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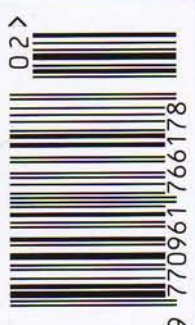


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Bienvenue!

Tony Bolton celebrates Micromega's return to the UK, finding the new CD-10 CD player to be full of Gallic charm...

From the late nineteen eighties, Paris-based Micromega built themselves a reputation for good sounding and innovative products. Indeed they were amongst the first companies to introduce two box transport and DAC combos in 1988. Following quality problems with the supply of the Philips CD mechanisms then used, the company suffered a downturn in fortunes in the late nineties, leaving these shores some ten years ago, and closing in France three years ago...

In March 2007 the company was acquired by Didier Hamdi; motor cycle racing fans may recall him as the 1991 World Champion. Since then he has had many interests including owning the company that lights the Eiffel Tower, selling motorbikes and now, owner of a hi-fi company!

The founder of the company Daniel Schar is now head of R&D and, with Didier Hamdi has re-engineered the previous Micromega range to produce a new eleven unit lineup which includes amplifiers, tuners and a range of three CD players. These start at £799 for the CD-10 under review here, and covers the CD-20 (£1,227) and the CD-30 (£1,599).

Available in either black or the rather sleek silver finish of this example, the styling was both pleasing to the eye and functional. The front panel is made of aluminum and sports chamfered edges and recessed buttons below the blue dot matrix display. The slimline drawer occupies the top left of the fascia. The mains on and off is situated at the back, above the IEC socket, along with phono sockets for the analogue out and a coaxial digital

output. Dimensions are a compact 430x250x70mm and weight 4.6kg.

Internally the machine is well specified, with either Sony KHM 3413 or Sanyo SFH 8450 DVD mechanisms. These are controlled by a Philips SAA78247 circuit and Micromega's own software program. The conversion from digital to analogue is taken care of by a Analog Devices AD1853 chipset. The power supply for all of this is based around an R-Core transformer. This was chosen because they have a narrow bandwidth, compared to the wide bandwidth of toroidal types, and in moderate current situations this helps with noise rejection. The drive mechanism, feedback circuits and all user interface sections are driven from the 'digital' power supply, the analogue sections having separate rectification and filtering. At this point it is worth reading the



instructions because the Micromega has a lot of facilities that are accessed through the front buttons, that are not immediately obvious. These range from the useful, such as fast forwarding through a track, to the ability to adjust the speed the disc tray opens and closes!

SOUND QUALITY

After unboxing the player I had a quick listen before leaving it with a burn-in disc to amuse itself for a couple of days. Initial impressions were of a full bodied sound, but somewhat tight and lacking in subtlety. After about fifty hours of use I listened again and found that the impression of richness of tone was still there but the tightness had gone to be replaced by a more flowing and open presentation.

First up for listening was the New Cologne Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. This is part of the Cologne Philharmonic, who spend their summers touring small venues in the smaller towns in the UK. Having had the pleasure of

seeing them several times and been impressed with their musicianship I bought some of their discs a couple of years ago. One contains, amongst others, Vivaldi's Concerto for flute and orchestra 'La Tempesta Di Mare'. As the name suggests the music ranges from calm and flowing to turbulent and back again. The CD-10 dived into this performance with gusto. Horns shimmered without bite, violins sang without shrieking and deeper toned stringed instruments had a lustre to the sound that almost reflected the polish on their wooden bodies.

Ignoring the enjoyment factor for a moment and being coldly analytical, I found the soundstage to be of

reasonable depth and width, if not the largest that I have heard digital players produce, but of satisfactory and realistic scale. I felt that the performers had space to breathe and move around themselves and each other. One of my usual gripes with digital sound is the lack of three dimensionality in the sound when compared with vinyl. Now this machine did not attempt a vinylesque soundstage, but what it did do was transmit the information to the listener in such an absorbing manner that I felt that I could look into the recording and be aware of each aspect of the performance that I chose to give my attention to.

A few hours of listening later

'In March 2007 the company was acquired by Didier Hamdi; motor cycle racing fans may recall him as the 1991 World Champion...'



and I was playing Billie Holiday. The recordings were from her early years when she was working with the Benny Goodman bands, in particular forming a close musical association with Teddy Wilson (B.G.'s pianist). 'Miss Brown To You' demonstrated the easy collaboration between the singer and musicians. In the late thirties there was no ability to edit recordings, so each disc was 'live', and the interaction of the artists showed

any silver disc spinner at this price displays sonic manners!

Coming right up to date with Shpong's latest release 'Ineffable Mysteries From Shpongland', which was released in November this year, and I found myself exploring sounds from Indian street performers blended with some truly strange electronica that was propelled along at a pleasantly gentle pace by pipes and drums. A most mellow blending

using one for a great number of years and I love it for its smoothness and musicality.

The Micromega CD-10 comes very close to this, which for a totally solid-state design I find impressive. If you are expecting (or wanting) the sharply defined, slightly stark presentation of budget and affordable CD players then look elsewhere. The CD-10 had definition, but didn't feel the need to shape the edges with a razor blade, and tended to have a more tactile sound than most. Its bass is not the deepest that I have heard - you won't be causing structural damage when playing the 1812 overture - but it is satisfying and responsive. The big complaint I had was with the remote, which worked, but was inappropriate to such a well presented machine. It looked as though it was a leftover from an early nineties stack system, and was a let down after the sophisticated appearance of the player...

"one of the few affordable players I've come across that has the ability to present most musical genres in an entertaining and enjoyable manner..."

in the slightly sassy delivery of the lyrics, and the beautifully phrased piano incidentals with which Wilson complimented her voice. Again the CD10 rose the occasion making dance music something the listener wanted to move to, rather than sit and listen to. I was aware of the age of the recording, the clearly focused mono signal sitting firmly in the centre of the speakers. Here I felt the CD10 could have been a little

more generous in its presentation of scale. The image was very cohesive but left a feeling that the performers were a bit bundled together in the middle, rather than being grouped there.

Returning to the world of stereo, and a completely different generation of music with The Yardbirds and the classic track 'For Your Love', and the raw blues was the complete antithesis of the relatively friendly sounds that had been played so far. I was wondering if the well behaved nature of the CD-10 might soften the edges of the music, but I needn't have worried, the rawness and drive that made the band fair competition to the other big R&B outfits of the period (the 'Stones, Animals, etc.) was portrayed in a pretty honest manner. Were I being churlish I could complain that the very last bit of grit was missing from the sound and that the sonic focus was on overall musicality and presentation, rather than the gutsy raw honesty that can make blues a spine-tingling experience. However, I am not going to start complaining when

via the CD-10, it was in its element presenting a musical panorama that I found quite absorbing. This is one of the few affordable players that I have come across that has the ability to present most musical genres in an entertaining and enjoyable manner. It has more than a flavour of the similarly priced Njoe Tjoeb 4000 which uses a valve powered output stage. I have been

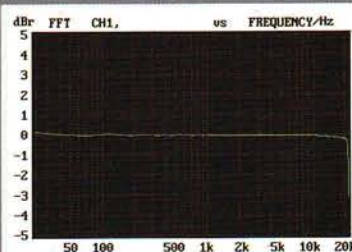
CONCLUSION

I felt that the CD-10 represented a welcome return to the marketplace for this manufacturer. It seems to be well made and finished, and certainly sounds very good. If you are looking to spend up to £1,000 on a CD player, then this is a must for the audition shortlist.

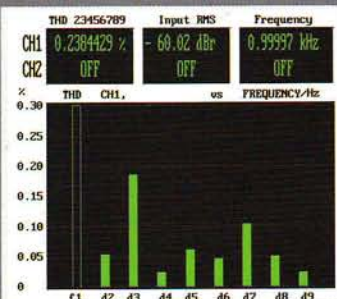
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the CD-10 measured flat across the audio band, reaching 21.3kHz, (-1dB) our convolved impulse analysis shows. The player will sound well balanced tonally and, because there is no peaking, reasonably free from treble sheen.	-60dB	0.24
	-80dB	2.8
Linearity was good, distortion on both channels being low right through the players dynamic range, if not quite as low as class leading designs. An EIAJ Dynamic range value of 109dB is a little on the low side as a result, but no disaster.	Separation (1kHz)	112dB
Channel separation was wide and noise low at -109dB. Output measured a normal 2.16V. Jitter on the digital output was a little higher than usual on quality players, around 200pS of signal related content with a 1kHz, -60dB tone, and around 20pS non signal related jitter. In absolute terms these are still reasonably low values however so the CD-10 works well enough.	Noise (IEC A)	-109dB
Micromega's CD-10 turns in a good set of figures all round, but it isn't quite class leading. NK	Dynamic range	109dB
	Output	2.16V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



IMPEDANCE



Frequency response (-1dB) CD	2Hz-21.3kHz
Distortion 0dB	0.0007
-6dB	0.0006

VERDICT

Super swelte sounding affordable CD player that punches above its price.

MICROMEGA CD-10 £799.00

Absolute Sounds
 ☎ +44(0)20 8971 3909
www.absolutesounds.com

FOR

- smooth, musical sound
- excellent vocal timbre
- good looks

AGAINST

- cheap remote control