

REVIEW

# TONEAudio

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METRONOME TECHNOLOGIE

## The Metronome CD-3 Signature

— JEFF DORGAY

## The Metronome CD-3 Signature



I have to be honest with you until this box arrived at my door; I was just about to give up on digital. All this talk with Michael Fremer and a few others resulted in the purchase of a much better analog rig, and that's when it happened; I just started to listen to digital less and less. I even went as far as to digitize my entire CD collection of about 2000 CDs in uncompressed form. I know what you are thinking, that would take a heck of a lot of hard drive space. 1.4 terabytes to be exact, or 1400 GB.

As luck would have it, I just happened to have a spare two terabytes hanging around on my Macintosh G5, so I was up for the challenge. A months worth of spare time later and all of my CDs were imported, all uncompressed. I was completely ready to take them to my local used CD store, drop them off for good and go buy a convertible.

But the CD-3 arrived and I hadn't yet boxed my music up, so I thought, what could it hurt? I had heard and read great things about this player, so I plugged it in and gave it a listen. How did it sound? More about that later, but I can tell you it was good enough to keep the CDs on the shelf for now.

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**The CD-3 is actually the most musical CD player I have heard to date.**

Now for the bad news, this little jewel isn't cheap. It isn't ridiculous, but \$10,800 is not chump change either. My current turntable, cartridge and phono preamplifier is worth twice this amount, so on that note, 10 grand for great digital playback isn't so bad after all... The CD-3 is actually the most musical CD player I have heard to date. Please keep in mind I am not using the B-word here, because I haven't auditioned all of the five figure players. (However, I am now on a mission after hearing the Metronome) *(continued)*

Metronome Technologie is a French company, whose products are distributed in the US by Jim Ricketts at TMH Audio. The CD-3 is actually their entry-level player, so I can't wait to listen to their 20 thousand dollar two box player. They also make a separate CD transport and DAC as well as some very interesting looking electronics AND A TURNTABLE! All of the Metronome products uphold the French tradition of beautiful things; the CD-3 is very attractive, yet understated. Even the remote is GORGEOUS.

This is a top loading player, featuring a modified Phillips CDM-12 Pro 2 transport (that is made out of metal) with a magnetic clamp and an oversized spindle. The CD-3's transport bay is also flooded with blue light for higher disc read accuracy. Make sure you have the clamp on the CD before pushing play, or you could damage the player! The top drawer opens manually and along with the rest of the player is very solid. The remote is also very industrial with ball bearing style buttons. Every aspect of the CD-3 is substantial and this player weighs about 35 pounds. Even before you turn it on, it feels like a ten thousand dollar player!

The rear panel has a pair of RCA outputs; a pair of XLR balanced outputs and an RCA digital output, should you want to use this as a transport alone. The on/off switch is also on the rear, placed by the IEC outlet, so the front panel is clean; just a massive aluminum piece with a blue digital display. The five buttons for the player are on the top and for the purists in the group; you can turn the display off while listening if you choose.

### Initial Setup

The CD-3 started in my second system, but after about a week's worth of listening was moved to the main system with my ACT 2 and Premier 350, so that I could do a lot of switching between LP and CD with my new SME 10. Jim Ricketts, the importer told me about the Delrin feet on the bottom of the CD-3 and suggested that to get the most sound out of this unit, that I place it on some kind of isolation platform (preferably Symposium) and a set of Rollerblocks or Rollerblock Jrs.

I wanted to give the unit the benefit of the doubt first, because I always hate telling people that in order to really enjoy a piece of gear, they need to buy another thousand bucks worth of accessories. After really getting a feel for the CD-3, it is a great CD player, but I must admit if you want to take the sound to another level of clarity and resolution, I would highly suggest a Symposium Ultra Platform, a set of Rollerblock Jr.s and upgrading the power cord to a DH Labs Power Plus. I know this will set you back another \$800-\$900, but I think you will enjoy it even more. If possible, live with the player for a while, and see if you can borrow this stuff from a dealer or a friend. It's kind of like driving a Porsche 911 or BMW M3 and replacing the tires that it came off the showroom with the latest Michelin Pilots; a bit more cash, but it makes an excellent drive fantastic.

### The Sound

Because my test unit arrived fully broken in, I only needed to let it play for a day before I started listening seriously. The first thing I noticed with the Metronome was how dynamic it sounds. While I won't tell you to sell your turntables, the presentation was right up there with a good analog rig, just a different flavor. I would compare it to hearing the best solid-state gear right next to the best tube gear.

*(continued)*



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Even the first day when it was warming up, I threw on the first Audioslave CD and noticed immediately how forceful the Metronome was, going from the extremely quiet beginning of *Gasoline* to when the bass kicks in; Kapow! Switching to a bit of classical with that new Bax box set revealed the same thing; going from the quietest passages to the loudest was effortless and much more dramatic than I've been accustomed to with digital playback. Often times when listening to digital it is easy to get fatigued, but one of the highest compliments I can pay the CD-3 is that even after quite a few 10 hour listening sessions, I still was really digging the sound. There are very few other players that I can make this claim for and they are all rolled off in comparison to the CD-3.

**Even after quite a few 10 hour listening sessions, I still was really digging the sound.**

The CD-3 is fully balanced, so if you have the opportunity, I suggest using it balanced. When I was using it in my other system with the Callisto and could compare the single ended outputs with balanced, I felt there was a touch more inner detail to be had using the balanced outputs. Switching the Callisto for the BAT VK-42SE gave the same results. I even preferred the balanced outputs using the CD-3 with my new McIntosh C220 in my third system. Even on a modest system it made enough of a difference, that I would recommend using it this way; however I doubt most people with budget systems would buy a player of this caliber! However, if you have aspirations for a mega-system, you could start with this piece!

Just to keep things a fair "apples to apples" comparison, I tried two different cables (the DH

Labs Revelation and Cardas Golden Reference) that I just happened to have with RCA and XLR termination, so I could be scientific about this. I really enjoyed the sound of this player with the Cardas cable, regardless of preamplifier. Enough about cables, back to this glorious player!

I'm sure you are thinking that this player can't be all that and a bag of chips at this price and it's really just marginally better than a good CD player in the \$1000-2000 range. But, it IS. I always hate comparing one manufacturer's gear to another, because everyone has different design goals, budgets and even different things they listen for when building a CD player, so it's really not fair (to me anyway) to say "Player A just smokes Player B."

**Here's what you get for ten grand. Music.**

You get great music, with all of the qualities that you normally might equate with digital playback missing. Harsh, grainy high frequency response, veiled congested midrange, lack of air and depth, it's all GONE.

I know, you have heard this modestly priced digital player that you think is really great and that's fine, but here's the test I dare you to perform: switch between your favorite reasonably (even moderately) priced digital player and then go right back to a good thousand dollar turntable with any good 5-700 dollar cartridge. I'll bet you a glass of your favorite expensive wine that you end up preferring the sound of the turntable. I know I always did. *(continued)*



## Not this time, buddy.

I had to go all the way up to my SME 10/Shelter 90x/Ray Samuels XR-10B combination before I felt analog had the edge, and I have to say, it wasn't a ton. At this level, analog was pulling just a bit more low level detail out of the mix and was just a bit more grain-free, but it was darn close. Considering that all I had to do with the Metronome was plug it in and NOT fool around with VTA, etc. etc., it makes you wonder.

Thanks to the Metronome, I'm on a quest to seek out more of this caliber of digital playback. We will have a number of these players to audition in the months to come and I must say for the first time, I'm thrilled to listen to digital. I'm hearing detail, texture and air like I've never heard before.

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**If you are an audiophile with a huge collection of CDs and little or no vinyl, I would buy this player and forget about analog, it's that good.**

When you are at a show listening to a mega player, it's really difficult, even when you bring your own test discs along.

I spent a lot of long listening sessions with this player, often sitting on the couch here all day working on my laptop, just so I could keep listening to the CD-3. No matter what I was listening to, it was so easy to just relax and enjoy the

presentation. Keep in mind, this player did not add or subtract from the sound. Some digital players trick you by rolling off the highs or softening the sound to make digital more palatable. The CD-3 was very neutral, accurate and dynamic at all times. Like a first-class turntable and phono cartridge, it extracted more information than anything else I have heard so far.

It didn't make my awful CDs sound better. Other than KISS-Alive, the worst sounding CD I have in my collection is Carole King's Tapestry. I often use this as a test CD because it sounds so compressed and rolled off, with almost no life in the recording. As much as I would like to tell you the CD-3 transformed this disc into something wonderful, it didn't. However, it did allow me to hear a lot more information on this disc than I ever did before. This was the experience I had with everything I listened to from Hip Hop to Classical; the sound was always more involving than I remembered it on other players.

## The Ultimate Compliment

Here's my take on the CD-3. If you are an audiophile with a huge collection of CDs and little or no vinyl, I would buy this player and forget about analog, it's that good. If you have a substantial collection of both and were at the same impasse I was a few months ago, I think you will love this player enough to be happy when you switch from CD to LP. It's that good. I can't wait to see what Metronome's \$20k player sounds like!! ●

## MANUFACTURER:

### Metronome Technologie

Importer: TMH Audio  
PO Box 751681  
Dayton, OH 45475  
937-439-2667  
www.tmhaudio.com

## PERIPHERALS:

**Preamplifier:** Conrad Johnson  
ACT2, BAT VK-42SE, Aesthetix Callisto

**Amplifier:** Conrad Johnson  
Premier 350

**Speakers:** Tetra 506 Custom

**Analog Sources:** SME 10 w/Shelter  
90x phono cartridge, Ray Samuels  
XR-10B phono stage. Teac A-4300  
open reel deck

**Interconnects:** Cardas Golden  
Reference, Tara Labs RSC, Tetra Artet

**Speaker Cables:** Tetra Artet

**Power Cords:** Running Springs  
Mongoose, Essential Sound Products  
"The Essence" Reference

**Power Conditioning:** Running  
Springs Jaco

**Vibration Control:** Symposium  
Ultra platforms,  
Rollerblock Jr.

## FAVORITE TEST TUNES: (all CD)

**Audioslave** – Audioslave

**Carole King** – Tapestry

**Miles Davis** – Kind of Blue

**Patti Smith** – Land

**Donald Fagen** – Morph the Cat