

NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER/DAC



Krell Connect

With the Krell Connect you get to choose from two flavours: for £2,500 you can buy the streamer itself, while an additional £1,000 gets you a high-quality internal DAC fitted. Both variants play a plethora of files – the important ones being FLAC and WAV at up to 24-bit/192kHz, but ALAC, AAC, Ogg, WMA and MP3 are also supported. Our review sample comes with the DAC built-in, but the cheaper version simply has a digital output, making it ideal for those that already have a digital converter or DAC-equipped CD player.

Being a Krell it is compulsory for it to look big and bold, and so it does. The central section sports a long LED light that glows red or blue depending on the mode – standby or operating. To the right is a small 320 x 240-pixel, 90mm diameter backlit LCD screen.

Sound quality

Unsurprisingly, there's a distinctive Krell family sound to the Connect – one that impresses and charms in equal measure. The powerful, percussive, fluid bass is great, as Propaganda's *The Chase* proves. The synth bass line modulates up and down with heady aplomb, sounding wonderfully untroubled by what is going on further up the frequency scale. At the same time, the Connect cuts through the track's dense wash of synthesisers, throwing out loads of detail and a capacious soundstage. Treble is svelte and smooth too, and timed beautifully – the Krell manages

to bring all of the music together in a believable, coherent and organic way.

At first listen, it presents itself as a light, bright and tonally spry device, but it's so much more than this, as it plays a clever trick of rendering the music in a very clean and detailed fashion, yet is never harsh or objectionable. Indeed, when it's been on for a few hours, it acquires a seductive creaminess to its tonality.

For example, Steely Dan's *Deacon Blue* comes over in a beautifully lucid way; Donald Fagen's deadpan vocals sound unusually animated and tuneful, while backing saxophones and trumpet have a believable timbre to them that's rarely heard in a digital source component. Walter Becker's delicate guitar work is better etched than we are used to, while at the same time it never descends into brittleness. Indeed, the way the Connect allows all the elements to play along with one another is a joy to behold – it manages the deftest of party tricks of enthralling yet never tiring the listener. It doesn't just give a sense of the recording, it nails it.

Move from CD-quality to high-resolution recordings, and there's a proportional increase in sound quality, just as it should be; the music acquires extra energy, detail, drive, power and precision right across the frequency range. Treble becomes slightly smoother and a lot more sparkly, bass is firmer and fuller and the midband widens out even more and drops back, showing the Connect's ability to create a superbly

DETAILS

- PRICE**
£3,500
- ORIGIN**
USA
- WEIGHT**
8.1kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
433 x 88 x 427mm
- FEATURES**
● 6 to 24-bit,
44.1kHz to 192kHz
PCM playback
● FLAC; Ogg;
WAV; WMA;
Apple Lossless;
m4a; MP3 files
● ESS Sabre
ES-9018 DAC chip
● RCA and balanced
XLR outputs
- VERTRIEB**
Audio Tuning
Vertriebs GmbH
- TELEPHONE**
+43 1 544 8580
- WEBSITE**
audiotuning.com

spacious recorded acoustic given half the chance.

Wings' *Band On The Run* is an unalloyed pleasure; it's a great album that to our mind has never sounded right on vinyl or CD, but at 24/96 via the Connect it comes over as tonally fulsome, spatially three dimensional and musically gratifying. Once again the Krell's basic character shines through; things are fast and thrilling with fantastically dynamic pan rolls crashing across the soundstage, left to right then back again.

The Connect is consummately neutral and transparent, letting all the richness of recordings come out while capturing their full visceral impact – it's quite a thing to experience. This means that unlike some rivals, which seem to have been voiced in one way or another, it works uniformly well across a wide range of source material.

Conclusion

We have tried many different machines at this price point and the Connect can hold its own. Of course, it's always a matter of taste, but it's so neutral, open and transparent that it doesn't tie itself up in knots trying to flatter one type of music or another ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Naturally musical sound with power and punch; build quality
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Some may want fascia controls and a larger screen
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WESAY:** Superb sounding high-end streamer with real musical appeal
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL

