



## HARMONIX REIMYO CDP-777

Is there life left in the Red Book CD standard in the face of higher formats on one side (SACD, DVD-A, and possibly Blu-Ray), and downloadable compressed music on the other? We've long heard about this player as a phenomenon: music lovers listen to a couple of CDs on it, and they reach for their platinum cards.

And you *do* need a platinum card to afford this machine, perhaps even a uranium card. Its price places it well beyond the range most people would call affordable, or even luxurious. Your budget is none of our affair, however. Our assignment was to find out whether the performance lives up to the price tag.

You might well conclude that it is grossly overpriced if your dealer is so imprudent as to play it for you when it is too new. That was the way we first heard it at the Montreal show (see the report elsewhere in this issue), where we had borrowed the player for our room. It needed well over a 100 hours before we heard something we liked. Another 200

hours in, the Reimyo was totally transformed, and we began to understand what the fuss was about.

Harmonix is the brand name of Combak Corporation, known among other things for vibration control accessories, and also for the inexpensive AC filter long sold in our own Audiophile Store. The company's anti-vibe devices are in fact used in the Reimyo, and the beautifully-crafted aluminum box is from Combak as well. The top-loading transport is from JVC...but don't think about the JVC products found at Sears. Rather, think of the K2 system JVC developed for its upscale xrcd recording system. The third partner was Kyodo Denshi, known for its precision measuring instruments, which did the basic

**Reimyo is Japanese for "miracle." And it's not as off-the-wall as you might think.**

design and handled the actual manufacturing. Come to think of it, what is a CD player but a high precision measuring instrument?

It's an attractive package, as the best Japanese products can be. The front panel is not really distinctive, but it is well laid out. We wish the fluorescent readout were larger, but its brightness makes it easy to read from across the room (you can dim it or turn it off if you don't share our hunger for constant feedback). The player sits on some of Combak's antivibration feet, and not on the cheap OEM plastic feet used on most players. The top panel on our player was misadjusted, making opening the drawer a two-hand job, though we're told that's easy to fix. The brushed black chassis cover is gorgeous, at least until you get fingermarks on it. The jacks at the rear are of good quality, and XLR balanced connectors are included.

What is *not* included is a power cord. The reason is that the usual molded cord would chip a lot of quality off the sound, whereas a premium cord would

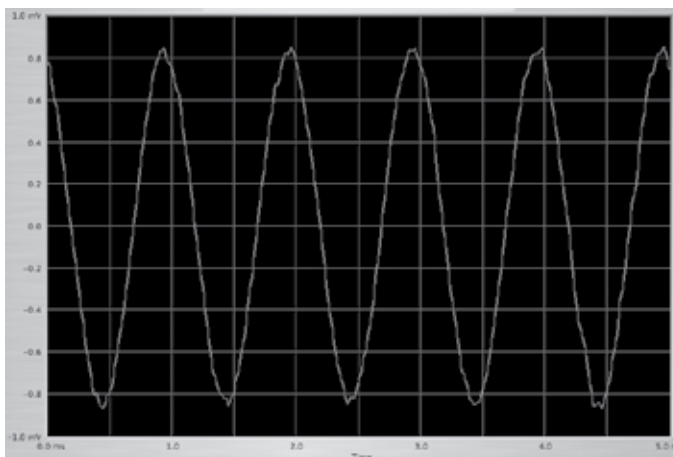
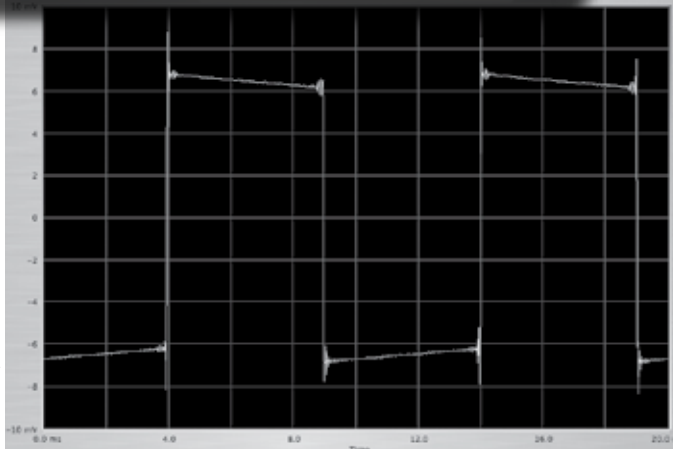
make this expensive player even harder to budget for. You won't be surprised to hear that Combak recommends its own cord, "available separately," as they say at Toys'R'us. We reviewed the player with a GutWire G-Clef cord.

There is, by the way, a digital output at the rear of the Reimyo, and you might wonder who would spend this kind of loot on a player only to turn it into an upscale transport. Harmonix figures some people will, since it also makes the DAP-777 (US\$5195), which is — you guessed it — a matching converter.

We set the player up next to our reference Linn Unidisk, and did some comparisons, starting with Norman Dello Joio's *Fantasies on a Theme by Haydn* (Klavier K11138). The wind band suite opens with an impressive tympani solo which has the sort of impact you don't often hear from a CD. You do with the Unidisk.

And you do with the Reimyo too. Gerard thought the actual sound of the mallet striking the membrane might be less focused, but there was no argument about the sheer energy that came across. The instruments seemed to be a little more distant than usual, but the cause was the excellent impression of depth. The brass instruments, like the percussion, were fiery, with a delightful dissonance that was entirely natural. The rhythm was strong. "My first impression," commented Albert, "was that this is a reference-quality player."

We continued with another classical piece, one of Dvorak's *Romantic Pieces* (Analekta FL 2 3191), which provides one of the most natural violin sounds on disc. We liked it. James Ehnes' Stradivarius was as smooth as we could wish, yet at the same time it was delightfully rich. This is a difficult balancing act, and the Reimyo demonstrated its unquestionable competence. Nor was its virtuosity merely sonic. The player managed to communicate Ehnes' unique virtuosity.



Did we have reservations? Yes, though not all the same ones. Gerard found the violin somewhat oversized with the Reimyo, and the stereo image therefore less plausible. On the other hand, he praised the piano, which Albert found rather soft and less detailed.

Were we nitpicking? Yes, probably.

Albert also found the solo harp a touch too wooly in *Vers la source dans le bois* (from *Caprice*, Klavier K11133). And yet, paradoxically enough, he admired the finesse across the range, from highs to extreme lows (and this harp *does* dip very low). The Compact Disc has often been accused of the inability to reproduce very soft passages, but it's a difficult accusation to maintain in the face of this player. Harpist Susann McDonald allows her instrument to float just above the silence, and then lets fly a torrent of chromatic notes that pushes you back in your seat. The Reimyo followed both passages with astonishing perfection. "You can really hear what a great recording this is," said Gerard. "And anyone who thinks the harp is a sissy instrument should get a listen to this!"

More and more often we include our choral recording, *Now the Green Blade Risetb*, in our tests, because we've observed how often very expensive systems muck it up to the point you need to cover your ears. And that includes CD players. How would the Reimyo do?

It got an A+, and we were unanimous. The sound was smooth to the point of softness, though with a recording like this softness is not necessarily a hanging offence. In any case there certainly wasn't anything missing. Reine remarked that the triangle, which in one passage can be heard *way* back in the sound field, was clearly audible.

As for the singers' voices, they were attractive and lyrical, "A delight for the ear," said Reine. There was neither harshness nor graininess, flaws we have heard too often on lesser players. Nor confusion, even when the singers all came in together. Depth was excellent.

Nor did we have any reservations on the next recording, *Master's Plan*, from Doug McLeod's *Come to Find* blues album (Audioquest AQCD1027). McLeod's guitar was softer than with our Unidisk, but it was entirely natural nonetheless. His voice sounded realistic too, with plenty of body but in excellent balance. There was nothing to obscure even the syllables that McLeod at times murmurs rather than sings. The rhythm, to which McLeod gives much importance, was strong. Reine wondered whether, on this recording, the Reimyo might be better than our reference. Albert agreed.

We ended with another voice, that of Margie Gibson on *Soft Lights and Sweet Music*, from *Say It With Music* (Sheffield CD-36). It's not easy to make this wonderful recording sound bad, and of course we knew the Reimyo would do well. But *how* well?

Really well.

"It's soft," said Albert, "which goes perfectly with the title of the song." Indeed, there was a pleasant smoothness to Gibson's voice, which gave the piece

the warm and intimate feel it should have. It wasn't in any way muffled, though, as we could tell from the richness of detail. When she glided down a note, it was difficult not to feel a little shiver of delight. And we know that it is the tiny bits of information that produce this effect.

The other end of the spectrum was superb too. Gibson's voice had plenty of body, and both the plucked bass and the cello accompanying her had a natural fullness that pleased us, and timbres that were entirely natural. "She is here, singing for us," said Reine.

We took the Reimyo into the lab for some technical stuff, though we were fairly sure we knew what the results would be.

On the 100 Hz square wave, shown at the top of the previous page, there was some overshoot on the riser, but it was quickly damped. There was only a small amount of tilt to the top, indicating a minimal rolloff of the top end, possibly accounting for the slightly soft sound.

The low-level 1 kHz sine wave (the

lower picture on the previous page) is nearly perfect, with small anomalies caused by an occasional noise spike. That performance is in line with what we see with the best players.

With a clean signal, jitter was so low we could not detect it, which goes a long way to explain what we heard. Our Pierre Verany test disc, whose tracks are interrupted by increasingly wide laser cuts, was revealing. It took a 0.3 mm cut before we could *begin* to see jitter...that is to say, before it began behaving like

### SUMMING IT UP...

**Brand/model:** Harmonix Reimyo CDP-777

**Price:** US\$15,495

**Dimensions:** 43 x 38.5 x 12.7 cm

**Most liked:** Smooth, undigital sound

**Least liked:** Stiff top drawer, plastic remote out of character for such a player

**Verdict:** The first 200 hours are just a preview of what's coming next

## CROSSTALK

The first time I heard the Reimyo I figured it had talent, and that was despite the fact it sounded bright and harsh. But there's harshness, and then there's harshness. The Reimyo didn't sound harsh the way cheap shoes feel harsh, but harsh like *good* shoes that are brand new.

With the obligatory long break-in performed, the brightness was utterly gone, but the rest was not. I was right...this box *does* have talent. A lot of it, more than nearly all players I could name. It is one of a handful of products that continue to chide us for having underestimated the CD medium.

Expensive? Sure it is, but can you do this well for less? If you can, go for it.

—Gerard Rejskind

Built for reference status, this is a knockout of a CD player. It does only that one thing and it does it well. Very, *very* well indeed.

The softness surprised me at first, but then I recalled how often I am equally surprised at the smoothness of the sound of *live*

*instruments* when I attend a concert and am lucky enough to be in one of the first rows. Everything is in the textures, the silkiness of strings, the golden glow of brass, the velvet call of a trombone, the throaty voice and the smile *behind* the voice. I heard it all.

The Reimyo's sound doesn't have as much contrast as that of our reference, and at first I thought it *should* have. But as the listening session progressed, I came to appreciate more and more its specific character, that natural smoothness, that very delicate rendition, which brought me close to the live musical experience.

—Albert Simon

Here's a player ready for the major leagues. It made me travel through a wide range of emotions. That's what it does for one's feelings, but it also delighted my ear with its exceptional sonic qualities.

I was struck by the sheer beauty and the smoothness of certain voices, with outstanding trills, inflections and modulations galore. As we moved through different re-

cordings, I admired the virtuosity of one musician, then the fluidity of playing of a pianist, or a guitarist, or a harpist. Here and there I could make out a fine point of humor. Boundless energy drew me into the rhythm, well underlined by firm attacks and stops that were just as firm.

I recall being moved by the beauty of certain guitar chords, or the endings of certain pieces, trailing away into sounds that are nearly imperceptible, yet so essential to a truly satisfying listening experience. Surprising things happen when you think the final note has died away, and another, infinitely soft, sound wafts out.

I sometimes wonder how certain components can reconstitute so faithfully so many fine details, despite the presence of so many different instruments of different types, played by artists with differing emotional sensibilities.

I've re-read my notes, and I can sum them up with one word: plenitude. I can add no more.

We think you will too.

—Reine Lessard