

Consonance 2.2 CD player



Fresh from the Far East comes an affordable CD player that aims to win your heart as much as your head with a sound that's rich, liquid and analogue-like

Consonance 2.2

PRICE £1295

There are certain countries synonymous with high-end audio, with the US, Canada, UK and France immediately coming to mind. Over the last 18 months, a new player has entered the field – China – and now a new name from that country is vying for attention. That brand is Consonance.

Like the Shanling CD-T100 [HFN Jan 2003] and Inca Design Katana, the 2.2 CD player boasts excellent build quality, from the exquisite wooden detailing on top of the U-shaped lid to the solid 10mm-thick aluminium front panel and quality chrome plating of the two front panel controls.

The player is a centre-loading design, with the display directly below the loading tray. Though the controls appear to be rotary ones the left control actually pivots up and down to turn the power on/off and open the loading tray, while the right control pivots on the vertical axis for play/stop and the horizontal for next/repeat.

The back panel features an IEC power input, a pair of quality RCA outputs, an S/PDIF digital output, and a pair of balanced outputs – unusual at this price point, with only the Inca Design players joining the Consonance in offering balanced outputs at under £1500.

Another unusual design feature can be found under the lid where a Sovtek 6H30 dual triode valve is employed in the output stage. The 6H30 was originally designed for the Russian military and was unheard of until BAT in the USA began using these valves in its pre- and power amps. The 6H30 is used here after the Analog Devices SSM 2141 balanced line driver I/C, driving the single-ended outputs only. The balanced outputs are driven directly by the op-amps, giving the user the choice of a valve single-ended output or solid state balanced output.

The Consonance 2.2 was used with a Krell KRC-3 and Trilogy 902 pre-amp, Bryston 3B-SST and 14B-SST power amps, with Musical Fidelity

reference CD players. Townshend Isolda DCT-300 interconnect and Isolda DCT speaker cables were employed in the pre/power system while Signature interconnects with Odyssey 4 speaker cables were used with the integrated amps. All equipment was supported on RDC Aspekt racks with power provided by an Isotek Substation and Qube.

Initially this player sounded dry, lacked stereo image focus and high frequencies sounded shut in. But after an extended run-in period the sound opened up and the soundstage developed fully. Once run in fully the player impressed with its rich and liquid sound. While the 6H30 in the single-ended output stage had an undeniable effect of contouring the sound, even the solid

Timing is very special. The player can denote the interplay between musicians in a way many machines miss

A308 and X-80 integrated amplifiers also being pressed into service. Martin Logan SL-3, ART Loudspeakers Skibo, Rocket RSC-750 and PMC GB-1 speakers were used with Musical Fidelity's Tri-Vista 21 DAC, while the Musical Fidelity X-Ray V3 and Inca Design Katana SE were used as

state balanced output exhibited a fullness that was unexpected given the modest price of this player, the sound being more in keeping with that heard from Wadia players. With Dido's *Life For Rent* [BMG 82876557422] – an Australian copy-protection-less disc CD that captures Dido's voice

Sovtek selling point

The Consonance uses the Philips VAM 1202 transport, as seen in the Katana and the Musical Fidelity X-Ray V3 CD players, with the Cirrus Logic CS4396 24-bit 192kHz upsampling DAC. The CS 4396 is a multi-bit Delta Sigma modulation DAC that then feeds a pair of Burr-Brown OPA 2604 op-amps. On the single-ended outputs this feeds the 6H30 valve output, while the balanced outputs are connected to an SSM 2141 differential output I/C. The big selling point of the Consonance 2.2 is the use of the Sovtek 6H30



valve in the single-ended output stage. The 6H30 is an ex-military, very high transconductance dual-triode tube. Originally designed for use in Russian military applications during the Cold War, this tube made its way to China where it has been adopted for use in the Consonance player's single-ended output stage.



Chrome-plated knobs pivot up and down

Consonance has chosen a Philips-made transport mechanism for the 2.2



in a surprisingly natural way, the 2.2 ensured that the vocals sounded very smooth and yet at no point lacked the nuances and inflections needed to give the impression of a real singer in the room with you. The result is a player you can listen to for hours without fatigue, even when it is fed modern pop recordings.

The timing of this player is also something very special. It has the ability to bring to the fore subtle timing cues that denote the interplay

performers in the depth plane was a little blurred, individual instruments overlapping with no representation of space between musicians. The balanced output, while delivering a smaller stage size, gave improved focus, bringing performers into far sharper relief and bringing a feel of actual space between the performers in the depth plane.

Also noticeable was that transients were diminished slightly when heard through the Consonance, again this seemingly being traded in

its presentation. This gives bass guitar a body that'll be welcomed by users of smaller speakers, but the sound was a little too full and weighty to be convincing when heard through the SL-3. Meanwhile, the lower midrange displays a subtle opaqueness that affects the openness and micro dynamic detailing of guitar and piano notes, but this diminishes as you move up through the midrange, allowing the sound to open up and flow effortlessly into the room. The subtle timing shifts and cues of the musicians and Dido's voice can be clearly heard, but the opaqueness in the lower mids prevents the suspension of disbelief needed to convince the listener that on this track there is a human voice between the speakers. Having said that, the player provides a rich, luxuriously full sound that the listener can relax into.

The high frequencies have a definite character, with a subtle rolling off being present, though this isn't as dramatic as that heard in the early Wadia DACs like the 64.4. The effect is to tame the brittleness and energetic high-frequency output of many of today's recordings. High frequencies do not lack detail or texture, cymbals and tambourines sounding correct and convincing.

The Consonance 2.2 has a distinct character that I would suggest will appeal to someone who likes the Sugden Masterclass player, but who is looking to spend less money. It's a must-hear for someone who yearns for the body and richness of a late '80s British suspended subchassis turntable or who finds listening fatigue a problem with CD generally. Any CD player that makes musical enjoyment a priority deserves to be recommended, while the 2.2 gives established manufacturers another reason to worry about the Far Eastern invasion of the high-end. ■

David Allcock

It's a must-hear for those who yearn for the body and richness of a late '80s British suspended subchassis turntable

between musicians in a way that many machines, even those more expensive than this one, miss.

As for the soundstaging capabilities of this player, they're a little behind those of the Katana and X-Ray V3 players. The single-ended outputs showed the deepest and widest stage size, with instruments located just beyond the speakers' edges. But image focus was a little behind the best, as if the manual focus on an SLR camera was slightly off, blurring subtly the edge definitions of performers. Likewise the position of

favour of a slightly warmer sound. One example of this was the acoustic guitar that appears during the introduction of 'Sand in my Shoes'. This had a wonderfully natural and liquid sound, yet the transient of plectrum on string was merged with the sound emanating from the body of the guitar. Through the Tri-Vista 21 DAC and Katana these two parts could be heard as separate entities.

The bass from this player is full without being especially extended, giving further credence to the idea that the 2.2 is not completely neutral in

Supplier

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Hi-FiNews verdict

The emphasis here is firmly on the music, the 2.2 having a rich, analogue-like sound that will appeal to fans of '80s Brit turntables. The trade off is in terms of soundstaging and imaging, though timing is tops.