TEMPTATIONS
EXPENSIVE, YES. BUT YOU KNOW YOU WANT THEM

Aurender A1000

- **Music streamer**
- **£4100**
- ★★★★☆

"It isn't a particularly characterful unit, but that's a good thing, being tonally balanced and unusually even-handed"

Aurender has been in the streaming game longer than most, and that experience shines through in the A1000. There is an impressive maturity about this product, from its build to the stutter-free way in which it operates. Best of all, it sounds good enough to make that hefty price tag seem entirely reasonable.

The basic template of a music streamer is pretty much set at this point, and the Aurender A1000 meets all expectations while adding its own twist. It will pull music files from any storage on your home network or attached to its rear-panel USB Type A socket, play internet radio, features Connect versions of Tidal, Spotify and Qobuz, and offers a range of digital inputs.

It is a compact unit that is around a third narrower than typical 43cm wide components. The aluminium casework feels rigid and nicely finished. There is a slick professionalism about the way this product feels and works that inspires confidence.

The front-panel full-colour 6.9in display makes it easy to navigate around the A1000's various settings. Of course, most people will use the dedicated app to make changes, but it is still nice to have confirmation of actions from the unit itself.

The front panel is cleanly designed and contains just the basics as far as controls go. The back panel packs in the usual range of USB Type B, coaxial and optical digital inputs alongside the increasingly common HDMI ARC that helps to integrate your hi-fi with your television. There is a pair of USB Type A sockets, one for sound output and the other for external storage. As would be expected, this Aurender will connect wirelessly or wired to your home network.

aptX HD Bluetooth is also on the menu. While this wireless connection will never be our first choice where sound quality is concerned, it is well worth having for convenience, even though the inclusion of Apple AirPlay and Google Cast means there are alternatives which can be used instead.

Take a look at Aurender's website and you will find the A1000 listed under Analogue Music Servers; that's because it has a slot for a 2.5in HDD or SSD drive of up to 8TB. That's plenty of capacity, even for those with large hi-res music libraries. It's a neat solution for those who want to simplify their music storage solution. In case you are wondering why it's listed under 'Analogue', it's because the A1000 has a built-in digital-to-analogue module, and the company also makes a range of servers that don't (and so require an outboard DAC).

The A1000's digital circuitry packs an AKM 4490REQ dual-mono DAC chip and quad 2.0 GHz ARM Cortex A55 processing unit, which gives it great file compatibility of up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512. That should be more than enough for most people's music collections.

The user experience of any streamer is reliant on the quality of the partnering control app, and Aurender's app proves to be slick and stable, though the layout is a little cluttered and fussy.

We use our reference Burmester 088/911 MkIII amp and ATC SCM50 speakers for the most part, but also feed the Aurender's analogue output into PMC's Cor integrated, driving Epos ES14N speakers, to hear how it fits into a different flavour of system.

The A1000 turns out to be a pleasingly balanced and insightful performer that sounds comfortable in both systems. It isn't a particularly characterful unit – and, just to be clear, that's a good thing. being tonally balanced and unusually even-handed in the way it deals with various music genres.

Listen to a grand symphony, such as Shostakovich's *10th*, and the Aurender responds with all the scale, authority and control the music demands. The dense instrumentation is handled well, with the music's various strands nicely separated while never losing the cohesion necessary for emotional impact.

Detail resolution is good; the A1000 renders the acoustic space around the musicians properly, as well as capturing the distinctive textures of the various instruments well. It has the transparency to allow the characteristics of the recording to shine through rather than painting the sound with its own flavour, as some do. That's a quality we really admire, but it's also fair to say that it plays things a little safe, too.

A LITTLE RESTRAINT

While the music's dramatic dynamic shifts are delivered in a composed way, we can't help but feel that the Aurender keeps the handbrake on just a bit. Alternatives such as the Cyrus 40 ST, Audiolab 9000N and the Naim NSC222 deliver music with more verve and drama. The result is that music such as this Shostakovich symphony or Nirvana's *Nevermind* doesn't quite hit home with the emotional impact it should. That strain of restraint doesn't stop us from enjoying everything the Aurender does, though it is the prime reason that this streamer doesn't get the full five stars from us.

Playing Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* on DSD, Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* (24-bit/96kHz) and The Unthanks' *Mount The Air* (16-bit/44.1kHz), it is easy to admire the Aurender's broad spread of abilities. Its clear but organic-sounding midrange allows The Unthanks and Wonder to come through with expression and passion intact. There is an impressive sense of organisation that gives this streamer the ability to play complicated pieces of music without ever sounding like it is struggling. That is a great talent to have.

There's pleasing rhythmic ability too. While not quite as joyous-sounding as the Cyrus and Naim, it still brews a storm with Jackson's *Don't Stop Til You Get Enough* charging along full throttle. Basslines hit hard and true, and come barrelling out of our speakers with a good amount of enthusiasm.

The Aurender continues to impress through its digital inputs, from our reference Naim ND555/555 PS DR music streamer, as well as our Apple MacBook Pro (loaded with Audirvana music playing software and plenty of hi-res music files), and we find that the A1000's DAC module is a good one. It sounds detailed, balanced and musical, regardless of the music we play.

While obviously limited in outright transparency compared with the same recording played back from our NAS, or via Tidal Connect, Bluetooth from our iPhone 14 Pro still sounds entertaining and holds our attention.

The Aurender A1000 is a solid all-around performer that has the bonus of being able to store your music files, all in one neat box. It is well made and easy to use. Most importantly, despite that slight lack of verve, it remains a pleasure to listen to. Anyone looking for such a versatile music streamer at this level should seriously consider this capable unit.

WHAT HI·FI?

SOUND
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

FOR
- Balanced and detailed presentation
- Impressive feature set
- Pleasing build and finish

AGAINST
- Sound could do with a little more verve
- Partnering app is stable, but looks cluttered

VERDICT
The Aurender is a well-equipped and capable streaming solution that will work well in a wide range of systems