



A dedicated hi-fi network attached storage device from Japanese company Melco can take your music collection to a new level, says Jon Myles.

Magic Melco

An increasing number of people are using network attached storage devices to handle their collection of digital music files.

After all, what's not to like? One small box can contain a veritable living room's worth of CDs, ripped LPs or high-resolution downloads – and when connected to your chosen streamer make playback from an armchair as easy as can be.

Except there's one problem. Most NAS drives are not purely for hi-fi replay. Instead, they will store music, pictures, videos and any other digital files you care to mention.

Which is all well and good...but perhaps not ideal when it comes to getting the best sound possible from your music.

Which is where the £1600 Melco N1A Music Library comes in. Yes, it's a NAS drive – but has been engineered as a high-end audio component whose sole purpose is to store and feed digital files to your chosen streaming device.

As such it comes housed in a standard-sized, hi-fi rack size unit with an OLED display on the front and an on/off button on the left, combined with four control buttons on the right.

Look under the hood and you find 4TB of hard drive storage, a high-quality power supply and audiophile-grade components throughout.

Round the back there's a specific IP port for connection to your streamer/network player with an additional port for control and ethernet.

The pre-installed media server means no configuration is required while the front panel OLED display gives track data, system set-up information and access to the menu tree.

Full power-on takes an impressively quick 15 seconds and in a number of hours of use the Melco never once dropped its connection to the streamer.

USB 2.0 and 3.0 sockets allow

for importation of music files or the attachment of extra storage capacity if those 4TBs are not enough.

SOUND QUALITY

If you ever believed all hard disk storage was essentially the same then the Melco has the ability to make you think again.

The attention to detail and research that has gone into the basic design is certainly impressive – and it translates into a sound quality that is a step up from any other network attached music library I've heard.

What immediately struck me was the crystal clear clarity of the delivery. Hooked up to a Chord streamer and playing through our resident Tannoy Kensington GR loudspeakers powered by Icon Audio's new powerhouse MB81 monoblock amplifiers (see review elsewhere in this issue) the amount of detail the Melco delivers is quite astonishing.

Paul Simonon's bass on 24/96 files from The Clash's 'Sandinista'



Three USB sockets on the rear panel allow for the importing of music files as well as connection of additional storage devices and back-up to other hard-disks. Two RJ45 are dedicated for connection to your own network and streamer.

was firm and fulsome, with a tactile quality that pined me back in the seat.

There was an absolute lack of graininess or smear and instead a natural, pristine quality to the sound, bringing out often missed details in

of music I chose. With a dense piece of music such as John Coltrane's 'Ascension' the Melco managed to pick apart the cacophony of sound, allowing me to track individual instruments with ease. This piece isn't the easiest listen for even die-hard

heard. On The Smiths' 'The Queen Is Dead' (again 24/96), for example, there's a cavernous quality to the soundstage that is purely sumptuous – rich, resonant and totally engaging.

Johnny Marr's overlaid guitar work can be clearly made out, while Morrissey's vocals are suitably gruff. There's so much more detail than you'll get through a standard Red Book CD player, but no lack of attack or verve.

Melco say they designed the N1A to be an audiophile storage system and front-end for the digital generation – and to that end they have succeeded in a massive measure.

CONCLUSION

The Melco N1A is a truly impressive piece of equipment for anyone looking to house their music collection in one place. Bags of storage, simple to operate yet possessed of a gorgeous sound – it comes unreservedly recommended.

"what immediately struck me was the crystal clear clarity of the delivery"

even the most familiar of tracks.

Playing Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds' 'Where The Wild Roses Grow' I could hear the sharp intakes of breath in Kylie Minogue's vocals between the individual lines, while instruments had a clearly-defined timbre to them.

It might be a cliché, but it really did sound as though a veil had been lifted from the music. Playing the same track through my own Western Digital NAS drive there was still detail and atmosphere but not the same level of precision the Melco delivers.

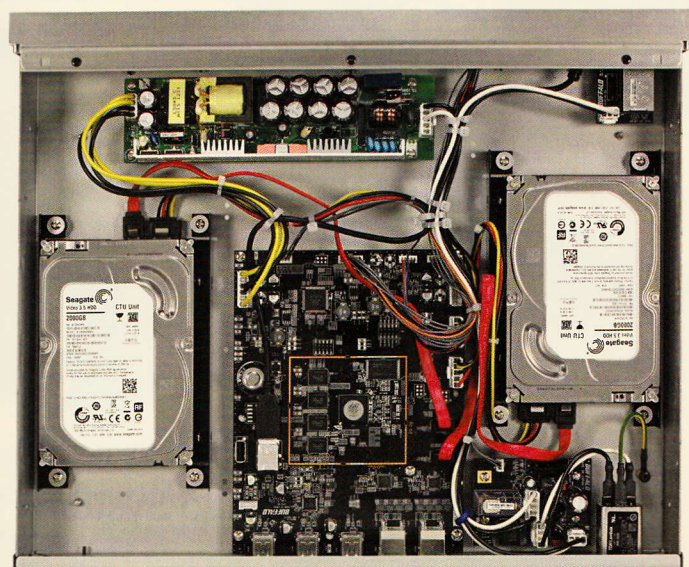
This extends to whatever genre

jazz fans but the Melco lets you hear the interplay between the various musicians and the rhythmic swing of the track.

Of course, the sound quality is going to be very much dependent on the quality of the streamer and its DAC – but what the Melco does is let you hear exactly what they are doing.

To that end it's probably the ideal digital front end for anyone looking to house a large music collection – especially if that contains a good deal of high-resolution tracks.

For the Melco allows the extra information in such recordings to be



Inside lie to 2TB Seagate hard drives, a switch-mode power supply (top) and digital processing and control circuitry.

WHO ARE MELCO?

The name may be new to many – but those readers with longer memories may recall Melco for its range of well-regarded turntables from the 1980s.

The company later rebranded as Buffalo as it branched out into the computer industry, becoming one of the largest IT peripheral manufacturers in the world with products including wireless routers, ethernet data switches and storage devices.

But founder Makoto Maki remained a committed audiophile and more than two years ago revived the Melco brand with the aim of providing music-lovers with high-technology networked devices.

The N1A is the result – with a higher-specification N1Z featuring upgraded components and specially-designed SSD drives also available at a price of £6200.

MELCO N1A MUSIC LIBRARY £1,600



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

A truly hi-fi storage device that combines ease of operation with stunning sound. A must listen for those with large digital music collections.

FOR

- clean, clear precise sound.
- detail
- ease of operation

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

Kog Audio
+44 (0)24 7722 0650
www.kogaudio.com