



# IT GOES TO 12

## MOON by Simaudio's Evolution 780D

By Jeff Dorgay

**W**ith so much excitement surrounding analog these days, it's easy to forget about digital, but as cool as it is to play records, the tremendous progress made is even more amazing for this reviewer. Digital used to be downright unlistenable, with even the really good stuff still not holding a candle to analog. Yet a few seconds into the high res download of Van Halen's "You're No Good," as that infamous cymbal hit fades into its flanged glory, full of life and grandeur, you instantly know this is the good stuff. And at \$15,000 it damn well better be.

Moving to more acoustic faire, *real* music if you will, just widens the smile. And just like my reference dCS and Gryphon DACs, what makes the MOON 780D part of the digital elite, is that it does a phenomenal job with 16/44.1 files, and god forbid, MP3 files as well. No matter how big your high resolution music collection is, chances are good that if you're a major music lover, you have a ton of standard resolution files.

We can argue forever about 16/44.1 vs 24/192 or DSD files, or better yet, digital vs. analog (yawn), but if you have a big server full of 16/44.1 files (I've got about 12,000 CDs ripped on my server) or explore new music on Tidal, you want outstanding redbook performance. The MOON Evolution 780D delivers the goods and is on par with the world's best players.

Ray Lamontagne's voice on his latest, *Ouroboros*, streamed via Tidal is tremendous, as is some other favorite male and female vocalists. The hardcore vinyl enthusiast with perfect pressings might grumble a bit, but these are mighty thin hairs you're splitting here. This is a damn fine digital experience, no it's a damn fine musical experience.

### Precisely why you write the big check

In 2016 you can buy a much better DAC for a thousand bucks than many of us ever dreamed of ten years ago, even five years ago. But you don't get sonic quality, and in the case of the 780D, a *lack* of sound without laying out some cash. Just as it is with analog, you can have fun and enjoy music for peanuts, relatively speaking, but an immersive experience at this level still requires a serious investment.

The good news is you won't spend any time diddling around with precise setup as you might with a \$15k turntable. Though the 780D provides pristine sound, the minute you connect your source, you can customize functions and rename the inputs on the massive LED display, a real bonus if you do take advantage of those nine inputs at your disposal.

As mentioned, the 780D reproduces music with such finesse, it's hard to believe it's digital and with high resolution digital files or rips from my favorite LPs, the gap is virtually nonexistent. Like the rest of the Evolution series, the 780D has expansive dynamic range, or as some like to call it – jump factor.

Whether you are listening to Prince scream, Miles Davis blast his horn or Keith Moon pound on his drum kit, the 780D delivers a visceral experience that goes a long way to convince your brain that you are listening to the real thing.

MOON by Simaudio components have always carried a highly accurate, yet tonally natural voice – neither embellishing, nor over-emphasizing the overall sonic experience. Again, the 780D is true to form with a wonderful midrange that is never harsh or strident, but never truncates leading or trailing edges of musical notes in the name of warmth. Yet, after countless all day listening sessions, I can testify that the 780D does not fatigue due to an overly resolute presentation either. This is a source component that you can easily build around because it has no sonic signature of its own.

### Speaking of experience

Canada's Simaudio has been making great gear for nearly 40 years now, and if you click here, you can read about my visit to their state of the art Montreal facility, which includes one of the finest listening rooms in the audio industry. And while every aspect of their plant was very cool, one of the things I liked the most about my visit was that there was only one repair guy and he didn't have many components stacked up on the repair bench awaiting his skilled hands. That's why it's always easy suggesting their gear, new or used as a great value. *(continued)*



780D DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER





Extensive listening sessions with the previous 650D and 750D DACs had not prepared me for the quantum leap that the 780D provides. With an MSRP of \$3,000 more than the 750D, something is gained and something is lost; mainly the ability to play CDs. For most, this will not be an issue. As with all marketing decisions, the development team in Montreal probably spent some time agonizing whether to please the smaller ranks of physical media toting audiophiles, or go for broke with a no holds barred DAC instead.

Though I still enjoy spinning a CD now and then, I applaud the direction they took, and in addition to eliminating the CD transport, they incorporated their coolio MiND streamer onboard.

Notice that little wireless antenna? Honestly, this is what gives the 780D the power and separates it from the pack. While some in the world of audiophilia might accuse me of heresy to suggest it, the 780D sounds so damn good, that unless you've got 30 – 50k analog rig and shelves full of first stamper British this and that, forgettaboutit. Just buy a 780D and play your favorite digital files, whether via the built in Tidal capability on the MiND app, your server, or your computer – I suggest a combination of a ROON server with Tidal and a transport, just for when you feel like playing a pile of discs, or heaven forbid you have a network issue.

### Family resemblance

At 35 pounds, this DAC is solid, and it's not just because of the heavy duty casework, there's a power supply under the top panel that's bigger than that in a lot of moderate sized power amplifiers. Thanks to multiple advances in power delivery, filtering and regulation, the analog output signal is quiet, quiet, quiet; but that's not the whole story. The 780Ds advanced MHP (MOON Hybrid Power) supply keeps out the harshness and glare that creeps through in lesser players. This approach carries over from the rest of the Evolution series of components. It goes without saying that if you have an

all MOON system, the synergy here will be perfect. Say that ten times as fast as you can. Last, but not least, it has an outstanding remote control; intuitive, functional, and built with a level of mechanical integrity in keeping with a component of this price.

While compatibility in a rack full of MOON components is a given, the 780D mates equally well with anything else. Its 2 volt output from either the RCA or XLR connectors should drive any linestage to full output. The 780D features a fully balanced differential analog output stage offering optimum performance into a fully balanced system, yet we experienced no lack

of quality driving Robert Koda and Conrad Johnson preamplifiers in single ended mode. Both balanced and unbalanced outputs will drive a 20 foot pair of interconnects with ease and no degradation of sound quality.

As part of MOON by Simaudio's Evolution series, the 780D shares the same elegant chassis work that graces the rest of their matching components. Thanks to having their own 5-axis mill in house, Simaudio can offer robust casework that is not only aesthetically pleasing, but acoustically inert without it driving retail prices through the ceiling. *(continued)*

### Connections galore

I achieved excellent luck with both my dCS Paganini transport and a friend's borrowed MOON Néo 260D, which you can add to your digital front end for an incredibly reasonable \$3,000, making a 780D/260D combo along with a power cable and maybe a premium USB cable weigh in right at \$20k. Both transports did a killer job via the AES/EBU inputs with a short run of Nordost Frey balanced digital cable.

The rest of you can either connect wirelessly, or hardwired, via USB, SPDIF, Toslink or Ethernet. For my money, a hardwired Ethernet connection and a NAS drive is not only the easiest way to roll, but the most robust from a data integrity standpoint, but I admit to not being a terribly geeky end user. I use what works. For those of you with better computer Jedi skills, the 780D's manual is incredibly concise, so you'll have no problem getting it to do what you'd like it to do. Along with the plethora of inputs comes equal capability to decode any digital files you might have in your collection, including DXD and 4x DSD.

It's worth noting that the MiND renderer always did a better, more musical, more natural job decoding digital files than anything on my Mac or Windows laptops.



Kiss suffering with Amarra and other third party playback options in the quest of higher performance goodbye. It all happens on board with the 780D and I'm all for anything that makes listening to music simpler.

Those needing more in-depth technical analysis can visit the MOON by Simaudio website here. They answer every little bit that the audience requires. Better yet, just go listen to the damn thing.

### Parting comments

We've had the pleasure to listen to the MOON 780D for some time now and compare it with numerous other products. There is no question that this is a world class DAC with no compromises made in any aspect of its design. It plays anything you can throw at it and with its onboard streamer/renderer, offers tremendous flexibility. As it had been returned some time ago, the only aspect of the 780D's performance that I can't address is the addition of an MOON 820S external power supply. If it offers the same level of performance that it did to both the MOON 750D DAC and the MOON 810LP phono stage, it should be substantial.

I could wax poetic about technobabble, and the engineering department has an arsenal of acronyms to describe their prowess in analog, digital and power supply designs, but the bottom line is that this is one hell of an instrument to listen to music with. Like a very short list of DACs that truly get out of the bitstream and immerse you in the musical experience, MOON by Simaudio's MOON 780D is one of the best. It will take you but five minutes in your dealer's chair to convince you of its excellence. *(continued)*



Audible performance is certainly a big part of a high performance audio component, but an often overlooked aspect of esoteric audio components is consistency, reliability and long term value. I have owned a number of Simaudio products as reference components over the years, as have other TONE staffers, and we have never experienced an equipment failure. Should you need service at some point, their products carry a ten year warranty and with an extensive world wide dealer network, help is close by in most major cities.

A quick look at the small number of MOON by Simaudio components for sale on the secondary market, and the high price their components command also reinforces the long term value of their gear. This is not to be taken lightly when you're spending this kind of money.

You might call me wacky to award a \$15,000 *anything* an Exceptional Value Award, but considering how many \$40,000 DACs we've heard that don't approach the performance of the MOON 780D, it's justified. Simaudio can offer a DAC this good for \$15k because of their extensive in-house manufacturing and engineering capabilities. If they had to job out metalwork and subassemblies, this DAC would easily cost twice as much and it would still be a killer at \$30,000. That's what makes it a major bargain at \$15,000. Flame suit on.

**The Simaudio MOON Evolution 780D**  
**MSRP: \$15,000**

**MANUFACTURER**

Simaudio Ltd.

**CONTACT**

[www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com)

**PERIPHERALS**

**Preamplifiers**

Robert Koda K-10, Pass Labs Xs Pre, Audio Research GSPre

**Power Amplifiers**

Pass Xs300 monos, Audio Research GS150, Nagra 300i

**Speakers**

GamuT RSi5, Dynaudio Evidence Platinum, Quad 2812

**Cable** Nordost Frey and Heimhall

**Power** IsoTek Super Titan