hi-finews OUTSTANDING PRODUCT

Network-enabled media storage device
Made by: Buffalo Technology, Japan
Supplied by: Audiophile Digital Music Masters Ltd, UK
Telephone: 01252 784525
Web: www.melco-audio.com; www.audiophiledigital.co.uk
Prices: £6999 (H50)/£8999 (S38)

AUDIO FILE

Melco N10/2

There are two distinct Melco families: the full-size N1, and the half-width N10, of which the N10/2 models – the £6999 N10/2-H50 and £8999 N10/2-S38 flagship – are the latest iteration. The two prices reflect storage: the 2-H50 offers 5TB of conventional HDD, while the 2-S38 packs 3.84TB of (solid-state) SSD.

As you might expect, given Melco's roots in Japanese computer

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company Buffalo, the new drives are of a dedicated design, optimised for the 'write once/read many' working of a music library system. A new mainboard, originally developed for the 45th anniversary limited edition of the N10, also graces both.

In terms of setup and use, much here will be familiar to existing Melco users. The N10/2 has twin Ethernet sockets for connection to both your network and to a network player, and three USB ports to accommodate external storage, a CD ripper, and a USB DAC (384kHz/32-bit and DSD 512 is

supported). It's even possible to use the N10/2 as a source for a USB DAC *without* the network connection, 'pushing' digital audio data straight out of its USB port, and it can also access streaming services including Tidal, Qobuz and vTuner Internet radio via the Melco Music HD app.

Much of the beauty of the Melco experience is down to the 'behind the scenes' development of the company's Intelligent Music Library suite, which combines MinimServer and SongKong music file management software to give an attractive interface with extensive, logical metadata tagging. All this happens without any user intervention, making finding and playing music simple and intuitive.

♫ ART OF PERSUASION
For the purposes of this audition we stuck to using the Melco N10/2 as a source for a selection of dedicated USB DACs, from a Matrix Audio X-Sabre 3 [see p61] down to a Chord Electronics Mojo 2 [p53]. And even with the £495 Chord DAC the N10/2 sounded spectacular.

Playing the gloriously detailed *Lamento* set by Marianne Beatte Kielland and Oslo Circles [Lawo LWC1226; DXD], the Melco/Chord

ABOVE:
There's little to distinguish this mk2 N10 from Melco's first two-box music library except the 'global' on/standby switch is now moved from the PS10 PSU [bottom] to the head unit [top]. The latter still offers simple four-button navigation and a USB port for loading music

combination delivered a sound dripping with the ambience of the church recording venue. The soloist and period instruments were placed persuasively before the listener – the voice was simply luminous, hanging in space, while the delicate accompaniment filled the soundstage with atmosphere.

It was a superbly immersive and precise audio experience, and that resolution was just as apparent in the 192kHz/24-bit remaster of Eric Clapton's *461 Ocean Boulevard* album [Polydor], where the Melco/Chord pairing slammed into the opening 'Motherless Children' with all guns blazing before settling back into the lushness of 'Give Me Strength' and the sweet harmonies of 'Let It Grow'.

Melco's two-box N/10 also worked supremely well with Matrix Audio's X-Sabre 3 DAC when it came to the big, dramatic stuff, such as the Bergen Philharmonic/Gardner recording of Britten's *Peter Grimes* [Chandos CHAN5250W, 96kHz/24-bit]. Here it crashed out all the fury of the famous 'Storm' interlude without losing track of any of the instrumental textures, and at the same time conveyed the uneasy atmosphere of the fishing village and its outcast, culminating in its bleak, desolate finale. This recording is possessed of breathtaking dynamics and tiny nuances in equal measure, and this combination revealed them all.

VERDICT
It's a costly way to feed a USB DAC, and the onboard storage capacity may limit those with huge libraries, but the N10/2 goes about its task so convincingly that it's hard to argue with the value it brings to 'digital' systems. This, plus its slick interface and metadata handling, makes it a sophisticated digital front-end. ⏻

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Digital inputs	1x Ethernet; 2x USB-A
Digital outputs	1x USB 2.0 Type A; 1x Ethernet
Digital jitter (Mytek Brooklyn)	7psec (8psec via PC USB)
Digital jitter (iFi Audio NEO iDSD)	10psec (550psec via PC USB)
Digital jitter (Chord Mojo 2)	10psec (15psec via PC USB)
Power consumption	10W
Dimensions (WHD) / **Weight**	215x61x269 (273)mm / 8.5kg (total)

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