# THE AURENDER A10 STREAMER/SERVER

The box arrived in the garage. It was not particularly large by Audio standards, a bit over 20 lbs, however, the device inside, an Aurender A10, offered up the equivalent of several devices in that one modest sized box. Aurender presents the A10 as a Music Server/Player and it is that; however, it is also a Music Streamer and a top-flight DAC. It comes with its own music management iPad app and outside of the headphone world it can operate as a full-fledged two-channel pre-amp for a stereo system. All in all it replaces four or five devices in one slim and attractive industrial design.

I reviewed the Aurender Flow a couple of years ago and while it offered terrific portable convenience, ultimately what mattered was it delivered outstanding quality sound. Hence I was pleased to have another opportunity to review an Aurender piece. The A10 represents a real opportunity for audiophile level headphone use. This compact device, offering so many different facets of functionality, could well be the answer to the headphone community's desire for the perfect partner to the flagship amp and headphones of an elite system.

Walking through the manual you begin to understand the breadth of what the A10 offers. Inside it has a pair of high end AK4490 DAC chips in a full dual mono configuration, each with its own power supply. I have been a long-time fan of AKM DAC chips and these new flagship model 4490's perform at a near reference level. Both Balanced and Single Ended outputs are available, and volume can be controlled from the aforementioned iPad App, the included aluminum remote control or from the front panel's rotary control knob or from your amp as you choose. The unit comes with two on board hard drives; one is a 4TB mechanical disc to store your digital music files and the other is a 120GB SSD which caches your current songs for playback. Noise from spinning discs is completely removed from the sonic signature. Aurender has developed an FPGA based Precision clock generation system which reduces jitter to undetectable levels. They have also been mindful of providing proper shielding for the power supply as well as fully isolating the Asynchronous USB audio. Speaking of that USB, it is full USB audio class 2.0 including ultra-low noise power circuitry.
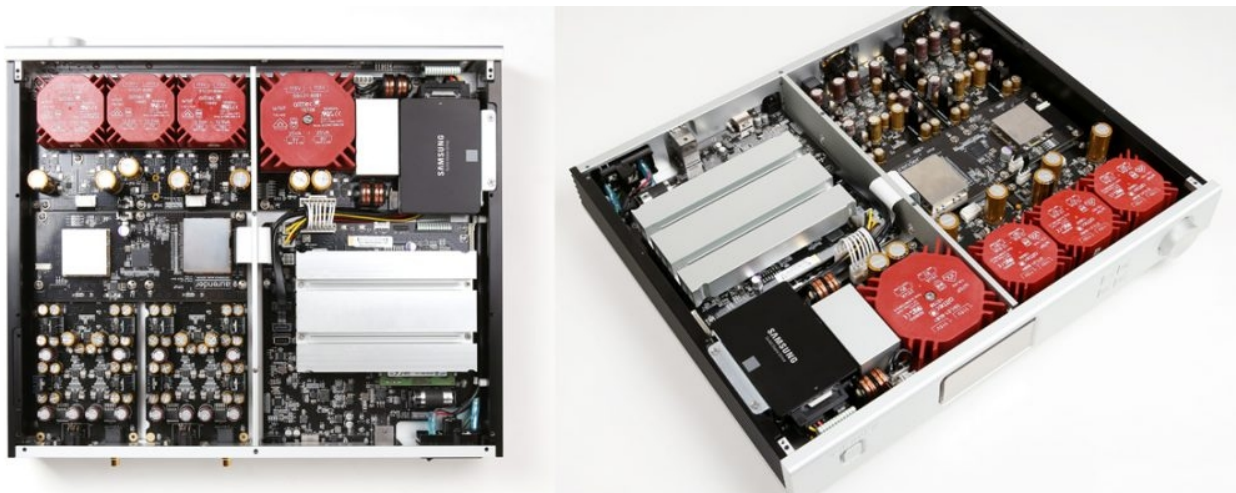
But wait you say. I already have my music on a NAS! No worries, Aurender has developed AMM (Aurender Media Manager) software for your MAC or Windows machine. Run the software and identify the NAS location and AMM will pair the NAS library with your A10 and any files on it into a seamless library within the Aurender App. But wait there's more! You can also integrate your Tidal account for hi res online streaming via the iPad app. My experience with the AMM software was that it works as advertised and all NAS files were simply part of the larger library via the App. Tidal was a seamless part of the family as well. Transferring files to the A10 was also a snap via the app. As with any large music file transfer, it will take some time bringing the files over but initiating the process was a simple and guided process during initial setup. If you are a cutting-edge listener and have begun to embrace MQA, fear not! The A10 is a fully MQA compliant device. At the moment, what the A10 is not is a Roon compatible device. Roon is currently not on the agenda for Aurender.

I did find that you want the A10 in a well-ventilated area as the unit will get very warm if placed directly on other electronics or in a shelf unit with minimal clearance.

As it is a hard drive based device Aurender advises to always shut the unit down by turning it off via the remote. A direct power off could damage your files the same as unplugging your computer could have consequences. This happened to me by accident as I was enjoying an A10 listening session and the power

went out. Fortunately, the A10 has an intelligent file regeneration process to protect against life's uncertainties. A few minutes file rebuild and all came back perfectly. I would not want to try this a lot but it is nice to know there are data safeguards built into the A10!
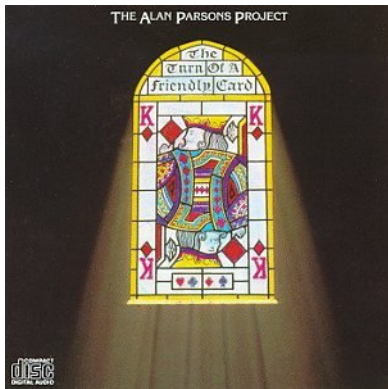
I dug in for some critical listening hooking the A10 up to my reference Simaudio Moon 430HAD solid state amplifier. The 430HAD has both Balanced and Single-Ended inputs so I hooked the units up with a pair of AudioQuest MacKenzie XLR cables. First headphones up are the Focal Utopia's with the new Dana Cables Lazuli Ultra's via ¼" jack. I have been listening to The Alan Parsons Project's Turn of a Friendly Card a lot lately via vinyl so I queued up the DSD64 file for "Time" (1980 Arista). As with my vinyl playback from my VPI Prime Signature the background from the A10 was black. Notes were clearly articulated and smooth. This is a song that flows (like time) and the ease and precision of the presentation pulls you calmly forward. Cymbals are shimmering but never harsh. Strings and orchestra were presented with a clear soundstage, wide and deep. Male vocals were a clear tenor, there was no hash or edge to the words. It was a decidedly lovely presentation. This is a reference system with top gear in all categories coming together to create a highly musical presentation and the A10 easily kept up with the rest of the system.

Switching to the Sennheiser HD800's with Toxic Cables Silver Widows I put on Heart's "Magic Man" from Dreamboat Annie (1975 Mushroom 24/192 AIFF). This 70's radio staple has a nice blend of acoustic and electric guitar, varied percussion devices and the incredible vocals of Anne Wilson. Once again notes emerged from a very black background. There is just no background noise with the A10. The acoustic guitars come through with very clean fingering. The tonality of the strings has a live performance quality. The drummers use of chimes and triangle not only have the tone but also location accuracy as these smaller devices sonically appear above the level of the drum kit. The electric guitars deliver the crunch and power expected of them. All of these instruments frame Anne Wilson's extraordinary voice. She comes through with power and clarity and in some parts delivering a haunting presence. Goosebump time! The world class soundstage of the HD800's really took advantage of the A10's ability to serve up the files in a clean and noiseless manner.
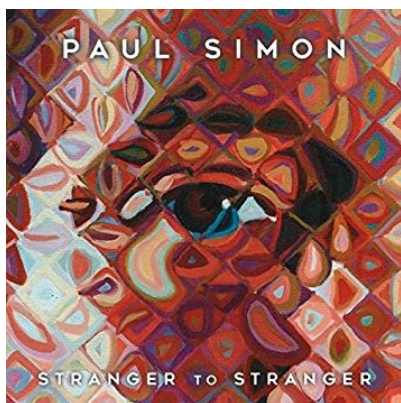
Moving on the MrSpeakers Ether C's, my current closed-back reference headphones, I went for some new Paul Simon from the Stranger to Stranger album, "Wristband" (2016 Concord 24/96 AIFF). This is a live track featuring a very basic drums, upright bass and Simon on guitar. The spatial positioning clearly outlined Simon and the band. The tight click click of the drumstick alternately on the snare rim and the cymbal keeps the tune moving. The upright bass creates a nice forward moving momentum. Simon is in great voice for this anecdotal song of a musician going outside for a cigarette before the show then getting locked out, so he has to try to get back in through security without a wristband. At no point did I focus on the gear. It was all about this fun and engaging track. You could picture yourself in the audience as Paul relates the story, laughing along with the rest of the people. The A10 was able to create that moment and not call attention to itself, but convey it clearly and with the joy and emotion of the moment. I wish I could have been at that concert, but I almost feel like I was.
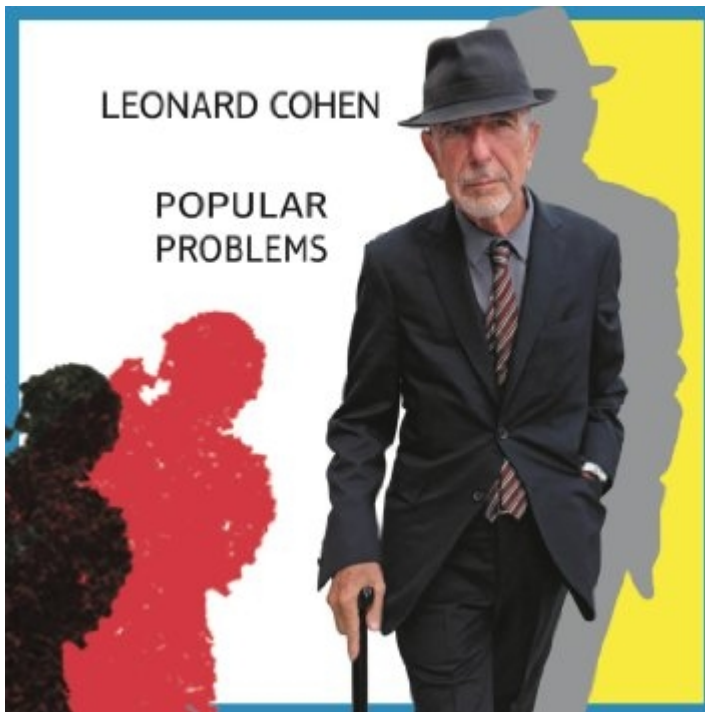
Wrapping up the listening, I ended with Leonard Cohen's "Slow" from Popular Problems (2014 Columbia 24/96 AIFF) paired up with the Audeze LCD-Xs and the Toxic Cables Silver Widow 22s with a balanced 4 pin XLR. The world lost a music giant with the recent passing of Leonard Cohen. His song "Slow" is a virtual microcosm of his writing and vocal delivery. The single note at a time bass line partnering with the Hammond organ give him a sparse but musical frame to showcase his poetry like lyrics. His gravelly voice framed by a group of three female backing vocals singers, floats in front of a dark background. You can see the staging with him at the mike with a single spotlight on him and one each on the musicians. The depth of background provided by the A10 is a real key to preserving and enhancing this song's necessary presentation. Paired with the LCD-Xs the song has real impact delivering the world-weary melancholy of the tune. Another reference presentation.

Over the time I had with the A10 I was able to enjoy my complete music collection via NAS, local A10 storage, external USB drive and Tidal, via the A10 iPad app. Where they were sourced from never mattered to the quality of the presentation. I could find what I wanted via search and set up a virtually unlimited playlist. A software update became available at one point and I was able to apply it with ease and enjoy some added features immediately. If you need support they can facilitate remote assistance via the iPad app. Emails to support are responded to promptly in my experience.

The A10 is a sophisticated product that makes enjoying music simple. It is a true reference level piece. For the Headphone Aficionado, it may be the missing piece to a system that is reference but does not require a desk full of gear and a tangle of expensive cables. The A10 performed beautifully with open and closed cans, Planar Magnetic, Dynamic, whatever I paired with it and for you two-channel speaker users it also worked perfectly as a Pre-amp with my amp and speakers. It has an excellent DAC. It can replace several items in your system in one beautiful box. What's not to like? **Highly Recommended!**