Bryston BDP-1 Digital Music Player

A First Look by David McCallum:

Bryston is about to launch a new Media Player designed for the Hi-Fi enthusiast that isn't like any other computer-based, media-server type product I've seen. The concept is new, the design is pure Bryston and last week I got to spend five hours with the prototype of the soon to be launched BDP-1 Bryston Digital Player. In typical Bryston style, the new player produces clean, resolute & dynamic music. The most interesting thing, however, might not be how good it sounds, but what the BDP-1 does. Here's a first look at what I discovered.

Bryston BDP-1

The Bryston BDP-1 is a digital audio player that plays music from a USB hard drive or USB Thumbdrive rather than a disc, designed specifically for playing high-resolution music within a two channel Hi-Fi stereo system. It plays digital audio from a USB drive and outputs a digital audio signal to an external D/A, just like a CD transport; instead of being stored on a disc, the music is stored on a USB drive. The media is stored, organized and arranged on the USB drive by the user (the BDP-1 does not come with an internal hard drive), and the player can access up to four different USB drive devices at any one time.

Once a USB drive is attached, the BDP-1 is able to play multiple audio file types including AIFF, WAV, FLAC, MP3, M4A, WMA with sampling frequencies of 44.1 KHz, 48 KHz, 88.2 KHz, 96 KHz, 176.4 KHz & 192 KHz, and bit depths of 16b & 24b,

converting computer audio files into digital audio for output to a D/A converter via either AES-EBU or SPIDF (BNC) digital signal formats.

The BDP-1 can be controlled using one of four different methods:

1. Directly from the player via front panel controls and display.

2. Using a Bryston remote control for Play, Pause, Stop, Next and Previous (with Song and Artist viewable from the front panel display

3. A computer using a web-browser (EX Firefox/Minion or Bryston MAX

4. A Remote wireless device such as iPhone ™, iTouch ™, iPad ™ (Using Mpod or Bryston MINI)

Control of the player from the front panel and the Bryston remote control is simple, with functions very similar to a CD player. However, substantially more interactivity is available through the options of using a computer or a remote wireless device.

In order to be operated by a computer or remote wireless device such as an iPhone™, the BDP-1 needs to be connected to a router within a wireless home network. This connection is made with a hard-wired Ethernet cable that runs between the BDP-1 and a router attached to a wireless network. Once connected to a network, third-party applications are used to interact with the BDP-1, the hard drive discs connected to it, and the audio files on those drives.

I experimented with two third-party music player applications: Minion and MPoD. Both are available for use with Apple's iPhone™, iPod touch™ and iPad™. Minion also offers a web-browser via Firefox for use with a computer. Although I didn't spend enough time with either app to be able to offer a thorough evaluation, I was impressed by how smoothly they integrated with the BDP-1. Once connected to my wireless network, the system functioned easily and efficiently, allowing me to see all of the hard drives, folders and music that I had prepped for the session.

In addition to these third-party applications, Bryston is also working on the development of a web browser called "Bryston MAX" & an application for remote control called "Bryston MINI." The prototype's for these two features were still rudimentary but effective, showing a lot of promise. My early guess is that owners of the BDP-1 will want to use one or both of these two features to control the BDP-1.

Once the unit was completely connected the real Hi-Fi fun began. With two USB hard drives, one USB Thumbdrive and wireless control in place, I started toggling through the folders with an iPad™ running MPoD. With this application switching between tracks was a breeze. In anticipation of the listening session I had prepared a hard drive with a lot of music on it, including my entire Beatles & Bob Dylan box sets, numerous high-resolution audio downloads from 96khz to 192khz, and many of my favourite albums and songs. The MPoD feature allowed me to prepare lists, or to simply switch between songs on the fly. While I didn't have a significant amount of time for listening, I did get to play most of the tracks in my test-music library, without having to switch between multiple CD's or toggle

USB Thumb-Drive

through tracks on a burned disc. The bottom line is that I was able to listen to a lot of music, and if time allowed I had hundreds of hours of music readily available at my fingertips.

In terms of its Hi-Fi performance, out of the box the prototype BDP-1 sounded excellent. Connected to the Bryston BDA-1 D/A converter I reviewed in early 2010<http://www.innerearmag.com/reviews/cd/Bryston_BDA1_DAC.shtml> the system sounded rich, full and very musical. I look forward to an extended listening session when it is ready for release.

I recognize that there are a number of media servers or hard drive based players designed for the Hi-Fi enthusiast already on the market, and some of them offer more features or greater functionality than Bryston's design. I also recognize that some basic computer skills are required in order to both prepare and use the BDP-1 Player, which may result in resistance from many hard-core audiophiles. But ultimately the strength of the BDP-1 lies in the simplicity and quality of its design concept. While it is a computer-based audio product, it isn't a music server or a computer being used to play music; the BDP-1 is exactly what Bryston has called it - a music player. It doesn't store, rip, or organize your music. It simply plays the music at the highest technical standard available today.

I think Bryston has set out to do the same thing they did when they built their first CD player; build a product that maximizes the sonic capability of the platform, while building a device that is simple to use. In this regard the BDP-1 gets full marks. How it compares to other such products requires a more thorough critique of its technical operation and a more detailed assessment of its sonic performance. I look forward to addressing these questions in a full review, which hopefully will appear later this fall. For now, after a first glance my enthusiasm is quite high, and I strongly suggest you watch the horizon for the BDP-1 Bryston Digital Player.

Editor's Note:

I asked James Tanner, Bryston's marketing executive, to come over to my house and listen to some prototype (very) high-end speaker cables and interconnects in a system with Bryston 7B SST squared amplifiers. He came and brought the BDP-1 along.

This provided me the opportunity to listen to this rather new source component — and **I am totally impressed.** The USB Thumbdrive held some of my usual listening material with which I am intimately familiar and, strictly from an audio perspective, I couldn't hear the difference between my CD player/DAC/Clock arrangement and the BDP-1. The Bryston DAC was used for these auditions. I am not the a savvy digital interface user like David, nor do I know enough about its technology, but I must admit that the unit's audio performance was **astoundingly high-end — nothing short of stunning.**

I regard the BDP-1 as the most innovative source component I have ever come across. I do not know why, but it seems that the unit is quite capable to "extract" the all-important harmonics better than most CD players I have listened to. Perhaps it is the absence or limited timing errors caused by CD transports; perhaps it is its discrete circuitry …whatever it is, this is the future of digital source components ..and it's available now. The price (suggested $2200) is right, the technology is up to date now and it is ready for updates when technology advances further. **All I can say is : I want one.**

Ernie Fischer