



# A certain Je ne sais quoi

**Chris Ward** enjoys a soirée in the company of the French high-end maestro's next-gen entry-level CD player with upgraded DAC

I first fell in love with Métronome Technologies' Le Player 2 back in *HFC* 425, so when I heard that an upgraded version of the CD player was available, a *rendezvous* was speedily arranged. Despite its 'S' status, the latest model looks almost identical to its predecessor, and both sport the same chic, silvery grey casework, Delrin feet and solid aluminium front plate hosting a slim CD drawer, understated blue LED display and sleek metal buttons and switches. The CD drive tray is still of the lighter variety, which feels a little vulnerable but it performs its task smoothly and reliably for the entire review. Controls and symbols are still wonderfully quirky but the switchgear

is positive and clear, imbuing the machine with a no-nonsense intent that feels refreshingly unfussy and very professional. The slim remote is straightforward and functional, even enabling the display to be dimmed or turned off, but it doesn't allow source switching, which is controlled via a revised front fascia switch that cycles between CD, USB input or coaxial digital output. Around the back unbalanced RCA, balanced XLR and USB inputs and an S/PDIF output look similar to before, but this doesn't tell the full story.

The main specification difference between the Le Player 2 and this 2S is that the USB input now supports PCM files up to 32-bit/384kHz (previously 24-bit/192kHz) and DSD files up to

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Métronome Technologie  
Le Player 2S

**ORIGIN**  
France

**TYPE**  
CD player/USB DAC

**WEIGHT**  
12kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
450 x 115 x 435mm

**FEATURES**  
● 32-bit/384kHz PCM and DSD256-capable DAC  
● Inputs: 1x USB-B port  
● Outputs: 1x stereo RCAs; Balanced XLRs; S/PDIF coaxial digital

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Absolute Sounds

**TELEPHONE**  
0208 9713909

**WEBSITE**  
absolutesounds.com

DSD256. This significant increase in resolution processing is enabled by a change in DAC architecture with the 2S now utilising a sophisticated dual-mono approach. If connecting a computer, Windows drivers can be downloaded online or from the installation disc provided. My MacBook Pro works instantly without drivers to play high-resolution files, but with DSD playback more dependent on your chosen media player or audio software, it's wise to check compatibility with the UK distributor first.

The original Le Player 2 continues (now priced at £4,898) and sits alongside the 2S. The extra cost for the update seems like a worthwhile investment and represents a first step into the company's very high-end know-how that extends all the way up to the flagship Kalista DreamPlay CD transport/DAC combo, priced at around £72,000.

## Sound quality

With the player connected to Hegel's flagship H590 integrated amplifier (see p42) via balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA Black Rhodium Sonata VS-1 interconnects (*HFC* 398), which outputs to Cadence's Arca loudspeaker via Black Rhodium Foxtrot cabling (*HFC* 412), playing *Preach* by Maverick Sabre is a sumptuous treat as the unaccompanied,

plaintive voice rises between the speakers. The vocals are visceral, full of luscious depth and bristling with detail. Every emotive inflection of his expression is painted vividly and the decay of his textured voice in the deep reverb is spellbinding. This is a 'hairs standing up on the back of your neck' performance from the Métronome as a keyboard joins the vast acoustic space, sounding solid and beautifully rich. The 2S gives a lesson in imaging, painting a picture that's deep, wide, stable and utterly compelling and the new incarnation is already bringing extra qualities.

Just like before, it manages to balance tiny revealing details and



The original Le Player 2 is cheaper, but the extra £202 for the updated 2S version is worth it for the superior DAC and a degree of future-proofing. The EAR Yoshino Acute Classic CD player/DAC £4,800 (*HFC* 415) also provides a high level of musical refinement and valve smoothness from CD, alongside USB access to a quality DAC. It has extra preamp functionality and a headphone stage, while Le Player 2S is more single minded in its mission. Both create a glorious and highly analogue soundstage with the 2S just edging it sonically with a little extra depth, punch and dynamic drive.

transients without ever desiccating the essential flow and expression of music. Yet, in the 2S specification I'm sensing even more light and shade. The track swells into a huge, orchestral soundscape and the player changes up through the gears seamlessly. Many hi-fi sources do simple, stripped-back music well, but when the music gets complex and rich, the 2S confirms you've invested wisely, teasing out separate instrumentation and many layers of intertwined melodies. The depth and expression of deeper bass is noteworthy. The deepest registers are supple and preserve a degree of bounce that is

## You can't help but be marvelled by its unflappable delivery and composure

highly musical, ensuring that the lowest notes always feel entirely unified with the whole track.

Changing input to a 24-bit/96kHz download of *Solo* by Lucy Rose, Le Player's simple blue LED display references the incoming sample rate via USB. The timbre of the opening piano is gloriously rich and rounded yet Rose's voice is perfectly conveyed, full of fragility and emotion. This is a sweet source that also has power, portraying scale and intimacy with equal aplomb. Some really incisive high-end sources can dredge detail at the cost of starting to sound brittle or stopping music flow. Instead, the 2S pulls off the trick of conveying masses of detail without ever sounding dry or matter of fact. Sound quality is similar to the existing Le Player 2, but I sense slightly more output, dynamic range and greater nuance, enabling more sensitive contrasts to be communicated.

The opening drum rim shots on *Bela Lugosi's Dead* by Bauhaus on compact

disc positively crack and fizz with extra energy, tumbling over each other in transparent layers of delicious delay and boundless reverb. A potent bass guitar strides into the track, full of deep, dark menace; the vampiric riff sounding notably threatening with masses of extension and atmospheric texture. Wailing guitars soar over the punchy backbeat, as Peter Murphy's sinister vocals appear centre stage. Through the 2S, his dark delivery is absolutely mesmerising, with every nuance of expression and emotional intent emphasised and served up as a brooding and complex masterpiece. I've not heard a better rendition of this track as previously opaque sections are resolved and the layers of cascading reverb and guitar effects lock into sharp focus.

## Conclusion

The Le Player 2S is a high-end CD player with updated DAC that focuses on musical quality. Feed it weaker CDs or impoverished MP3 tracks and be marvelled by its unflappable delivery and composure, encouraging you to just play whatever you want in such a musical, engaging and rewarding way that you find yourself turning the volume up and up ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**LIKE:** Sweet treble; rich bass; engineering and finish

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**DISLIKE:** CD drawer is a little lightweight

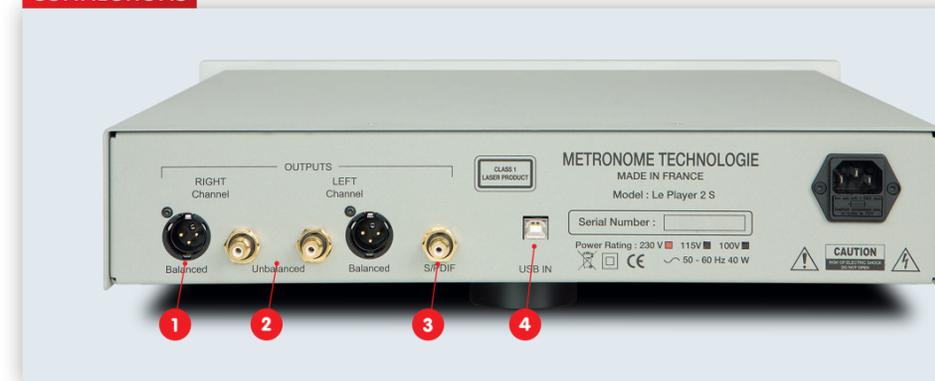
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**WE SAY:** Effortlessly musical and completely engaging, now with superior DAC offering greater file support

**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

### OVERALL



## CONNECTIONS



- 1 Balanced XLR output (right channel)
- 2 Unbalanced RCA outputs
- 3 S/PDIF coaxial digital output
- 4 USB-B port