

STUNNING SIMPLICITY

MOON by Simaudio Neo 280D
Streaming DSD DAC

By Andre Marc

S imaudio is the rare position of being thought of as one of the top tier purveyors of luxury home audio goods that do everything well. Their power amplifiers, preamps, phono stages, integrated amps, CD players, and transports continuously receive numerous positive reviews and awards. However, most recently, their Digital Audio Converters and streamers have been in the headlines for their cutting edge design, versatility, and outstanding sound quality. Justifiably so.

Simaudio also has the reputation of providing a solid upgrade path for their customers, while constantly seeking to improve their products. They do not, however churn product lines, only introducing new models if significant improvements have can be offered. Simaudio also makes optional state of the art outboard power supplies for many of their products, further increasing their performance without having to buy a new box.

280 D DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER



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In the digital realm, Simaudio covers all the bases. I reviewed the Moon Neo 380D DAC with the built in Moon MiND ethernet streamer and it enjoyed long term status as my digital reference. Their stable consists of the stand alone Moon MiND 180D streamer, the Neo 230 HAD headphone amp and DSD DAC, the Neo 260D CD transport and DAC, the updated Neo 380D DAC, now with DSD capability, the Moon Evolution 650A and 750A CD transports/converters, and the new flagship Evolution 780D DSD DAC. (which has also been recently reviewed here at TONE) Simaudio also has a number of integrated

amplifiers that can be ordered with onboard DAC modules. Their newest product, the ACE is an all in one streaming amp that only requires speakers to complete your system.

The Moon Neo 280D Streaming DSD DAC, was introduced early last year, and is priced at \$2,200. The optional Moon MiND streaming module is an additional \$600. With an impressive feature set featuring seven digital inputs including AES/EBU, Coaxial, TosLink, asynchronous USB, aptX® based Bluetooth®, and Ethernet for the MiND streamer (WiFi can be used as well), the 280D supports virtually

all known formats, including DSD256 via the USB input. The analog stage is a fully balanced differential circuit, which Simaudio says is designed with exceptional transparency in mind, much like the ones gracing their flagship Evolution series.

The Neo 280D is distinct in appearance, and follows in the Simaudio tradition of exceptional industrial design. The elegant curves make it an attractive addition to any system. The build quality is off the charts, and the product exudes quality and pride of ownership. Note, it is available in black, silver, or two tone finishes.

The Neo 280D is put through it's paces in a system consisting of a Bryston BDP-2 file player, a Rogue RP-5 preamp, Audio Research VS55 and Rotel RB-1590 power amps, a pair of recently reviewed Bryston Mini T three way monitors, and a JL Audio Dominion subwoofer. Analog cabling is all ZenWave audio, with digital links from DH Labs and iFi Audio. The Bryston file player is used with both the Neo 280D's AES/EBU and USB input, with the music library stored on a remote networked attached storage device. *(continued)*



Half way into David Bowie's *Five Years* box set (24/192 FLAC), it became obvious the 280D was a world class DAC. These high resolution remasters are highly transparent, bringing Bowie's early catalog into the 21st century with fresh appeal. The Neo 280D gets the acoustic guitars, piano, bass, drums, and fuzzed out guitars into focus to the point of being startling in the immediacy of the presentation, with Bowie's voice rendered in the most sublime way, shedding new light on what a superb vocalist he was.

The Neo 280D is equally superb with DSD material. Sifting through dozens of DSF files ripped from SACD discs is an immersive experience. The same holds true for DSD downloads like Shelby Lynne's *Just A Little Lovin'*, the Muddy Waters classic *Folk Singer*, and the Blood, Sweat & Tears self titled album.

Even more impressive to these ears is DSD128, such as Quiles & Cloud's lovely *Seminole Star*. It is clearly the analog like quality and sense of continuousness that makes DSD very appealing, and the Neo 280D brings out the best attributes of this format.

Redbook playback via the Neo 280D is some of the best I've heard in my reference system. Since the bulk of the music library resides in this resolution, it is vital that a DAC can shine here. And the Neo 280D does, big time. Cycling through dozens of FLAC rips across multiple genres makes it easy to determine that the Neo 280D offers up a vibrancy, pleasing tonality, and a sense of musical flow that one seeks in the very best DAC models.

Arbouretum's *Coming Out Of The Fog*, is a wonderful mix of pastoral leanings, and modern psychedelia, reminiscent of The Band. *(continued)*



It sounds utterly exhilarating through the Neo 280D, with the angular guitar riffs, jagged melodies, and the sense of drama in the songs beautifully framed. In fact, there are moments where the guitars leap out of the speakers, and the different shades of dark and light the band employs are fully on display.

A brand new release that has been in rotation is *Porto Bohemica*, by avant-garde chanteuse Trixie Whitley. The free-form songwriting is an interesting melange of mid-period Joni Mitchell and John Martyn-like meditations. The album is filled with echoing keyboards, chiming guitars, and a lot of ambience. The Neo 280D brought me right back to the club where I saw Whitley perform recently. Her voice was rendered wonderfully, with all the emotion in her delivery intact.

As noted, the Neo 280D is equipped with the optional Moon MiND module for the purpose of this review. I have previously spent quite a bit of time with the MiND, integrated with the Simaudio's Neo 380D DAC and with the stand-alone Moon MiND 180D outboard unit. Having the Moon MiND module in the Neo 280D is a pure joy. No digital cables required, no additional boxes, and no fussing. All that is required is a networked library, and an Ethernet connection, or WiFi. I use Ethernet exclusively, with my library on a networked computer running MiniMServer, with an iPad Air used as a control point.

Having reviewed dozens of streaming products over the last few years, here again the Moon MiND is among the very best

experienced, offering a rich, full-bodied presentation that makes long listening sessions highly rewarding. I feel the Neo 280D with the Moon MiND integrated module better than other streamers connected via USB or AES/EBU. This may be due to the elimination of cabling, but, whatever the reason, it is a favorite.

The MiND iOS control app is total winner. It is fast, smooth, ultra-responsive, and aesthetically pleasing. Creating playlists and navigating libraries is a cinch, and the newest version offers Tidal integration. Simaudio has allocated a lot of resources into creating the app, allowing for total control over the quality of the MiND experience and it shows. You can, however, use other control apps if you desire. *(continued)*



A nice feature Simaudio included with the Neo 280D is aptX enabled Bluetooth capability. Banish any audiophile prejudices against Bluetooth, as it is absolutely enjoyable, fun, and convenient. Case in point, connecting the iPad Air via Bluetooth and streaming Spotify to sample current releases was a gas. Any bluetooth enabled device will work, and the connection is immediate, and trouble free. While Bluetooth is not going to better the Neo 280D's other inputs, it is by no means a throw away add on. And it's a perfect way for your friends to get involved with the party when getting together. Now everyone can easily link their mobile device to your system and rock out!

The Neo 280D is an exceptional digital component visually and aurally, checking all the feature boxes as well. What ever flavor of digital connection, format, or resolution you desire, it is all included. In addition, the optional Moon MiND streaming module is too convenient and too good sounding to pass up. That, coupled with excellent styling and build, and the Moon by Simaudio Neo 280D Streaming DSD DAC deserves our highest current recommendation for sub \$3,000 digital front ends. ●

The Simaudio MOON Neo 280D
MSRP: \$2,200

MANUFACTURER
Simaudio Ltd.

CONTACT
www.simaudio.com

PERIPHERALS
File Player/Streamer
Bryston BDP-2, SotM sMS-100

Preamplifier
Rogue RP-5, Aric Audio
Expression

Power Amplifier
Audio Research VS55, Rotel
RB-1590, CLONES Audio 25p

Speakers
Bryston Mini T, Magnepan
MMG, Spondor S35R, JL Audio
Dominion D108

Cables
Transparent, Stager Sound,
Acoustic Zen, SVS, DH Labs

Accessories
Bryston BIT-15, Audience aR6,
Symposium, Shakti