

Digital Stream Player Reviews



SNEAKY MUSIC DS Tone, New Zealand Jul 2008

Linn created a real stir in 2000 when it released its Kivor/Tunboks hard drive-based music server system, which in a roundabout way may even have started the extinction of physical media such as the CD.

Fast forward to 2008 and the rout is well and truly underway, with sales of digital downloads snapping on the heels of CD.

And that's just where Linn's new network music player, the Sneaky Music DS, fits in, offering extreme bang for buck and most of the sound quality of its more illustrious hard drive-based brethren. Essentially it's a very superior form of upsampling DAC. And unusually for a source component, the Sneaky has a 2 X 20W amplifier built in and as such offers an almost complete hi-fi solution. Just add loudspeakers, connect to a local network, load the Ripstation Micro DS (for copying your collection) and custom Linn Twonky software (internet connection a must) and you're ready for action.

When connected to my Castle Richmond speakers, the Sneaky worked flawlessly and sounded great from the outset.

In terms of sound, all the hallmarks of Linn's ethos were there in spades. The music moved along with remarkable pace and timing, while the little 20W amp proved a good match for the Richmonds. There was a distinct improvement in terms of acoustic 'space' over my tube CD player; each instrument on tracks such as 'Clowns' from the latest Goldfrapp album was easy to pick out and place along the soundstage, and there definitely seemed to be more height to the recording. And this was at Redbook 16/44.1 quality, let alone the lofty 24/96 resolution of tracks downloadable from Linn's website.

I downloaded the new Nine Inch Nails album from the band's website as a 24/96 FLAC file...the music had awesome drive and tight, punchy and realistic bass definition.

The Sneaky monstered my treasured CD player in just about all aspects of the audio spectrum, especially with its superior pace, rhythm and timing. Transients were more dramatic through the Sneaky DS, especially with rock and pop music, and while the tube-based Raysonic produced a warmer sound, it was also slightly cuddly and soft. Moreover, the Sneaky revealed hitherto unknown detail from the depths of each recording, while the noise floor was dramatically reduced, so much so that silent passages during tracks were totally inert.

The Sneaky Music DS is a hugely impressive product...it manages to offer a real taste of the high-end future at a price I'd consider a bargain.

Pros:

- + Superb hash and glare-free sound quality
- + All your favourite music at the touch of a button

Verdict:

The future of high-end audio'

AKURATE DS, KLIMAX DS, MAJIK DS, SNEAKY MUSIC DS Stereo, Germany Jul 2008

'IS STREAMING KILLING CD?

Even though we weren't quite sure what Linn "DS" was all about, we suspected that we were in for an experience of epochal proportions. Once we found out, our established view of the (HiFi) world was completely disarranged...

...Klimax DS is in a class totally by itself. Not only is it the best network player we've heard. It is - and that's a sensation - one of the best sources money can buy, slightly better even than our long-standing reference, Nagra CDC...It plays in a different cosmos...

...Akurate DS, Majik DS and Sneaky DS accomplish a similar feat. All three of them sound better than any CD player in their respective price range.....overwhelming...4 superb machines...!'

AKURATE DS, KLIMAX DS, SNEAKY MUSIC DS FonoForum, Germany Jun 2008

"FAREWELL TO THE CD RACK.... The Klimax DS literally knocked our socks off, and although its "little" brothers can't quite compete with its out-of-this-world qualities, both are clearly superior in their own right. No doubt about it: Linn's DS players offer the best sound we've heard so far from digital formats. All three easily beat similarly priced CD players, which takes network streaming to an all new level of sound. And best of all: Going Linn means you can leave your PC in the office..."

SNEAKY MUSIC DS Audio, Germany Jun 2008

"...Best ever sound quality for 1500 Euros. There's no CD player anywhere near its price range that could seriously compete with it. The Sneaky Music DS deserves to be integrated in the best systems and once there it will kick many a high end CD player off the rack. Verdict: Reference Class. Sound: outstanding. Value for money: outstanding."

SNEAKY MUSIC DS Stereoplay, Germany Jun 2008

"The SNEAKY MUSIC DS sounds just amazing and enters Absolute Spitzenklasse (highest rating). Value for money: outstanding."

Sneaky Music DS was also awarded a "Highlight" (best of class) by Stereoplay.

KLIMAX DS Tone, New Zealand May 2008

'Carved from a solid ingot of aluminium, the sheer build quality of the Klimax DS assured me it was a serious, high-end piece of audio equipment...it looks very understated and elegant, just what you'd expected from the Scottish hi-fi masters.

The Klimax DS gave an immediate improvement to the sound, being cleaner and much more immediate than the CD. The snare drum had better 'snap' and dynamic impact, while overall the music had better pace, rhythm and timing.

What was amazing, however, was that the CD had been stored at its native 16/44.1k. Essentially I had been listening to the CD minus the whirring transport and the improvement was considerable: better definition, more vibrancy and realism.

Linn has a revolutionary product in the Klimax DS...it surely represents the finest two-channel sound quality available today. It's a landmark product from Linn and one that, thanks to the potential of software/firmware updates, may not even date. Amazing.'



AKURATE, AKURATE 2200, AKURATE CD, AKURATE DS, AKURATE KONTROL

Stereo Mecmuasi, Turkey May 2008

English Translation of AKurate DS review from Stereo Mecmuasi, Issue 5:

'Timpani Audio's 13th Event was dedicated to the presentation of Linn Akurate DS unit. It took place on 20 - 21 March 2008 and was the first of its kind in Turkey. The demo system had the following components: Linn Akurate 212 loudspeakers, Linn Akurate CD player, Linn Akurate Kontrol pre-amplifier, Linn Akurate 2200 power amplifier and, of course, Linn Akurate DS player.

...When we listened and compared Studio Master and CD quality versions of the same music downloaded from Linn Records' website, I noticed the following:

There was a huge difference in favor of the Studio Master recordings, particularly on the piano and vocal sounds, there was more high frequency sustain, harmonic richness and effortlessness. Low frequencies were more detailed and tight, mids also were more detailed and three dimensional. On classical music material, the Studio Master recordings were providing a very balanced performance that is very neutral and dynamic.

... Starting from the first few seconds, you immediately notice the increased focus of the very "life-like" performance. The level of difference is not at all incremental, it is the type of improvement that is infectious and gets your blood pumping. Instrument and stage resolutions are at the level you would expect from a very high level source. Very, very clean sound indeed!

... In addition to all the above, together with the increased detail and control, the sound had a very analogue-like character. All of the criticized negatives linked to the digital sound had one by one disappeared. I strongly felt the urge to compare the Akurate DS sound with a turntable.

...The second half of the event was going to answer the question that I was most curious to hear: how would the FLAC format ripped CD's played through the Akurate DS compare with the CDP playing the same CD.

...We compared the Akurate CD and Akurate DS using different recordings, but in my opinion the track that reflected the differences best was "The Look of Love" from the "Isley meets Bacharach" album. My beliefs were shattered and my expectations went upside down: because I still had the hope that the CD player would at least show an equal performance against the Akurate DS. But the FLAC versions of the tracks played through the Akurate DS were performing better than the Akurate CD player in every respect. The differences were similar to the ones we had previously noticed between Studio Master and CD quality recordings. The sound was cleaner with a better focus and more analogue like tonality. Probably the most striking differences were the disappearance of the messiness and the feeling of compression, thus we had an airier and more effortless presentation. Low frequencies became more controlled and tight and the cymbals silkier. The focus and the palpability feeling of the lead singer was increased to such a degree that I was in awe. The truth is I had never experienced Ronald Isley so present in any other system.

...Akurate DS displays even better its supremacy on classical music: stage resolution with its different layers is excellent. The sound is so much more cleaner that you feel the need to turn up the volume. Whereas with a CD player, due to the edginess of the trebles and the lack of resolution, I always felt the need to turn down the volume.

... As a conclusion, I think that Akurate DS should be seen, heard and savored. We can say that "It is walking on the trail of the future".'

AKURATE CD, AKURATE DS Hifi.nl, Netherlands Apr 2008

'When playing the Linn Records *Notes from a Hebridean Island* album through both Akurate players, it became clear that not only does Linn make premium quality sources, but excellent recordings as well.

With Studio-Master quality downloads, everything took on a less mechanical quality which shifted the aural focus from replay to the music.

This is rather promising technology which deserves the serious attention of audiophiles.'



KLIMAX DS Kankyu Ohkoku, Japan May 2008

Read the English translation below

'The new generation player that synchronises with your PC to play back music data ripped from CDs or studio master grade data from the internet – its variation in expression is breathtaking.'

By S Koreeda

'Let me first say that Linn's Klimax DS which requires a PC environment is completely different from standard audio products. It also requires a large storage hard disc drive (NAS) that connects straight to the network and a wireless LAN: yes, it is an audio computer system.

DS has two functions. One is reading digitally encrypted music signal in the CDs as file format and recording onto NAS, then turning it back into analogue signals and relaying it to the amp. This is the same role as a CD player. The second is downloading music tracks from the internet and playing them back. This of course is the same process as Apple's iTunes, but what is remarkable is that downloading the original music source itself, which is normally used to create CD or SACD (LINN calls this 'Studio Master Grade') or in CD level has already begun.

Presently downloading studio masters is only available at LINN Records and Onkyo, but it seems that EMI UK will start a CD level downloading service by the end of the year. CD sales, especially classic music CDs, is dropping at a devastating speed worldwide. The major labels and major record companies are headed towards net distribution.

Digital technology has always been closely tied to error correcting technology. Audio CD was born 30 years ago when tech-talk was a big deal. Its correction is said to be more of 'filling in the blanks'. So, audio CD is a dated, elementary technology. It goes without saying that in data recording on PCs etc, the information precision of its recording methodology is 100%. Because if it wasn't, it would not be used for storing data that requires precision down to the last yen, if not 1/10 of yen.

But as you know, when playing back an audio CD on a CD player, depending on the difference of reflection due to the variation in the material used for the disc, or variation of the mechanics, the precision in reading the data varies greatly. That left room for master clock generator and such. But even with help, a CD player required to read data and playing it back simultaneously has its limits.

The information on an audio CD is not stored in PC's file format, but due to recent appearances of iTunes etc has proved that extracting almost 100% (depending on physical state of the disc such as scratches) information (called ripping) is possible, and has become ever so popular. For a computer fanatic who was into audio, accurate ripping of audio CD was nothing new.

The storage space of a PC has grown tremendously in the past 10 years. If you have a 1 Terabyte hard disc, you will be able to store information of 1500 CD discs (44.1k Hz/16bit). Number of tracks will be less if you use studio master level music source.

I listened and compared the original CD and its ripped version, and the difference in the sound quality was quite shocking. The sound of CD ripped music source on a pair of speakers that can reproduce the slightest change in the air, was both open and precise. Both digital and analogue recordings left an elegant impression without being harsh. You could also feel the cold steel and the detailed surface; the variation in its expression made me hold my breath.

And the studio master source, used as a source for making SACD, left me in an unbelievable awe on the deepest level. You feel the existence of the space between sounds, and layers of utmost energy pouring out. It is a sound I have never heard before.

The impact was so huge, it made me wish that I could replace all my CD/SACD players with this.

Even with this system the type of cable or the NAS seems to make a difference in sound, which somehow was a slight relief to me. There is still more depth in the audio world.'

KLIMAX DS Stereophile, USA Apr 2008

'The Klimax DS is unlike any other network music devices because it assumes you're starting with high-quality sources, not lossy compressed files...its real glory is handling higher-rez material - not only does it accept native resolutions up to 192kHz, it also upconverts to 384kHz or 352.8kHz.

The Klimax DS shares the slimline chassis style established by the Sondek CD12 CD player and carried on by the Klimax amplifiers and Kontrol preamplifier. That means it's machined from a solid billet of aluminium, which assures it of excellent EMP shielding and mechanical isolation.

When it came to coaxing "Red Book" digits into analog, the Klimax DS was definitely first-tier. But get above "Red Book", even ever so slightly, and the Klimax came into its own...every time I followed the 24-bit version with the 16-bit, I realized I was missing something I really, really wanted.

On to Linn's Studio Master downloads. Barb Jungr's cover of Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?" from her *Walking in the Sun* was stunning...Did I mention that it totally rocked? The band - and the Klimax DS - were *slammin'*!...The Dunedin Consort's recording of the 1742 Dublin Version of Handel's *Messiah* puts you in Edinburgh's Greyfriars Church, and trust me - you want to be there. The performance is spectacular, and the balance of instruments and voices is phenomenal clear and easy...This is one of the most vivid ways that live music beats recordings, and the Klimax DS conveyed that sense of realism better than just about any component I have auditioned.

I predict that we audiophiles will soon be spoiled with a plethora of choices for legally available hi-rez downloads. Based on my experience with the Linn Klimax DS, I can't wait...the Linn Klimax DS is about as good as digital gets. It's better, when playing hi-rez files, than any "Red Book" player I've heard.

As more and more hi-rez downloads become available, the incentive to own a Klimax DS will increase...The Linn Klimax DS is the stuff that dreams are made of.'

KLIMAX DS Antoine Gresland, Ecoutezvoir.blogspot.com, France Feb 2008

'The machine is a wonderfully looking component, simple and elegant, machined in billet aluminium...The Klimax DS succeeds in bringing full tonal richness and articulation...Clearly, it extracts any available piece of information. On a performance point of view, the Klimax DS is a really astounding front end, another total success to be credited to one of the best design team in the whole audio industry. It is certainly the most musical digital gear I had the opportunity to hear.

The Klimax DS has been created to offer the best of digital for today and the future. In contrast with other current digital front-ends, its open architecture together...and its independent storage device are a guaranty over obsolescence. This is the same sort of philosophy that prevailed to the Sondek LP12 spirit in its time ... what a reference!'

AKURATE DS, KLIMAX DS Stereoplay, Germany Feb 2008

'Akurate DS and Klimax DS have been conceived for one purpose alone: to convert music stored on a hard disc into the highest quality audio signal possible ... Hardly any other source has been moved into Stereoplay's listening room with as much anticipation as Linn's network players. Klimax DS left no room for doubt: a few inches will have to be added to the summit of Mount Olympus for this reference product ... [it] performed like a dependable rope ... coherent in every respect, with more authentic colouration and the utmost information density - you perceive each individual strand, yet all strands pull in the same direction.

Klimax DS stands magnificently on the winner's podium, isolated from the competition.

Klimax DS marks what is currently the best achievable performance in audio for network players and leaves mechanical/optical systems in the dust. Its little brother Akurate DS is not far behind. The perspective for the future is: fast Internet connection and music streaming.

Test Conclusion: Klimax DS sets new standards. It plays CD content from hard disc like no CD player can, and it widens the gap even further when it comes to high-definition content. Reference. Akurate DS, the little brother of Klimax DS, does the family proud: audio performance of the highest order; playing CD quality recordings even better than the legendary Sondek CD12."



KLIMAX DS, SONDEK LP12 Homevision, Germany Jan 2008

Homevision name both products their new digital and analogue references.

'HIS FATHER'S SON...The Klimax DS is not a steal but which product that defines the State of the Art is? If Gilad's Klimax DS will ever reach the LP 12's legendary status remains to be seen. This has nothing to do with its qualities but with the fact that digital technology is moving so fast. Does it matter? Just like his father had done with the Sondek a long time ago, Gilad has created with the Klimax DS a unique, incomparable product which sets the technological and sonic standards of today and will be pointing the way for years to come. His father's son.

Klimax DS Verdict: Never before has a digital medium sounded so natural, it's the pinnacle of audiophile digital technology...

Sondek LP12 Verdict: With the SE version Linn has created its own monument. The LP12 SE is the standard by which all other turntables will be judged – the reference.'

KLIMAX DS AUDIO, Germany Oct 2007

The Klimax DS has been appointed AUDIO magazine's new "Reference Digital Source Product" in a recently published 8-page review.

LINN KLIMAX DS: THE DIGITAL WONDER:

Linn's [Klimax DS] conjured up a crystal clear sound without sharp edges but with elegant lines, tremendously well contoured and unbelievably exact. Cymbals rang out more intensively and at the same time more naturally...it's simply phenomenal how it managed to retrieve such a multi-faceted sound from a simple data store.

Linn have demonstrated how much audiophile joy music from the world of data can instill. Do you still turn your nose up at music from the network? Maybe this test will help you appreciate that hi fi networks mean more than just tinny MP3 songs. High end audio is not limited to vinyl and CD. Linn demonstrates: if you approach the digital experience without prejudice, you can discover new worlds of sound. AUDIO is delighted with this new reference source.

KLIMAX DS Hi-Fi World, UK Sep 2007

"Linn's new network-enabled music player is quite unlike any other such device on the market...I heard a consistently smooth and well finessed performance, with an extremely neutral yet vivid tonality...The key to the Klimax DS was the way it conveyed vast amounts of detail and strung it all together as a coherent and very emotive musical performance...Essentially, the first truly high end, high resolution network music player, it boasts the company's trademark superlative design and build...As the whole world slowly moves away from 'physical media', there will be more and more products like Linn's Klimax DS, but this one is special and will continue to be years later."

