

Melco Drives Forward

Melco's award-winning network music servers are some of the best around. Now they've added extra storage and a high-quality optical disc drive to the range. Jon Myles connects them in.

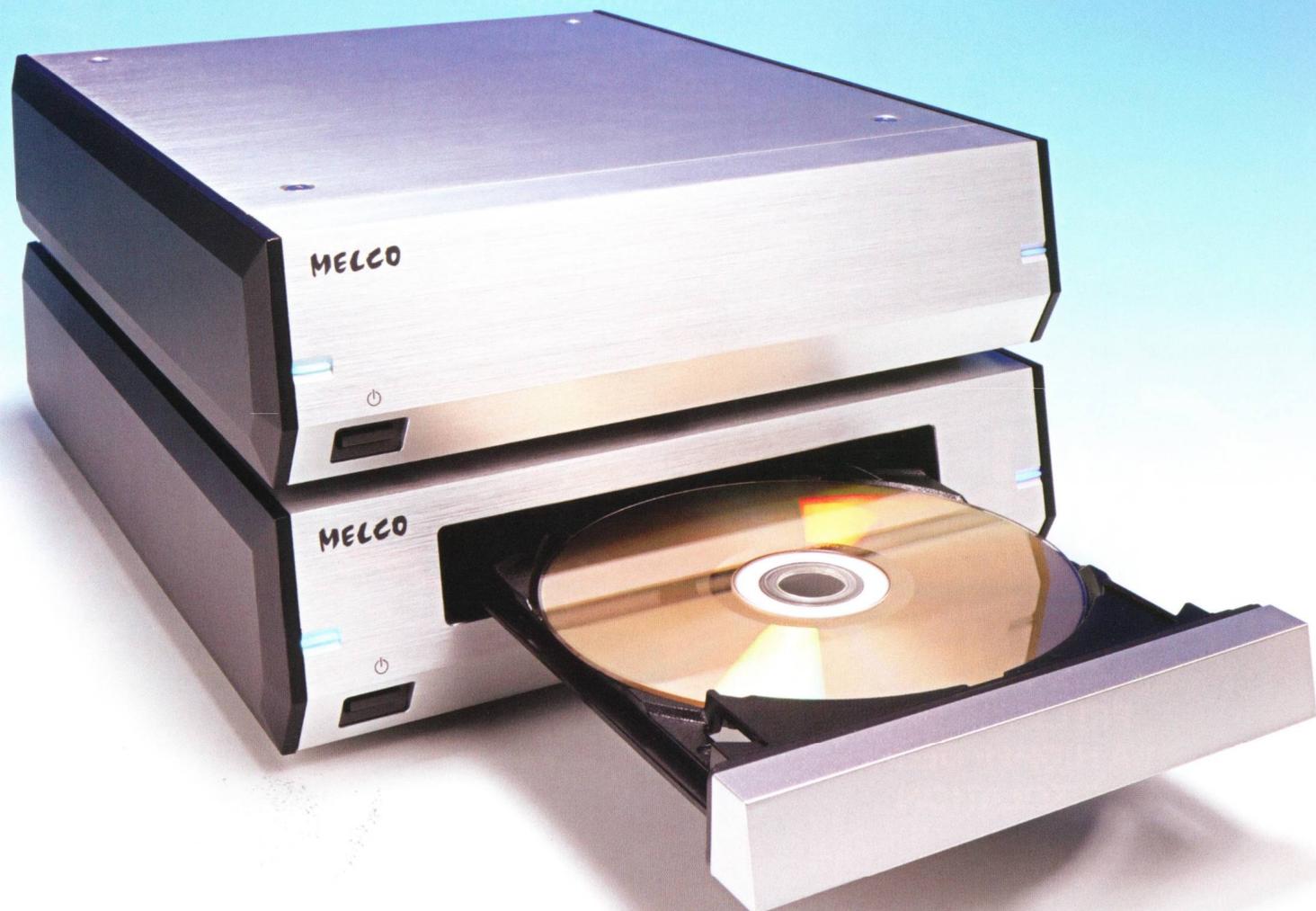
Melco are the audiophile division of giant Japanese computer peripheral manufacturer Buffalo Technology. Its engineers realised most hard disk-based

storage devices - such as NAS drives - were not ideal in terms of sound quality. They are not dedicated hi-fi devices, storing pictures, videos and many other digital files - all of which can introduce interference.

Yes, they do their job but could

they be improved? Melco thought so and set about building a server from the ground up using audiophile grade components, even including specially adapted hard disks optimised purely for the storage and playback of music.

Suffice to say they were a bit of





USB sockets are used for connecting both units to the main Melco music library, in my case a Melco N1A Mk2.

a revelation (see initial review Hi-Fi World March 2015). Melco arguably changed the network music storage landscape with its original N1A server. Since then the company has steadily improved its range, adding new features and improved sound quality.

Now they have added two products long requested by customers - the E100 expansion drive and D100 optical disc drive. Both cost £899 and come in half-size cases, so can be used side by side on a standard hi-fi rack if required.

Being Melco both are superbly built. The company places great importance on the quality of each component's chassis to minimise vibrations that can disturb delicate internal electronic components. They are constructed from 2mm thick aluminium, both incorporating anti-vibration platforms for further stability.

Inside the E100 is a 3TB hard drive controlled by a Melco-designed control board. Its function is to expand the storage capacity of an existing set-up (and with high-

resolution files getting ever bigger it's amazing how quickly those terabytes can fill up). It's minimal in looks - an on/off button at the front with two USB sockets at the rear. One is for connecting to the system and the other to daisy-chain to another E100 if required.

The D100, however, is rather more complicated. It will essentially rip CDs in bit perfect form to the Melco storage library or enable direct playback via a USB-DAC. There are two USB 3.0 connections at the rear - one for connecting directly to a Melco music library for data import and the other to attach directly to a USB-DAC if you just want to play your discs.

SOUND QUALITY

I tried both units, via my Melco N1A Mk2 playing into our Oppo UDP-205 universal disc player feeding a McIntosh MC152 power amplifier.

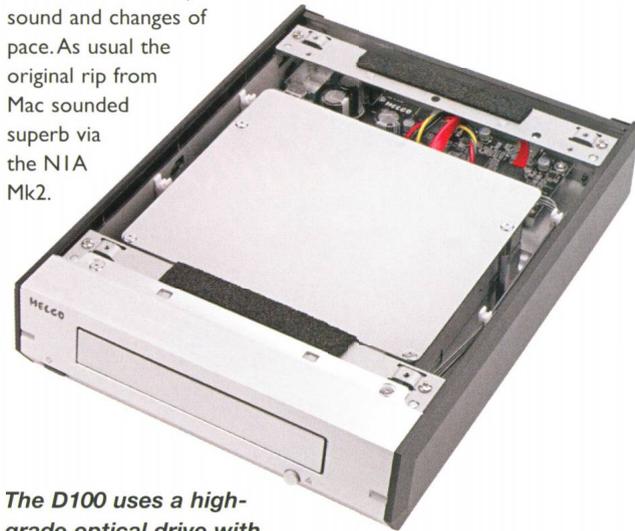
Sound-wise there's not a great deal to say about the E100. It just does what it says on the tin (well, the box) - adding extra storage if you are running out of space on your original Melco.

The D100, though, was a different matter. I have thousands of tracks on my N1A, ripped from CDs by an Apple Mac and transferred via USB, so I used a selection of these to compare the sound to those extracted via the new D100.

Now, some people maintain that any form of copying a CD should give identical results (after all it's bit-for-bit isn't it?). However, I've found that is not always the case and differences do exist

depending on the drive used and software involved.

So I tried my original copy of The Allegri Quartet's 'String Quartet's By Alec Roth' - a real test with lush instrumentation, depth of sound and changes of pace. As usual the original rip from Mac sounded superb via the N1A Mk2.



The D100 uses a high-grade optical drive with extensive shielding and vibration damping.

Placing the original CD in the D100 and using it to rip the same files to the N1A took me by surprise. Playing back there was a definite improvement. Strings sounded more vibrant with improved flow to the music. The whole album came over as smoother yet with added detail - as though I could hear further into the soundscape. Digital artefacts seemed to disappear to be replaced by a - dare I say it - analogue sound.

The same effect was present with Keith Jarrett's 'The Koln Concert' where his piano had more body and improved timing - bringing much more life to the piece. Okay, it wasn't a night and day difference but noticeable enough to make the listening session more enjoyable.

I can only assume that the dedicated audiophile construction of the D100 compared to the do-it-all and noisy environment of a Mac's CD ripper are making the difference.

For those who are sceptical I'd suggest you try it yourself. I reckon you may well be convinced. In the meantime, all I've now got to do is re-rip all my CDs from the D100 to my Melco N1A Mk2!

CONCLUSION

For existing Melco users the E100 and D100 significantly expand the capabilities of their system - adding extra storage and a quality way of transferring CDs to your storage device.

MELCO E100/D100 £899 EACH



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT

If your Melco is running out of space the E100 is the simplest way to expand its storage - whereas the D100 provides high-quality copies that exploit all the excellent qualities of the company's music servers.

MELCO E100 FOR

- simple to use
- adds 3TB of storage
- build quality

AGAINST

-nothing significant

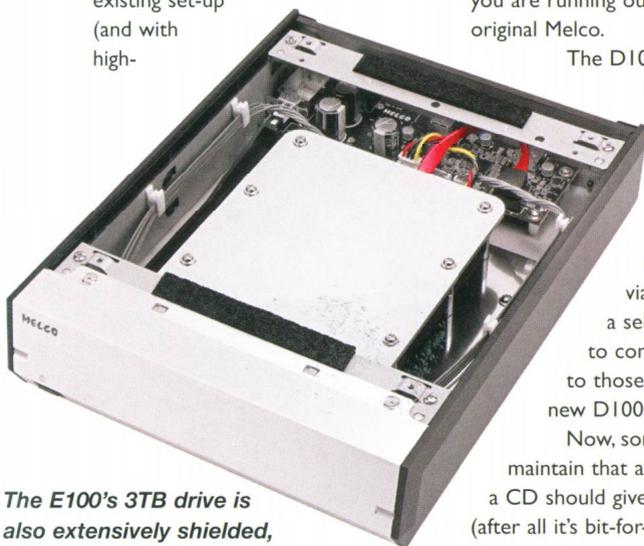
MELCO D100 FOR

- rips CDs to a high quality
- easy operation
- can be used for direct playback
- build

AGAINST

- nothing significant

Kog Audio
+44 (0)24 7722 0650
www.kogaudio.com



The E100's 3TB drive is also extensively shielded, with intrinsic vibration control.