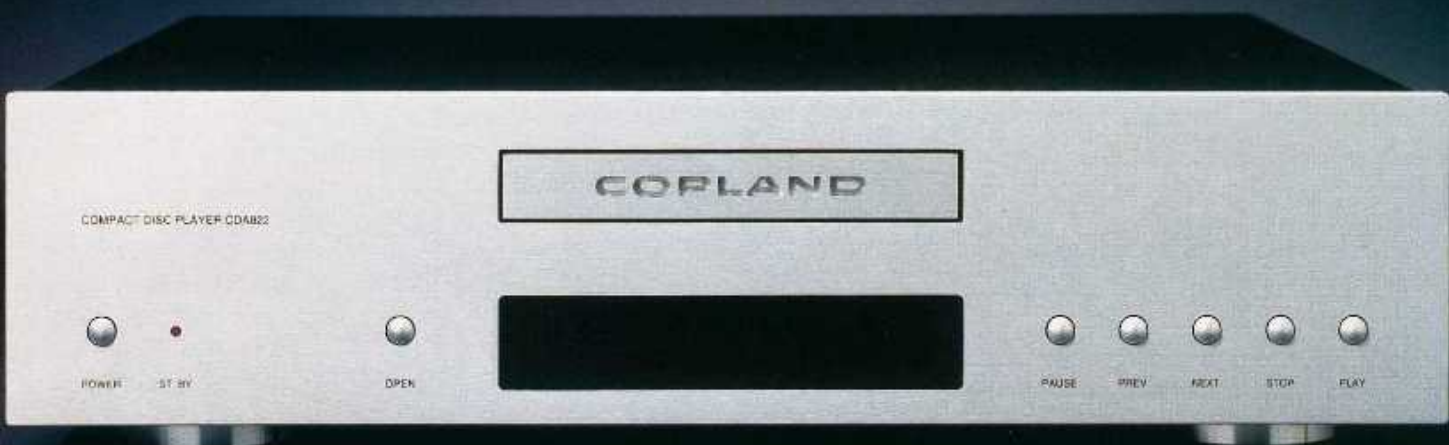


Copland CDA822 CD player



Copland sound and style make a statement below £2000

PRICE	£1600
SUPPLIER	Absolute Sounds
CONTACT	020 8971 3909

Just when you think you can consign something to the 'dustbin of history', along comes another cause for a rethink. Wiser heads than mine assure me that purist audiophiles will continue to buy conventional, two-channel CD players for decades, just as they continue to spin vinyl even unto CD's 20th anniversary. And yet, my logical side says, in the dawning of the age of SACD and DVD-A: why buy a CD player for £1600 when that will pay for a good universal player? But I hadn't reckoned on the sheer sweetness of the latest from Copland.

Copland's history as a manufacturer of CD players is slightly patchy, memory telling me that one or two machines issued by this Danish company deserved entry to Crufts. Be that as it may, Copland has gone through a period of complete rejuvenation, its entire range overhauled, a range which, yes, even addresses multi-channel. So maybe Copland is no different from the rest of us, circling in wait-and-see mode. While we pass time as the dust settles (and I am firmly of the camp that believes that every player sold a few years hence *will* be a universal player, for it would be stupid and self-defeating to be otherwise), there remains a

market for *serious* two-channel CD players.

Being of Northern European origin, Copland believes in clean front panels and a less-is-more approach. Thus, some of you will fall in love with the CDA822 just because of its minimalism. There's not a whole helluva lot more that they could have left off this player, the unit being Spartan to the point of masochism. And yet despite a near-total dearth of connection options, the Copland provides balanced analogue output — go figure. Clearly, these Danes are serious about the audio performance above all else. But let's back up, starting with what the unit does and doesn't provide.

Across the front, the Copland bears an On/Off button accompanied by a red LED which lights up when the player is in standby mode. Next are

Around the back, you're in for a shock if you expect a full complement of socketry for analogue and digital needs, as would be the norm at this price point. Instead, all you get are left and right analogue phono outputs, a single phono socket for coaxial digital output, the aforementioned XLRs for balanced output, the primary mains switch and an IEC three-pin mains lead socket. Despite the absence of TosLink, AT&T, BNC and XLR digital outputs, the unit is fitted with 12V remote triggers for remote operation with any pre-amp with 12V switching.

Copland has housed the unit in a truly substantial case, measuring 108 x 430 x 393mm (hwd) and weighing a hefty 9kg. The mass and solidity impart the sort of confidence experienced by silver disc spinners with much

The mass and solidity of the CDA822 impart the sort of confidence experienced by silver disc spinners with much higher price tags

the Tray Open button, the comprehensive display (showing track number and the time in total, remaining and elapsed forms) and five buttons for Pause, Previous, Next, Stop and Play. The supplied generic remote deals with programming, display on/off, display time modes, and so on. Above the display is the tray aperture, with a well-machined metal end-piece.

higher price tags. This machine can pass the same tyre-kicking test as the best that TAG, Linn, Denon and Sony can offer in the £1500–3000 bracket, and that's high praise indeed. As for the looks, well, Copland has yet to issue a product that's less than handsome, so the vibe is positive even before you switch it on.

Quite why I don't know, but the Copland



Minimalist controls add to the air of style and sophistication

really does need to warm up for at least an hour from cold; *ie*, straight out of the box. It explains why the unit features a true standby mode. If switched off by the front panel rather than the primary switch on the back, you get optimum performance almost instantaneously.

There are two other concerns you should also address before listening to the Copland, besides choosing single-ended or balanced, which might be determined by your pre-amp. First, the Copland benefits from due care and attention to positioning, despite its robust case. While it was immune to proximity to other components, and even AC cables draped across it caused no problems, it sounded more controlled and crisp

The music was in the room, airy and natural, more reminiscent of the finest open-reel tape playback than anything I've heard via laser

when positioned on a Mana rack, or either the SAP Relaxa 1 or 3. Second, the Copland is so precise in its delivery and so clean that it will turn you into a cable fetishist; its exquisite refinement coincides exactly with the areas where high-end cables differ, most notably in the handling of high-end transients and textures. With single-ended use, I preferred Siltech Compass Lake; for balanced, the Transparent Music Link. If you're interested in this machine take your own leads to the shop for the demo.

Completing the systems were a Marantz 1060 integrated amp of circa 1973 vintage, the McIntosh C2200/MC2120 and Jadis JC8/JA50 pre-/power combinations, Wilson WATT Puppy System 7 and Spendor LS3/5A (11 ohm). I also tried the Copland in a multi-channel system comprising Lexicon MC12 pre-amp/processor,

Theta Intrepid and MartinLogan's Ascent, but strictly in stereo mode.

When you assess the presentation and performance of this player you come up with no complaints. The CDA822, in spite of the almost naked cleanliness of the sound, is a soothing player more reminiscent of good analogue than good digital. (For those who think the latter is an oxymoron, my sincere apologies.)

Take, for example, the way it handles the Temptations' 'Happy

People' from *A Song For You* from the 2-on-1-CD with Masterpiece. It's a classic: Motown's take on '70s funk, naturally surpassing everything else in the genre and showing the upstarts who's boss. The bottom end can sound aggressive, the cymbals too sizzling, the whucka-whucka guitar a bit muffled and the horn accents just get lost in the mix. Through the Copland, every single instrument — and this is real wall-of-sound stuff — has its own little envelope, yet the lot meshes into a seamless whole. Move onto the next track, 'Glasshouse', with snappy *über*-funk bass playing and percussion with gut-bursting snap, and you're reminded of fat-ass moving-coils. Above all, five voices blending to perfection.

No kidding: I could be describing a turntable package of no mean pedigree.

So what did it prove? That the Copland can be fed some potentially fatiguing recordings and render them wholly agreeable — *without* sacrificing a single detail. Onto less electric recordings, like John Hammond's stonking new release *Ready For Love* on Back Porch Records [72435-80599-2-2]. Here, you can really sense the space; try his take of the old Stones' gem, 'The Spider And The Fly', with a six-man line-up in which every single musician can be heard doing his thing, and yet there's never a sensation of disparate parts. [This has nothing to do with this CDA822 review, but I beg you to check out the Hammond CD, a sublime blend of blues, R&B and honky-tonk, with a band of the five-star variety.]

Here's how good a player this Copland CDA822 is: with precious few exceptions, I loathe the music of Sondheim, and I can't stand Mandy Patinkin as an actor, let alone as a singer. And yet I couldn't take my ears off *Mandy Patinkin Sings Sondheim* on Nonesuch, Patinkin recorded with just a piano behind him. To me this is what McDonalds is to a Parisian, a recipe *pour gerber*. But I was gripped by the sound. Chilling? It was in the room, airy and natural and more reminiscent of the finest open-reel tape playback than anything heard via laser.

If there's still a race on to produce The Last Great CD-only Player, this one is a shoe-in for the under £2000 category.

WORDS KEN KESSLER

TECHNOLOGY

The power supply has two separate transformers, one for the digital circuitry and the other for the audio signal; two serial-coupled mains input filters reduce the incoming noise. The analogue audio output power supply is a 15V triple regulated type and separate regulators are used for the left and right channels. Copland also installed high value bypass capacitors, paralleled with polypropylene types.

For the digital signal processing, Copland uses a master clock for the system supplied by a 'very stable' discrete-type oscillator with very low phase noise; the buffer has its own separate power supply. The master clock is used for the CD transport, the sample rate converter and the D/A converter, the 44.1kHz digital signal from the transport upsampled to a 176.4kHz, 24-bit signal while also removing jitter.

Copland chose an Analogue Devices' AD1853 DAC, a dual-differential current output design that supports 196kHz/24-bit sampling. Copland used it because it feels 'that it is an effective way to keep noise, crosstalk and distortion at low levels, because differential architecture cancels out most distortions and noise'.

Analogue signal processing is accomplished without global feedback, and a discrete double-differential current-to-voltage converter is used. Double transistors cancel the output offset from the DAC (0.5mV), while ensuring temperature independency. Copland has used surface mounting of the transistors, while conventional transistors are used at the output buffers. The output is capacitor-coupled with large polypropylene types.

KEY FEATURES

- Open, natural, 'un-digital' sound
- Stylish design with minimalist controls
- Balanced analogue output as standard