

Reimyo CDP-777  
Price: 14,200 euros  
By: Heinz Gelking

And now? Well, it's expensive, not all that attractive and can "only" play CDs. I'm not saying that it has to be this one, and certainly not that it's the world's best digital source. However, if I had a great deal of CDs and even more money, then after listening to it before any buying decision, the Reimyo CDP-777 would still be my first choice, even though there are certainly more expensive CD players on the market.

The Combak Corporation, famous for its Harmonix tuning products, has introduced its first CD player onto the market. The asking price is 14,200 euros, which is not cheap for a newcomer and a product you might think belongs on the sidelines of digital progress in these times of SACDs and DVDs.

I could live just fine without a CD player if all new recordings were available on vinyl. My Transrotor Orfeo Doppio is not bad at what it does. And the fascination of precision mechanics will still speak well for it, even if digital music replay should someday perhaps sound significantly better. I don't think this will happen to CD players. As far as I'm concerned they're a necessary prerequisite in order to listen to new productions. Some day they may be accepted and considered as equals, but never loved.

Perhaps first-rate CD players will indeed achieve the status of great turntables and psychology is just playing tricks on me: I find it rather irritating that from the outside, unlike the Transrotor, you can't see how a device like the CDP-777 works and what justifies its price tag – even though the bold engraving on the cover, stately smoked glass and solid metal construction obviously, though somewhat insipidly, try to communicate value.

What's the sense of all this deliberation, inane comparisons to my record player, the somewhat uncalled for reference to more advanced digital technologies, which the CDP-777 neither commands nor ever will, and the criticism of outward appearances? To be quite honest, I've got a problem with the CDP-777. And I'm trying to protect myself as I write, because I can well imagine what's going through the minds of some people: Didn't this writer stick up for those Harmonix tuning products even though they

were extremely expensive and the manufacturer provided absolutely no explanation of how they work? Yes, he did. And, he would do it again. He also heard that some readers were not amused by this at all. For the record: No, I have not been made an offer to join the PR management team at Combak; and the products have long since been returned to Virgil Warren's German sales unit.

Naturally, there is that question about the Reimyo CDP-777 as to how it's supposed to work: A small Japanese manufacturer wants to go from zero to one hundred and compete against the best of Linn, Naim and Mark Levinson? There were in fact some shortcomings at the outset as Virgil Warren had to postpone delivery twice. First the CDP-777 was undergoing CE testing, which is an absolute must for any piece of equipment to be sold in Germany, and then the CD player earmarked for this test was snapped up by someone while being shown at a dealer. It seems that this customer didn't want to wait for the next shipment from Japan. This would never happen to a major manufacturer. Instead he'd just grab the next carton off the shelf and put it on the sales counter. Virgil Warren then suggested he could drop off a DAP-777 as a temporary substitute, as this would at least let me familiarize myself with Reimyo's digital reproduction. I took this D/A converter, equipped with a 20-bit JVC K2 processor – priced at 4,700 euros, but which looked to be worth 500 euros at best – and hooked it to the digital out of an Audionet ART V2 and listened.

From that point on I knew for sure and had no other questions. So let me put the following up somewhat uncritically for discussion: The ART V2's transport and the DAP-777 digital converter from Reimyo offered me CD reproduction the likes of which I hadn't ever heard before. But then, what others does he know? Aren't all these grandiose words making him a bit suspect? Yes, could be. I'm not familiar with the Linn CD12, the DCS combination or the big Naim player. This is because there are no "editorial-staff working devices" left over here at image hifi that can be brought up from the basement to run a comparison on. We editors either buy the test equipment or return it to its owners after a certain deadline, which admittedly is sometimes extended by a few weeks. Nevertheless I am highly familiar with one or two outstanding players.

Two weeks later the actual subject of the study then arrived – the CDP-777. Its digital processor section is even more complex than that of the DAP-777. Inside it works an extended version of the K2 processor by JVC. The upsampling rate is 24-bit / 176.4 kHz, the D/A converter works with 24-bits with a data rate of 705.6 kHz, while digital filtering is done with 24-bit 4x (176.4 kHz x 4). With technical specifications like these, the

CDP-777 is one of the most technologically advanced players, as Virgil Warren asserts. Still, I only delved into the bare numbers to the extent that I would be able to e-mail some intelligent questions to Kazuo Kiuchi in Japan. He was, as before, very friendly and even unveiled considerably more information this time. It was only when it came to the subject of "resonance optimization" – the Harmonix technology that flowed into the player – that he remained somewhat reserved.

The CDP-777's reproduction is once again as good as that of the DAP-777 in combination with the Audionet ART V2. As is the case with any outstanding device, it's hard to explain just what that special thing about it is. Enormous resolution is what you're likely to think, and you wouldn't be wrong if you did. The sound characteristics have no punctuated resolution, but are uniform and exhibit no irritations in even the most dense and complex forte. I have rarely heard the kind of broad, perfectly delineated and free-standing tutti orchestra that it delivers; and when I did it was from even more complex amplifier electronics (the Audionet Amp I is good, but not as good as the Amp II Monos). You could describe the play of the CDP-777 as the total and entirely unspectacular evolvment of that which is stored on the CD. It sounds incalculably natural, and unlike many, does not achieve this by the addition of any transitional softeners. Perhaps this comparison would make things clearer: The CDP-777 doesn't sound like a reversed telescope lens showing that wonderful "real thing" all cramped and scaled down, as is so often the case with hi-fi. Instead, it is like a mirror, which, although taking a bit from the "real thing", still allows it to retain its grandeur.

Live recordings in particular turn into a powerful and intense experience. This may be due to the CDP-777's ability to unlock so much more spatial information from CDs than one is normally accustomed to experiencing. Christian Thielemann's live recording of Richard Strauss' Alpine Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic (DG 469519-2) is one of the most impressive examples. For here, despite the numerous other more energy-packed acoustic events within this grand orchestra, the manner in which those quietly sustained sounds of the violins uphold their presence, even when the contrabass or the brass should become even more active, is something I have never experienced, and leaves nothing to compare with it. Here the dimensions are infinitely more than just left and right, front and back – it means having space and not being crushed by overly powerful neighbors. The violins are not fixed in one spot, but are given space. And because they have such space, they are present even when not playing.

The CDP-777 is not some sort of "embellisher" that makes spaces larger artificially. Particularly in the case of outstanding studio recordings such as

Tom Russell's "The Man From God Knows Where" (Kirkelig Kulturverksted) or Cassandra Wilson's "Blue Night Till Dawn" (Blue Note), the Reimyo can take those muffled reverberations surrounding the loud singing that appear, to show that the studio booths were a bit too small for the voices. The CDP-777 conveys such situations with great authenticity.

By the way, this test also left me with an impression that reminds me of my dealings with the Harmonix tuning elements. At first listening, while still captivated by the unbelievable three-dimensional reproduction, the overwhelming, but never bothersome, flow of information and the presence with which the instruments appear within the sound, there arises the question as to whether or not the CDP-777 plays a lead role when it comes to dynamics. It was the same with the Harmonix tuning feet. You had to ask yourself if the music wasn't coming through the speakers somewhat "slower" and with slightly less dynamic range. But, that's not the case at all. Other CD players seem just a trace more nervous and incoherent, thus accentuating individual events all the more. One all too quickly puts being hectic on a par with "swiftness", the way an audience on the opposite side always sees a blinking and twinkling during a big evening event accompanied by thousands of camera flashes. The CDP-777 illuminates the actions evenly, which doesn't mean without individual highlights. Every note always has a beginning and an end. It doesn't bolt out of nowhere and then immediately revert back to a digital zero. For those in doubt: "Equipment-testing music", such as Estrella's percussion in the previously mentioned Cassandra Wilson CD comes out of the speakers as dynamically, fast and precisely as one could find.

The high resolution and tremendous information content are accompanied by a broadly expanded palette of audio hues. Of course the choice of the word palette again implies too much of a raster, section or division into values. I do in fact once again experience the great variability in the sound of the violin as if it were the first time, in such as Gidon Kremer's live rendition of the Brahms concert with Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic (DG CD). So many colors, so many shades, so many transitions ranging from the most delicate touch of the bow on the strings to the powerful and sharply wresting forte! No, you really can't speak of a palette of colors, but rather of gradations of color with countless intermediate scales and tints. Speaking of violins: In my opinion, any CD player that enables one to differentiate between the first and second

violins at the beginning of Beethoven's Opus 18, Nr. 1, one of his earlier string quartets (Berlin Classics) – even though both violins are playing unison and producing exactly the same notes – simply because the primarius is playing ever so slightly more solo and with a more definitive nuance, while his violin sounds somewhat more brilliant, certainly ranks among the truly great original-recording devices (the Transrotor can't produce this any better from the comparable LP).

If with some reluctance I were to ascribe a certain "characteristic" to the CDP-777, something that was unique to it and which impressed me above all others, then that feature would be its ability to give sounds special buoyancy. Of course this goes hand in hand with the danger of underestimating its dynamic range. Is not the piano of the woodwinds at the start of "Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen" in Mahler's song cycle "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" in the fantastic Haitink recording with the Concertgebouw Orkest, Jessye Norman and John Shirley-Quirk (Philips CD) almost too present and too loud? – No. It's just that the CDP-777 never minimizes the softer instruments, but instead leaves their energy untouched. The brass sit all the way at the back of the orchestra and their melodies blow in from afar like a dawning dream and even when hushed still carry their sound to reach and touch the listener honestly and sweetly. No later than with the next fortissimo that it places in the room with such unexpected force, does the CDP-777 reinforce the impression of concentrated dynamic relationships. It is simply a master of the communicative piano tone: It bears Mahler's music in both its fragility and strength, and in its hollow pathos as at the moment when things are so precariously balanced. World class.

Further Information:

Test System Components | Interview with Kazuo Kiuchi

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