



Aurender A1000 Review

★★★★★

Audiophile Style



By The Computer Audiophile

On this, the 18th birthday of Audiophile Style, it's only fitting that I publish a review of a product from Aurender. When I started this site, servers like those that Aurender manufactures were only a dream. Back then we were using Windows XP, OS X, or Linux on commodity hardware and fighting with the operating systems every step of the way.

Now, nearly fourteen years to the day since I published my first Aurender product review of the S10, I'm excited to write about the Aurender A1000. The A1000 is in a product category that never crossed my mind back in the day, as something Aurender would build. While not the first Aurender server to feature a built-in DAC and analog outputs, it's the least expensive and depending on one's situation, the best value in the Aurender lineup.

The Aurender A1000 has been on my desk, connected to a couple different amplifiers and my Wilson Audio TuneTot loudspeakers for so many months I don't even remember when I started listening through it. Why so long to write the review? Because I foolishly overlooked something and thought there was an issue with the product, when the issue was totally unrelated. Every time I did anything, I heard loud buzzes and hums through the speakers. I was positive it was related to the A1000. Aurender even purchased the same amp I was using in an attempt to reproduce the issue. No luck.

The issue? I was using unshielded Kimber Kable RCA cables between the A1000 and amplifier. The real head-slap moment was when I started hearing the buzz get louder when I moved the mouse on my computer. I felt, and still feel, incredibly foolish. However, let's turn lemons into lemonade and make this a teaching moment. The A1000 features single ended RCA analog outputs, not balanced XLRs. Readers doing the same should use the best RCA cables they can, properly shielded from outside noise. If I had to guess, I'd say our home environments now are much noisier than they were years ago, so proper cabling is critical.

My "own goal" with the A1000 also showed the incredible support and lengths Aurender as a company is willing to go, to solve issues. The company doesn't treat me any different than its "normal" customers. I know this because the Aurender thread here on Audiophile Style is full of examples where someone from Aurender picked up the phone and resolved issues or setup the system to be fixed remotely by Aurender in Korea overnight. Sure, Aurender team members also chime in on the thread to offer help, but the company prefers more white glove

support and has shown this since day one. Listeners frustrated by the recent abrupt closure of a competing company should take notice of how Aurender looks out for its customers and of course the solid, reliable, and great sounding components.

Bringing this back home to solid, reliable, and great sounding components, I setup the A1000 on my desktop for two reasons. First, I wanted to use it with my TuneTots and the Mytek Empire amp or Schiit Audio Vidar amp. Second, the A1000 has a USB DAC input that I really wanted to connect to my Mac Mini, so I could hear audio from my web browser each morning as I watch NHL hockey highlights from the previous night. Why listen to the tiny speaker in my Mac Mini when I could use a great DAC and Wilson speakers? I knew everyone would be onboard with this use case.



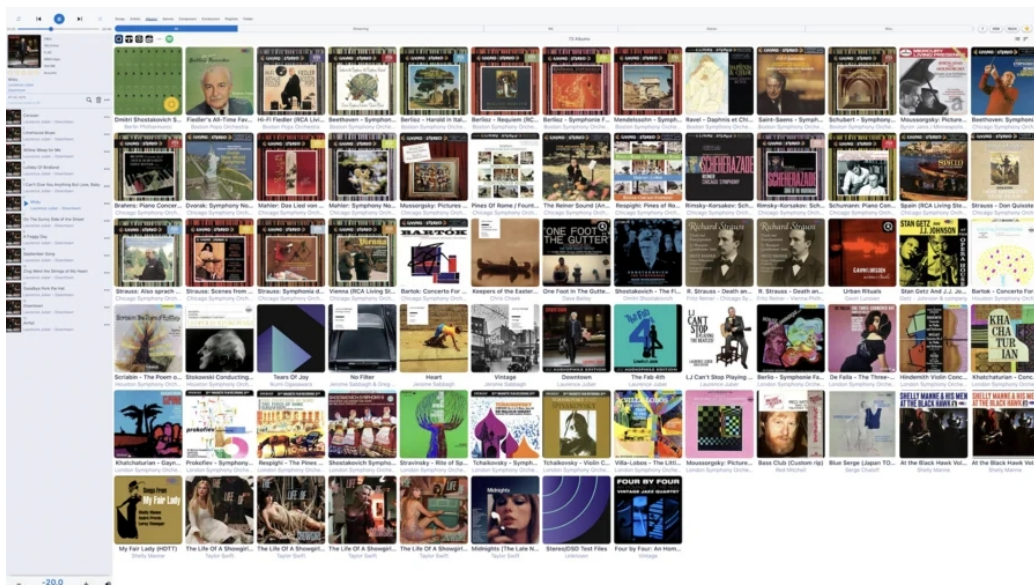
The A1000 has a 2.5 inch slot for listeners to add their own disk, either spinning or solid state. For this review I did something I hadn't previously done, used the server without adding a drive. I linked the A1000 with my Aurender ACS10 content server that holds my local files. This gave me access to all my local music as if it was stored right on the A1000. The ACS line of Aurender products is criminally underrated and continues to get better through frequent upgrades. A single library stored in one location, used by a number of Aurender servers would've sounded space age to us back in 2007, but it's commonplace now.

Looking at the back of the A1000, one can see a few options that are in some ways contradictory. Analog out with digital in and out, and USB audio in and USB audio out. This is an example of the fantastic flexibility of the A1000. I look at it this way, my use case today is one thing, but down the road I am likely to think of other things or my needs may change. Having the ability to use the same Aurender platform to satisfy these needs contributes greatly to the A1000's value proposition. For example, if a new DAC comes out that I just have to have, I can still use the A1000 by connecting its USB audio out to the DAC. Or, even though I don't use HDMI for audio today, I certainly could in the future via the A1000's ARC input. Listeners looking for an honest way to discuss getting the A1000 with a hesitant significant other may want to consider that with this flexibility comes longevity.



Listening

The A1000 was connected to my amp using good cables, linked to the Aurender ACS10 content server, and the Conductor app was open full screen on my 32" Apple Pro Display XDR. Note, there isn't an official Aurender Conductor app for macOS, but those with an Apple Silicon based Mac, such as my Mini with an M1, can run the same Conductor app as an iPad, and it works beautifully. I was ready to listen and start enjoying music. I pulled up Laurence Juber's album *Downtown*. Recorded nearly six years ago to this day on November 18th, 2018 at Capitol Studios B by Al Schmitt to 24/192 PCM, and mastered by Eric Boulanger at The Bakery, I love the sound of this album. Through the A1000 and my Wilson Audio TuneTots, Juber's Martin OM21 acoustic guitar sounds just beautiful. I much prefer listening to steel/nickel stringed guitars over those with nylon because I love the character of the sound and the added flavor. Nylon strings can sound too perfect or sterile to me. Through the Aurender A1000 all the steel string character and the resonance of Juber's Martin guitar comes through wonderfully. He's a magician at playing it which doesn't hurt either, adding to this terrific combo of great musicianship, great music, and great sound.



Moving to some lush jazz, I put on Jerome Sabbagh's newly transferred to DSD256 album Heart. The A1000 pulled this from the ACS10 content server without an issue, playing it seamlessly and reproducing its gorgeous sound very well. The soundstage and image were somewhat different from listening through the Aurender N20 on my reference system with Wilson Alexia V speakers, but equally as enjoyable. Jerome Sabbagh on tenor sax in the left channel, Joe Martin on bass right between the speakers, and Al Foster on drums in the right channel. This trio oozes talent and lush sounding jazz, and the A1000 passes all of it right through to the listener. This is another album I could listen to all day. The A1000 does nothing to change that all day listening enjoyment. Exactly what this all-in-one style server / DAC / Preamp should do, nothing.

Switching it up completely, I put on the acoustic version of Taylor Swift's new track called Wi\$H Li\$t. To date, this track is only available to those who purchased the special version of the CD from her website. Guilty as charged, I purchased all four special versions with two acoustic tracks on each. Anyway, Wish List is my favorite track on the new album The Life of a Showgirl and this acoustic version is even better.

Listening to Wish List through the A1000 delivered an identical experience to the previous albums. I was able to get lost in the music, rather than focus on the mechanics of what was going on. The story in this song is absolutely beautiful and it's what I want to let my brain get lost in while listening. Without this aspect, it's just sound or a HiFi demonstration.

As the violin entered this track at about 2:35, I got chills. The beauty of this, even though it's produced to the max as opposed to an "audiophile" recording, comes through with aplomb. I'll take this heart felt performance 100 times out of 100 over an unemotional "perfect" audiophile album. The beauty is in the imperfection of her voice and her delivery of lyrics that truly come from her heart. And, the Aurender A1000 delivers it all, without editorializing, in a way that makes me, and likely other listeners, feel something. That's what I want from my music, feelings, goosebumps, and chills.

Two notes about using the Aurender A1000.

1. The BLE (Bluetooth Low Energy) remote works very well. I highly recommend BLE remotes over infrared. I had to stop myself from pointing the remote at the A1000 to adjust the volume. The remote can be "pointed" anywhere because the signal is emitted via RF rather than a line of sight IR beam.
2. The A1000 features analog output via single ended RCA connection only. This means the output voltage is 2 Vrms, rather than 4 or even 6 Vrms from balanced XLR outputs. When playing some classical recordings with huge dynamic range I had the volume near its maximum level. I never ran out of power, but listeners should consider this when evaluating the A1000. If listeners already use single ended components, the A1000 will function identical to those with respect to output voltage. This is standard and has nothing to do with the A1000's design.

Wrap Up

After months of looking at the A1000 sit idle on my desk because of my own mistakes, I finally spent a lot of listening time with this analog music server. The A1000 is impressive on many levels. Like all Aurender products it comes with superb support that's only a phone call or email away, a very stable user interface and experience, flexibility, longevity, and great sound quality.

The flexibility leading to longevity of the A1000 is rare among products in this category. Manufacturers usually design a product for either USB audio input or USB audio output, not both. The same goes for analog outputs or digital outputs (S/PDIF), usually not both. Knowing how I use audio components, I am certain the A1000 would migrate from system to system over at least a decade in my house. It would start on my desktop connected as it

was during this review. Then I'd want to add another DAC, not because the internal DAC is lacking, but because I want to try another DAC. Then I'd have a need in another room and connect it via HDMI ARC. That's usually how my life goes. I'll "need" something and think about what I already have that can fit the bill. The A1000 fits almost any bill.

Once I switched to high quality RCA cabling between the A1000 and my amplifiers I was very impressed by the sound quality of the A1000. It did what I want quick components to do, delivering the music to my ears and enable me to have an emotional connection with stories being told or the notes being played. I listened to hundreds more tracks than I could mention in this review and I enjoyed all of them through the A1000. From Metallica (Qobuz) to Mendelssohn (RCA Living Stereo DSD) to Shelly Manne and his Men Live At the Blackhawk (HDTT DXD), it was all great.

The A1000 is Aurender's entry level analog music server. It has more features than most products in this category, the full Aurender user interface and experience, amazing stability and support, and great sound quality. The A1000 is entry level in name only. I'd absolutely recommend it to my friends and family.