

REVIEWS

Reimyo DAP 999EX DAC and CDT 777 transport Straight Ahead Red(book)

By Jeff Dorgay



If you think digital audio is merely bits being decoded and there isn't any difference between players, you haven't been listening.

Much like your favorite phono cartridges, all digital players have their own personalities, too. They all take a different approach, and it's not necessarily better or worse, but it is certainly different – with each manufacturer putting a different emphasis on the part of the player they find the most important. This DAC and transport combination from Reimyo is a perfect example.

With so much emphasis on high resolution digital audio, Reimyo's Kauzo Kiuchi (the founder of Combak) chooses to optimize his player, in this case, as a separate DAC and transport, for 16 bit/44.1kHz playback, and incorporate his take on fine tuning the combination; two sets of their Combak tuning plugs are included to deliver the digital goods. They also suggest using a bevy of their signal and power cables to achieve the ultimate result.

In the day of DSD and high res files, this may seem like an anachronism to some. But let's face it, unless you started collecting music three weeks ago, the bulk of your collection is probably redbook files, or even compact discs. Should you be the music lover that really doesn't care all that much about high resolution audio files, the Reimyo pair could be your destination, at least for the foreseeable future. Back when I traded my Naim CD555 for a dCS stack, I had remarked more than once that I could have lived happily ever after with the CD555 if it had a digital input on the rear panel. But computer audio dragged me down another path.

Un-digital digital

Listening to the ease at which the vibes and violin in the introduction of Elvis Costello's "This House is Empty Now" are rendered, it's clear that Kiuchi-san has created a masterpiece for music lovers. Forget everything you think you know about digital if you haven't heard this player. Years ago it was very hip to have a first generation Play Station to play CDs, because it had a very warm and involving, yet unresolving sound that masked many of digital's errors of omission.

The Reimyo pair gives this same warmth without loss of resolution. I wanted to open the cover and look for vacuum tubes, but photos on the internet reveal that there are none inside. Another review of this player mentions the effect, comparing it to photography, saying that this player lacks the "sharpening" often associated with image processing. As a photographer, I agree with this analysis, but as digital camera sensors have improved with more dynamic range and resolution, that precious little sharpening is not required anymore. And thanks to the 999EX's approach, it's not needed here either. For those that remember film, the Reimyo feels much more like Kodachrome than an unsharpened digital image, with a wide tonal scale that seems to fade out almost to infinity that to the uninitiated seems soft. The longer you listen to this combination the more under its spell you fall. You'll be stunned at just how much musical detail exists in those standard resolution discs of yours.

While both components are excellent on their own, the pair together is where the glamour lies. Using the CDT 777 with Simaudio, dCS and Gryphon DACs all proved excellent, and vice versa using Simaudio and dCS transports with the Reimyo DAC, the combination takes the relaxed analog-like effect to the ultimate level. I'm always great at spending your money, but in this case I highly suggest buying the two as a pair instead of working your way up. Unfortunately, we weren't able to get the full complement of Combak cables, so the thought of even more resolution and ease lurking with this pair is indeed compelling.



More music

This player will really shift your paradigm in terms of worrying about high resolution downloads. With so many of these files just being upsampled redbook, it's tough to know where the rocks in the road lie, and it's often too late to turn back once you've bought a bum album. Anyone having a huge CD collection should really give the Reimyo combination serious consideration as a destination player and call it a day. There was never a time during the review period that I found myself craving the high resolution files lurking on my Aurender W20 server.

Listening to Dave Stewart's understated masterpiece from the '90s, *Greetings From The Gutter*, there was so much subtle spatial information lurking on what has always seemed like a brilliant album that was only mediocre in the recording department, it was a revelation. Even The Monkees' *Then and Now*, which has to be the worst sounding CD ever, sounded fantastic with this player. Songs that felt hopelessly compressed to the point of being unlistenable are now palatable.

Which means well-recorded CDs sound brilliant. Tracking through Neil Larsen's *Orbit*, mastered by Bernie Grundman, is full of percussive attack, a massive soundstage and weight that feels like a 24/192 recording, as do all of the best sounding CDs in my collection.



Single purpose player

The CDT777 transport links to the Reimyo DAC via a single coaxial output, where the DAC features coax, BNC, AES and optical inputs, so those streaming music will not be left out. Unfortunately, the only input lacking is a USB connection, but with so many good, reasonably priced outboard converters, this will not stop you from using your computer with the Reimyo DAC. Though precious few audiophiles will need the Toslink input, it is incredibly well implemented, should you need to use it, proving that not even the smallest detail is overlooked in the design of the Reimyo DAC. As mentioned, files are kept in their original format without being converted to higher resolution before digital conversion, which is done at a 24 bit/16x rate.

A Phillips CDM-Pro 12 mechanism, with clamp (very similar to the Naim 555...) is used to spin the discs with excellent results. This transport is robustly built and at this point in the game, should outlive you. A very basic remote is offered to control machine functions and switch digital inputs, so the rest is really installing the various Combak bits and getting down to business.

It's really all about tonality

If you've ever been taken under the spell of a great SET amplifier, a well-presented single driver loudspeaker, or the original Quad 57 loudspeaker, these devices all present a "continuous tone" type of musical reproduction, because of the simple signal path, lack of crossover effects and the lack of interaction between multiple drivers or output devices.

There is a certain signal purity that accompanies any of these that is unmistakable and, once you hear it, it will either become your holy grail, or it will not be detailed (a.k.a. "audiophile enough") for you. Add the Reimyo combination to this list of components that has an all encompassing, musical feel to its presentation. At first blush, you might even find it slightly dull, but the more time you spend listening, the more difficult it is to leave the couch or chair in front of your speakers.

This continuous tone nature really starts to pull you into the music after a few minutes, especially with vocal tracks and acoustic instruments. The piano takes on a new life through the Reimyo, and it's tough to believe that you are actually experiencing digital music, let alone redbook CD.



Is it for you?

In the day of multiple, high resolution digital formats that change like the wind, there will always be a steady supply of compact discs to play, much like the massive collections of analog records still floating about. Should you be a music lover with a substantial collection of CDs, in search of a better rendition of your library, the Reimyo CDT777 and DAP 999EX will be your grail.

MSRP: \$12,500, transport and \$11,500 DAC

www.combak.net (manufacturer)

www.wynnaudio.com (NA distributor)