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Nordic charm



Copland has performed far more than mere cosmetic surgery on its latest CD player

PRODUCT Copland CDA823

TYPE CD player

PRICE £1,750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x12x39cm

● Weight: 9kg ● Analogue outputs: single-ended phono, balanced XLR ● Digital outputs: coaxial electrical ● System remote control

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🌐 www.copland.dk

Copland's distinctive Scandinavian electronics are remarkably consistent in terms of styling; the look is as steady as the proverbial rock. The 823 may not be as massive as some of its predecessors, but it has the same four-square front plate and the bare minimum of controls for a front panel. It was one of the first brands to use silver front plates too, something that is the norm now but which was very unusual in the early 1990s when Copland first emerged.

The latest CD player from Olé Möller's Copland brand is a little more sexy-looking than its predecessors (like the CDA822). This is thanks to the unusual green backlighting on the front panel transport controls and the computer style dot matrix display, which states the amount of tracks and length of each disc as standard. It even tells you which firmware version it's running, in the style of Meridian players – in this case it's version seven.

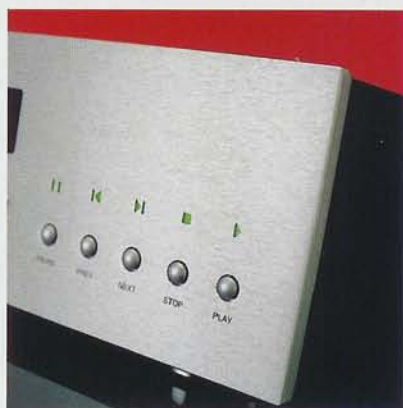
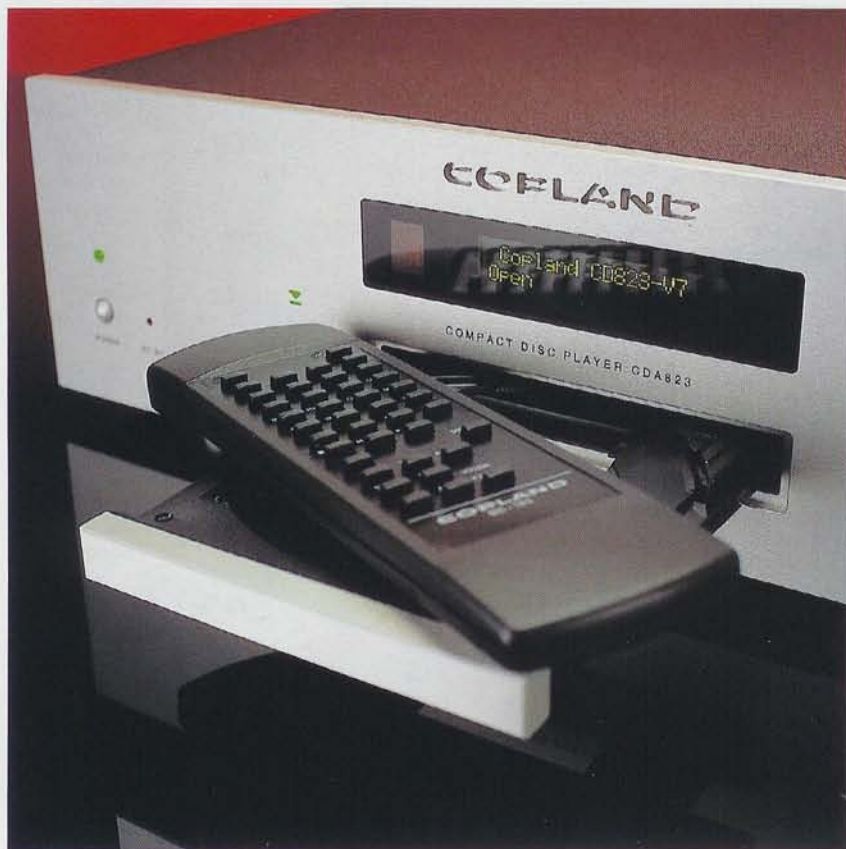
Unfortunately, this level of style is not extended to the remote, which is a comparatively standard looking affair, festooned with indistinguishable buttons. It will run a whole Copland system, however, and you know it's not adding too much to the price of the player.

The CDA823 has an unusual display that graphically illustrates how far you have progressed through a given track. This is quite useful but if you find it a little too lively, there's

the option to dim or even defeat it. Placing a disc in the unusually noisy drawer mechanism produces the words 'Finding CD' on the display – a fairly slow process that reflects the DVD-oriented nature of the transport. Once it has sussed the disc out, it moves from track to track with alacrity.

Rifle through the spec sheet and you'll see the Copland is packing heat, with 192kHz oversampling and true 24-bit resolution (from a 16-bit format, remember). It also sports a dual differential DAC and multi-regulated power supplies, but differs from the CDA822 in using a Toshiba DVD transport mechanism that reads the disc at double speed and double re-samples the buffered signal. It uses discrete rather than op-amp Class A input amplifiers, while the output stage provides fully balanced and single-ended outputs.

Designer Olé Möller pinpoints clock accuracy as the most important and revealing parameter



when designing a CD player. He says that the lower the phase noise on the clock oscillator, the better the player will sound. In Möller's opinion, this is the only measurement which consistently indicates an improvement. Presumably, this is because you can build a player that measures very well by using off-the-shelf parts such as the op-amps he has avoided, yet this does not necessarily make for a great sound quality.

Connections are the solid and steady options of XLR and RCA phono analogue outputs, alongside another phono socket for the digital out, though the latter is not defeatable. The only other holes in the back are for remote switching of the 12volt trigger variety, something for the Americans but equally appealing to the multiroom install industry.

SOUND QUALITY

We used this player with a Bryston BP25 preamp and a pair of ATC SCM150 active loudspeakers, with cabling courtesy of Living Voice and support from Townshend Audio. From the moment you press play, the CDA823 is clearly a remarkably good CD player. You might expect all players at this price to be as much, but as good as most of them are, this is a distinct cut above the average. It does all the important things with impressive ease, by which we mean dynamics, acoustic space and bandwidth. All the while, detail and timing was pretty spot on, too. This was ably demonstrated by Madelaine Peyroux's *Careless Love* album, which sounded open and positively 'springy' with life through the

“This is the sort of player that encourages the reviewer to stray from the usual test discs and rummage through the CD shelves.”

CDA823. The quality of the recording was instantly revealed, and as a result, the Billy Holiday-like tones of her voice sounded patently clear.

The CDA823 also served up some unusually heavy bass, which brought out the full-bodied nature of even mellow jazz recordings. But this bass was not overpowering and differences in recording were clear cut. That said, differences in recordings are not easily discovered on the Copland, because you tend to play whole discs, not mere snippets! Timing is as perky as one would expect and the Copland seems to be both revealing and musically engaging – a rare combination in digital audio.

Moving away from audiophile discs, even heavily manipulated sounds are served up in full effect, as the scale of the image combines with the weight and power of the bottom end to produce a gripping experience. Add the sheer resolution of vocals, effects and spatial cues when playing albums like Missy Elliot's *Da Real World*, and you have a high energy experience simply bursting with colour.

This is the sort of player that encourages the reviewer to stray from the usual repertoire of test discs and rummage through the CD shelves. *Red Hot on Impulse* is a prime example; a compilation with a strong John

Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* theme that should be as the title suggests. However, it has never been an appealing album and the Copland revealed the distortions introduced by the mastering and/or mixing process that make it an uncomfortable disc. But, uncomfortable or not, the insight provided by the Copland makes you hungry for more.

Part of the reason why this player proves such a hit is the surprisingly quiet background. This initially seems odd, because CD is supposed to have a noiseless background; but the Copland subjectively registers even less background noise than most and this makes for compelling listening.

The quiet background is thus a factor of the player and a result of Möller's quest for great micro-dynamics – you can't hear the fine details and differences in level if the background noise floor is not inaudible. CD players never reveal a noise floor to the extent that analogue components can, but it's there nonetheless.

Possibly this lack of noise floor is more indirectly perceived (as something positive occurring) than audibly registered (as the absence of sound). What's more, when the noise floor is reduced to this vanishing level, the result is compelling listening. For example, Bugge Wesseltoft's *Sharing* album appears ■

Q & A

We spoke to Olé Möller, one of Copland's founders and still the company's chief designer, about the genesis of the CDA823 CD player, and how it differs from its predecessor



HFC: Is there a big difference in filtering between this and the CDA822?

OM: Yes. When you increase the sampling frequency, the amount of filtering you need in the analogue section decreases. You want to avoid filters if you can, as they are always audible. By using a higher sampling rate, I was able to reduce the amount of analogue filtering which accounts for the change in sound.

We also changed the drive mechanism with this player, which means we had to change the values of many of the components in the analogue section. This gave me a chance to give it another try, and improve on things.

The CDA 823 has an unusually dynamic sound. How did you achieve this?

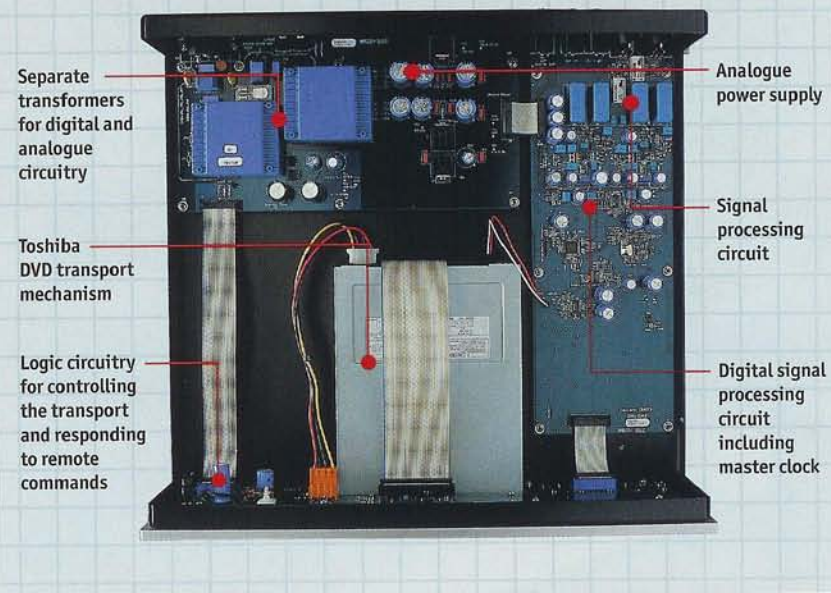
Dynamics are extremely important – one of the most important things to retain a sense of live music. There are two types of dynamics: micro-dynamics and macro-dynamics. Macro is all the explosive sounds like drums, where there is a change in overall energy level. Then you have all the fine things, the small sound levels – that's micro-dynamics. These two are very difficult to combine in one amplifier, whether it's the output section of a CD player or a power amp.

The discrete approach gives the designer the opportunity to adjust the sound. For good micro-dynamics, you need high local feedback and high internal bandwidth with a low global feedback. For good macro-dynamics, you want high internal current levels, low internal feedback and high global feedback. As these requirements are so different, what you have to do is find the best balance that gives the listener the illusion that everything is perfect.

You state in the literature that the input amps are discrete. Is this a part of the output stage?

The whole output section is discrete. It's the only way you have a chance to change the sound for the better. From a digital point of view, I think we all know what to do. We know the importance of a precise clock and the converters nowadays are very, very fine. The transparency of DACs is also superb, but they have a tendency to perform with less dynamics. The only way to compensate for this is in the analogue section.

Detail



“The Copland is very good at delivering strong dynamics and three-dimensional space, but it never stops drawing you into the music.”

significantly calmer and more relaxed than usual in the Copland's hands. It has a strangely quiet quality that makes you want to keep turning up the level, despite the occasional large dynamic swings in the music that often catch out lesser players.

The CDA823 features a high speed drive and delivers a very dynamic and open sonic character – features common to both the Copland and the Resolution Audio Opus 21 we rate so highly. In comparing the two side by side, the differences are surprisingly subtle until you play something with bass weight, like Eleanor McEvoy's rendition of *Memphis Tennessee*. The Copland has a drier, more grippy bass that makes the Opus 21 seem less precise, but the latter delivers a warmer, more rounded bottom end... and it's difficult to say which one is correct.

The Copland is very good at delivering strong dynamics and three-dimensional space, but it never stops drawing you into the music, however unfamiliar that music might be. There are those that prefer a more muscular sound

and others that go for a smooth, relaxed result, but if you want to get to the heart of the music, these qualities will often get in the way.

This Copland brings the price of outstanding CD replay down to a new low; or perhaps it brings the quality of 'affordable' players to a new high. Either way, it represents something of a high-end bargain. £1,750 isn't cheap, but it's considerably less than most of the real competition in sonic terms. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 93%

FEATURES >> 82%

BUILD >> 91%

VALUE >> 90%

PRO
Dynamic and spatial resolution to compete with the best, along with high resolution of fine detail and solid build.

CON
Ergonomically challenged handset, noisy drawer mechanism, slow 'CD Finding' thanks to DVD transport.

CONCLUSION
The best Copland yet sets a new benchmark for CD players at the price. Its resolution of micro-dynamics and acoustic space is second to none, but its ability to engage the listener with all manner of music is worth even more.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 92%

