

## Simaudio MOON 780D v2 & 700i v2

Streamer DAC & integrated amplifier

by: Jason Kennedy



A friend has described (on more than one occasion) the times he lay on his teenage bed playing *Close to the Edge* through headphones and feeling like he was levitating, such was the potency of that classic Yes album. I didn't do that, no headphones for a start, but if the Moon [homepage](#) is any indication it seems that they want their customers to enjoy a similar state of sonic bliss. Floating is clearly the ideal state for a music lover, think of how well isolated you'd be from furniture borne vibration for a start! Moon seem to be a pretty serious Canadian brand most of the time, they make solidly built, well featured electronics that have stood the test of time since Victor Sima started the company he called Sim Audio forty years ago. The 700i v2 is the largest integrated amplifier on the roster and a pretty substantial and capable piece of kit it is. The 780D v2 is the most ambitious addition to the company's range of streaming DACs. Most companies make streamers that also happen to be DACs, Moon turns it around and makes it clear that streaming is one element in what has become the most fundamental digital audio component today.



There is a difference between streamers and regular DACs but the semantics and the option to stream through a regular non-streaming DAC don't make this very clear. A streamer in the full sense 'pulls' the signal from a network, where it's either stored on a server/hard drive or coming in from streaming services such as Tidal. Streaming from a PC into a DAC (generally via USB) is different because the signal is being 'pushed' from the source to the DAC. So we really need terms that differentiate these types of streaming. In my experience the pulling approach (as found in devices from Linn, Naim, Sonos etc) delivers more engaging music than the push approach but both have their qualities. The important point here is that the 780D v2 is the pulling variety, a streamer proper not merely a DAC with a USB input. Moon's streaming core is called MiND and it comes with its own control app which also allows for multi-room operation with low (3 microsecond) latency between devices. You can alternatively run the 780D with Roon if you have a suitable device running a Roon core. Moon are one of not that many streamer makers to incorporate MQA decoding for all inputs, which is significant if you are a Tidal user where this format is available for a fair amount of content. It can of course stream from Tidal alongside Qobuz and Deezer but not Spotify or Amazon HD, very few streamers support the latter at present but this is likely to change over the coming year. The back panel is replete with digital inputs including USB and wifi, the latter being ready for network connection and Bluetooth aptX but not Apple Airplay. I tried connecting my Mac over Bluetooth and it worked seamlessly albeit with a bit of scrolling through the menus. It would be nice if these settings could be accessed via the Mind app but hopefully owners won't have to adjust them too often. Other variables include input naming, phase switching, what to display (sample rate or input name) and whether or not to respond to IR controls from the supplied handset. Not sure why you wouldn't want that one. There are no digital outputs but both flavours of analogue output, the XLRs delivering a fully balanced signal. And there are plenty of connections for multiroom and custom install operation alongside the Simlink bus system that connects the 780D to a partnering Moon amp and allows integrated operation.

The 700i naturally has the same link and when they are connected switching on the DAC causes the amp to go to that input. Moon recommends you use an XLR connection for the analogue signal to take advantage of the balanced nature of both elements. It also means that when you change volume on the app the amp and its display responds, which is a nice touch that relegates the handset to rarely needed status, that said if you want to pause play in a hurry it's often the quickest option.



The 700i v2 is a brute of an integrated amp, the weight reflects the price and the styling reflects that of the 780D, which is reminiscent of Mark Levinson in its use of two tone anodised aluminium. This is a 175 Watt per channel amplifier that doubles its output into a four Ohm load, which reflects the power supply that makes up the bulk of its 28 kilo (62lb) mass. The four RCAs and a single balanced input are configurable for plus or minus 10dB gain in order to bring different sources closer together in level terms, and any input can bypass the preamp stage for integration into a home cinema set up. Input names can be chosen from a list of options or customised to suit specific sources. The volume range is broken down into single decibel steps for the first 30dB and thereafter divided into tenths of a dB, eg 30.1, 30.2 etc; so very fine steps.

### Sound quality

The specs are all pretty solid, both components offer pretty well all the features you could want and the numbers, both digital and analogue are spot on, but they don't tell you what these components sound like. When I first got these two pieces the distributor told me that they were brand new and would take time to burn in, which often means it takes time for your ears to come round to a particular sound. In all honesty I was initially somewhat underwhelmed, it took a good month or so before they started to come on song, what started out as slightly lacklustre became unusually effortless and highly resolved, these really are extremely finessed components.



Via Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3 speakers with an Innuos Zenith SE server the combination delivers high res sound with an ease that is rare, exposing the precise nature of the

recording in an understated fashion that times as well as you could hope. There is no discernible character aside perhaps from the sense of ease, which sounds more like an absence of character, nothing seems to be added or taken away. The biggest problem with a lot of audio equipment is that it adds its own distortions and masks the signal in the process, that doesn't seem to be the case here. It doesn't have the crystalline clarity of a single ended tube amp where the midrange is emphasised at the cost of the frequency extremes, rather there is a wide open, wide bandwidth window onto the music that allows so much of the character in the recording to pour through. Give it a great one like Doug MacLeod's *Exactly Like This* (Reference Recordings) and you get an understated groove that's a hook and a half topped off with a finely nuanced voice, the background is so silent that you can hear very quiet notes as the piece fades out. It's a real treat.

'Veil of Tears' by Dave Holland (*Live at the 2007 Monterey Jazz Festival*) has a fabulous double bass solo that is reproduced in a clean but not exposed fashion by the Moon duo. It's the sort of sound that could be a little cool in some circumstances; neutral to the point of sterility, but not here, here the warmth of the performance is rendered superbly. There's real depth in the pulse of the double bass and speed too, immediacy is a critical part of the live sound and Moon seem to appreciate as much. There is also plenty of space to the soundstage with excellent depth for the various instruments to inhabit. The benefit of good 3D imaging is that it allows both the attack, decay and shape of every note to be expressed. You can have speed and dynamics with a relatively flat image but you are missing out on all the fine details that make up the full character of each note.



There is plenty of power available but no sense of any electronic edge to suggest it's there, making an amp that has grip but doesn't reveal any grain is not easy. The 700i v2 clearly controls the speaker and allows the dynamics and power of the music to come through, but it doesn't sound like it's having to work at it. Bugge Wesseltoft's *Sharing* is very propulsive and encourages high level listening, which is a trait of this speaker but also a sign that the electronics are not adding any distortion to the signal. It did make me think that it would be nice to have some kind of volume scale displayed on the app, as it stands there are louder, quieter and mute symbols but nothing to show what level the system is at. I used the 700i v2 with my Rega P10 turntable and Groove+ SRX phono stage and got very clear, extended and powerful results with it, and when I put on Burnt Friedman's Deutsch dub album *Secret Rhythms* the bass got positively seismic in a full scale fashion. Bass that you can swim in, well almost. And voice, this amp does voice very well indeed, Lana del Rey's on her *NFR* album has clearly had a lot of work done on it but sounds

absolutely pristine, the degree of subtlety in her inflections is particularly good. I usually play Hot Tuna's debut album on vinyl so it was interesting to try the digital version through this pairing. Here the bending of the acoustic guitar strings is very clear but the mix is darker and thicker overall, possibly because it was mastered in US version where there seems to be a preference for a darker balance. Another release of similar vintage is the Grateful Dead's *Europe '72* but this is a more recent digital mastering and has a lot more of the roughness that you'd expect of a live recording of this vintage, and it's no less compelling for that. With Keith Jarrett's latest release, *Munich 2016*, his piano sounds solid and real, the phrasing is masterful and recording makes others sound crude by comparison.



This DAC streamer and amplifier combination has a tendency to make alternatives sound crude as well, it is unusually refined and effortless in its delivery, it even had me playing a recent Linn recording of Schubert's *Symphony No.9* with Maxim Emelyanchev waving the stick. It's not my usual fare but the effortless scale and unfettered dynamics that the Moon pairing reveal make it very appealing. This is ultimately what good audio equipment should do, make as wide a variety of music as easy to enjoy as possible. It should open up any recording so that you can appreciate the efforts of the composers and musicians involved. The 780D v2 and 700i v2 are also built to a very high standard by a company with a solid track record in the business, so while not inexpensive they get very close to the state of the art for a relatively sensible price.