brand at its founding, and one believes this too was drawn from this original meaning. Therefore, whether it be the highest-tier production or the spare styling design conveniently conceived for contemporary homes, in order to hold fast to this manufacturing conviction Métronome takes the precise delivery of the music signal as the design principle for all its products. Among them, DST, the newly added member of the Digital Sharing range, brings together in one crucible all the old and new technologies of digital music playback systems, and through the refined CD-DA technology of the Red Book mode, the professional audio CD standard of Métronome Technologie's thirty-odd years, reopens the supreme value of CD, redefining the pleasure and value of listening to CD with Métronome's consistent high quality and fine sound.

Métronome DST (Silver) specifications:

- Power consumption: 21W
- Dimensions: 250 x 70 x 250mm (L x H x W)
- Weight: 4.7kg
- Retail price: HK$49,500
- Sole agent: Sound Concepts Ltd. 23863113
- Audition venue: (Central) Sound of Music.

Métronome DSC mini (Silver) specifications:

- Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz (±0.3dB)
- Signal-to-noise ratio: 124dB
- THD+N total harmonic distortion: -110dB
- Power consumption: 15W
- Dimensions: 250x70x250mm (L x H x W)
- Weight: 4.8kg
- Retail price: HK$48,500
- Sole agent: Sound Concepts Ltd. 23863113
- Audition venue: (Central) Sound of Music. 25241881