

TEMPTATIONS

Copland CDA 825



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This single-minded **CD player** does what it says on the tin. Brilliantly

Profile

Price £4298 ★★★★★

What makes it special? The CDA 825 uses a high-quality CD transport, proven engineering and has a carefully considered electronic design

Tempted? Copland has built up an enviable reputation for well-designed, good-sounding kit. If the company's previous CD players are any guides, this new one should be great

Understatement may not sell a lot of products, but specialising in it has kept Danish manufacturer Copland in business for over 30 years.

Over that time we've invariably admired the company's products. They have tended to combine simple yet classy aesthetics with fine sound quality all at sensible prices - sensible by high-end standards, that is.

The CDA 825 is a dedicated CD player, designed to get the best from traditional Red Book CDs. There isn't even a passing nod to SACD, DVD-Audio or even computer audio. In fact, look round the back and you'll only find a single coaxial digital output alongside the balanced and single-ended analogue connections.

Copland has concentrated on getting the basics right. The casework is decently solid and beautifully finished, giving the player an aura of understated luxury. Unusually, the CDA 825 is a top-loading design. This somehow makes it seem more special than drawer-equipped units, but it does mean the player needs to be on the top shelf of any rack.

The transport is a Philips CD-Pro2LF. It's designed for top-loading operation and works with speed and quietness. Once the transport reads the data from the CD it is, rather unusually for an integrated player, fed into a buffer. (The information that leaves the transport invariably has a certain level of jitter in it. Putting this signal into a buffer and

then accurately clocking it out again lowers the jitter levels significantly, which means the digital-to-analogue conversion circuitry has a better-quality signal to work from.) The use of this buffer adds a two-second delay into the signal path, so if you press 'Stop' while a piece of music is playing then it plays on just a little longer before it actually stops. That feels a little odd at first, but we got used to it.

DACs in abundance

Copland has followed the tried and trusted high-end route of using two DACs per channel. This lowers unwanted noise, so improving the signal-to-noise ratio. That should mean a better-resolved sound.

The number-crunching devices used are well-regarded Wolfsan WM8741 24bit/192kHz chips. As always with good high-end kit there has been plenty of work put into the power supply design, analogue circuit layouts and choosing just the right components to achieve the best sound quality.

Start listening and it's obvious all of Copland's work has paid off. This is a hugely capable player.

One thing to take note of is that Copland's signal output is on the high side. Through the single-ended analogue sockets it delivers 2.4 volts rather than the more usual 2.0 volts, and this doubles to 4.8 volts with a balanced connection, as opposed to the industry standard of 4.0 volts.

Behind the music

• Ole Moller, Copland MD and founder



Simplicity is a key point in the design of the CDA 825. With around 400 components employed for the clock oscillator

and the analog stages alone, it might not seem like it, but it's true. The CDA 825 is optimised strictly for CD playback, without introducing potentially performance-degrading circuits related to other sampling frequencies and relocking schemes.

In the digital domain of electronics, there seems to be a direct relation between calculations, measurements, and sound quality, but in the analog domain these relations can't be taken for granted. The low distortion performance from op-amps is no guarantee of success here when it comes to the matter of sound quality.

To gain essential control of the sound, circuitry solutions employing discrete components are unavoidable for the buffer and post-filtering section analog stages of the CD player.

TECH SPECS

Integrated Yes
Outputs Coaxial digital, XLR, RCA
Digital inputs 0
Finishes 1
Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 43 x 39cm



Top-loading design is well conceived and backed up by stylish internal illumination

Modest looks are gilded by smart design details such as the machined graphics

While a highish output is not a problem in itself it does mean you have to be careful to match levels when comparing the CDA 825 to rivals. A louder sound invariably grabs a listener's attention more during a comparative demo.

The CDA825 recovers an awful lot of information from CD. It has an open, spacious presentation that veers ever so slightly to the leaner side of neutral in tonality. We mention this more as an observation rather than a criticism. It's just something to keep in mind when it comes to system matching.

Insight and clarity

Feed the Copland a disc such as Nick Cave's *Push the Sky Away* and the player shines. This album needs a subtle touch with dynamics and a high level of

insight combined with a great sense of cohesion across the frequency range: the Copland gets it right. There's lots of insight and enough clarity to render Cave's low-key vocal performances with all the emotion intact.

Move to something harder-hitting, such as Major Lazer's *Pon de Floor*, and the Copland shifts up a gear with ease. There's plenty of heft and the kind of solid, punchy bass that has a really physical quality. Unlike rivals such as Naim's CDX2 this Copland doesn't push the rhythmic aspects of music to the fore, it's a little understated in this respect. Take a close listen and you'll find the information is still there, as is a fine sense of composure and organisation.

Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* showcases the Copland's dynamics and punch, but also gives it a chance to show

off a wide and expansive soundstage, which is populated with focused and solid-placed instruments. The CDA 825's broad spread of talents mean that it is right at home here, delivering a sound with ample drama and delicacy.

In the headlong rush for music streaming it's easy to forget that many of us still have large CD collections. If you really want to hear what's on these discs the CDA 825 is a great way of doing it.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A high level of clarity; subtle dynamics; organised soundstage; fine build and finish

AGAINST No digital inputs

VERDICT Copland's CDA 825 is a terrific player. If you still value top-class CD replay, give this machine a listen