

YBA Genesis CD4

Yes, it's just a CD player, although to be fair it does also have a single digital input. So is this the ideal 'last physical media player' to buy, or simply a blast from the past?

Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

An elderly relative got to grips with CDs pretty quickly. Until then he'd been a firm fan of his LP/cassette/radio music centre, complete with its huge acrylic lid, auto-changer and piano-key controls, which operated with a reassuring mechanical 'clunk'. But when silver discs in square cardboard sleeves started falling out of his *Mail On Sunday*, his initial curiosity soon gave way to reason.

After I'd explained that he needed an extra player, which he could plug into the back of his existing system for not much more than a couple of hundred pounds, it wasn't long before he was making full use of the discs: strung on lengths of hairy green garden twine, they swayed in the breeze doing an admirable job of keeping the birds off his prized runner beans...

AGAINST THE STREAM

Players like the £2750 YBA Genesis CD4 seem to be coming at the whole CD thing from the opposite direction. The much-vaunted vinyl revival notwithstanding, we're often led to believe that the age of playing music from physical carriers is almost over, supplanted by digital downloads and, even more to the point, streaming services. Just as tape-based video recording, and the short-lived video disc recorders, have given way to Tivo, SkyQ, Netflix and Amazon Prime, so music will soon be something only to be experienced at the click of a mouse, a swipe and a tap, or even 'Alexa, play me...'

At least that's the theory, and while it's not quite that simple [see boxout, p53], it does seem that the choice of CD players, and in particular newly-launched CD players, is narrowing. Even the old fall-back of using a high-quality 'universal' Blu-ray player as a one-box disc playback solution has taken a knock with the exit of Oppo Digital from the hardware arena,

RIGHT: A purist player dominated by its PSU transformers for digital [lower left] and analogue [upper left]. DAC board [upper right] features the venerable CS4398 part and note 'wood block' damping of key components [far right]

thus depriving the market of machines as appealing to the SACD/CD listener as they were to the home cinema enthusiast.

TOP OF THE PILE

Against that backdrop, the Genesis CD4 player may well look like something of a throwback, for not only is it limited to spinning CDs, it also does so using a top-loading transport mechanism, located under a sliding door. That makes it a 'top of the rack' machine, designed to be placed where a turntable – whether newly acquired or long-cherished – is apparently more likely to be found these days.

Mind you, if you're going to drop £2750 on a CD player at this stage of the game, you're going to be showing a certain level of commitment to the format, in which case the YBA player is a pretty unequivocal

purchase, its simplicity and that top-loading design almost making one think of it as a turntable – just for CDs.

Like a turntable, it's a bit tweaky, too: it sits on three feet, not four, for stability, and the word from the company is that the sliding lid over the disc mechanism should remain slightly open during playback 'in order to minimise vibration due to the movement of the air rotation of the disc'. That rather flies in the face of those players of the past, which have used heavy damping lids to seal the disc away, flooded the transport compartment with supposedly sound-improving light, and so on, but we'll see how much a lid that's not a lid when it's ajar can affect the sound when we get listening.

The controls and connections here are minimal, too. Aside from balanced and



single-ended analogue outputs, plus a coaxial digital output with a switch to turn it off when not in use, the player has just an optical digital input on offer, the latter a more recent addition since the player was launched a couple of years back. However, as PM points out in his lab report [see p55], this is effectively limited to 96kHz/24-bit, which, to these eyes, makes it of restricted appeal when it comes to adding higher-resolution music sources to your system. On the other hand it could be useful if, for example, you want to play the sound from your TV through your main set-up.

PURIST DETAILING

That idea of a CD player, pure and simple, is reinforced by the front panel controls, located to the left of the clear (if basic) display – here little metal flip-switches turn the power on and off, select play/stop/pause and skip tracks forwards or backwards, and that's it. Beyond that you'll need to resort to the supplied remote handset, which adds random playback, track/disc repeat, display dim/off and the ability to change the readout from 'time elapsed' to 'time remaining'. The handset can also control various of YBA amplifiers – the Genesis being one of four distinct ranges – but

although it adds these functions, it does little to dispel the overriding impression that this is simply a no-frills player.

That impression might be reinforced by a look under the lid, as you can see from our 'top off' picture [p52] wherein the purist design of the player is made clear. It even includes selective damping applied to various components within, using small wooden sheets glued into place as an anti-vibration measure. Separate transformers are used for the analogue

'A combination of slam, power, and gorgeous guitar tone'

and digital sections of the machine, with one for the number-crunching, the Sanyo HD850 transport and the control system, and one each for the two analogue channels, which are thus kept entirely dual-mono. The DAC itself is the CS4398 from Cirrus Logic, originally launched by Crystal Semiconductor getting on for two decades ago: yes, it has been updated along the way, but this is just about the definition of 'tried and tested', and for good reason as, again PM points out in his Lab Report, it still serves its purpose extremely well.

As one who spends most of his listening life calling up files on an iPad these days, finding discs and loading them into the Genesis CD4 was something of an exercise

ABOVE: Solid, functional but not without a little style thanks to its stepped, two-tone fascia, YBA's CD4 is still steeped in 'retro' with its top-loading transport and basic toggle controls

in nostalgia. OK, not on the Zerostat and Milty record-brush level, but you get the idea – and this is definitely a machine designed for those who play their discs all the way through, not track-skippers.

GALLIC GENEROSITY

With a disc dropped gently into that top-loading transport and clamped in place with the magnetic puck provided, you only need to slide the door shut an inch or so for the transport to start spinning and reading the contents. I did experiment at some length with having the door closed just enough to set things in motion, almost completely shut or fully so, but I could discern no difference in the sound from doing this. However, turning off the rear panel digital output had a much greater effect, with a noticeable lack of sparkle in evidence with the output on.

That said, this is a player more about refinement than hurling every last detail of a disc at you, which will make it a fine partner for the company's Passion series PRE550A/AMP650 pre and power amplifiers [HFN May '18]. The sonic balance shouldn't come as a surprise, given that the DAC here is the same as in the PRE550A, in which a pair of CS4398s is used, but all the same the Genesis CD4 delivers a sound of appealing warmth and generosity, without any overt signs of smoothing in the treble.

That will make the player suitable for use across a wide range of discs, from those hard-sounding early CD releases all the way through to harsh modern mastering jobs, and the emollient effect of the player is nicely judged in the cause of listenability. Thus while it isn't the most savage-sounding of players, and in that respect can appear to be holding in check the likes of Motörhead's powering cover of 'Sympathy For The Devil' on its *Bad Magic* album [Motörhead Music UDR 057P18] or the snarl of The Prodigy's *The Day Is My* ⇨



VIRTUAL EXTINCTION?

The mainstream press likes to get excited by headlines of CD's demise: a few months ago *USA Today* reported that 'The shiny compact disc, once as essential to every living-room music system as a copy of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album, is quickly going the way of the eight-track and cassette tape'. Citing the decision of US giant Best Buy to stop selling CDs as 'the latest nail in the coffin', it declared 'The rise of streaming music services such as Apple Music, Spotify and Pandora, as well as the availability of digitally downloadable tracks and albums, are making the CD extinct'. Last year saw physical media – including CDs – stage something of a comeback against music downloads, but also marked a 30-year low in the sales of the silver disc. So what's going on? Well, things are marginally affected by the 'vinyl revival', but the change is reflective of the rise in subscription-based streaming at the expense of individual paid-for downloads. So 'physical media' has staged a minor comeback, at least on paper, in the 'bought' music market, but still lags way behind those ever-booming streaming services.

CD PLAYER/DAC



ABOVE: No USB-B or network connections here, just an S/PDIF digital input on Toslink optical (good for 96kHz/24-bit), with a reciprocal output on coax, alongside fixed-level balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA) analogue outputs

Enemy [Take Me To The Hospital HOSPCD005]. Mind you, neither is it that impressive with the latest Arctic Monkeys set, *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* [Domino WIGCD339], which is dull, dense and clearly wasn't at home when the dynamic range deliveryman called – but then to get much interest out of that album would require some kind of French miracle.

A REAL LIVE WIRE

But you don't have to restrict yourself to endless spins of the live 'Hotel California' or 'Keith Don't Go' (thank goodness). In practice, the Genesis CD4 thrives on well-recorded albums, and with the mighty Gov't Mule *Dark Side Of The Mule* [Provogue PRD 7446 2] delivers a fine combination of slam, power, gorgeous guitar tone and a real sense of the live event. This may not be what company founder Yves-Bernard André had in mind for his CD4 player, but it certainly kicks impressively and is a big, bold listen.

On which subject, coming back to that optical digital input, which I tried with a number of sources, from prosaic CD players to my Mac mini music computer fed via the Gustard U12 interface, I'd maintain my original prognosis that it's best thought of as a convenience feature than as a major reason for buying the CD4. The sound is a bit on the vague side – more lacking in interest than having anything specific wrong with it – and so I'd stick to using the player as a means of spinning discs rather than as a DAC.

And that's a task it handles very well indeed. With the Manfred Honeck/Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra recording of the suite from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* [Fresh! FR-722], the Genesis CD4 delivers a wonderfully

lush and silky view of the strings while maintaining all the scale and power of the brass, all wrapped up in the lovely ambience of this concert hall recording.

Meanwhile the classic Jacqueline Du Pré recording of the Elgar Cello Concerto [this month's Classical Companion, p74] with Barbirolli and the London Symphony Orchestra [EMI Classics Japan TOCE-3098] benefits from the player's ability to reveal instrumental timbres and the nuances of a performance. This it typically achieves while still keeping things in good order – in this instance through the fiery charge to the conclusion of the piece.

Yes, there are players more able to delve into the depths of a recording and reveal every last iota of detail, but when it comes to sweeping you up in the impetus of the music, this one takes some beating thanks to its generosity and fluid presentation. If that appeals to you, and perhaps you're contemplating your last CD player purchase to make the most of a hefty collection of discs, you could do an awful lot worse. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

It isn't the sparkiest of digital players – and, optical input notwithstanding, it is effectively just a CD player – but the YBA Genesis CD4 combines a smooth, easy to enjoy sound with plenty of punch when required, and what it lacks in detail is easily overlooked. Add in the minimalist design of the whole enterprise, with top-loading transport, clean looks and simple facilities, and it has an appeal all of its own.

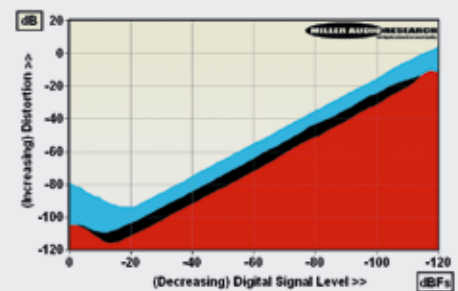
Sound Quality: 80%



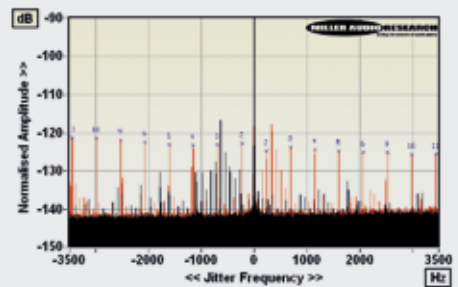
YBA GENESIS CD4

If Kiseki's Blue N.S. is an 'old school' MC pick-up [p48] then YBA's CD4 is most certainly an 'old school' CD player/DAC. For starters that optical digital input is really only good for 96kHz/24-bit, with intermittent unlocks/dropouts occurring with 176.4kHz and 192kHz data. (Toslink optical receivers were typically rated to 96kHz in the past, but modern examples are usually good to 192kHz/24-bit.) Then there's YBA's choice of DAC – the Cirrus Logic *née* Crystal CS4398, originally introduced 16 years ago and subject to updates ever since. Not that an old DAC is a bad DAC. Far from it, for this venerable part demonstrates as wide an A-wtd S/N ratio (106.8dB) and as low jitter (a mere 20psecs with 48kHz or 96kHz/24-bit inputs) as many a contemporary DAC. Even with CD, jitter is as low as can be recorded with a 16-bit data pattern [red spectrum, with markers, Graph 2].

Distortion is well managed too, the substantial and well-regulated PSUs ensuring the DAC and analogue output stage have plenty of clean headroom. At its 4.4V maximum (balanced) output, distortion is closely matched at ~0.0006% through bass and midrange whether via 16-bit CD or optical digital, but the latter has the edge with 24-bit inputs at lower levels where THD falls to a minimum of 0.00018% at -20dBfs [red vs. black traces, Graph 1]. Distortion increases at HF as a function of the output op-amps, reaching 0.014%/20kHz/0dBfs and falling back to a minimum of 0.0009%/20kHz/-30dBfs. YBA has selected a steep roll-off minimum phase type digital filter in the CS4398, the response reaching -0.58dB/20kHz with CD and 48kHz digital inputs. Finally, the 10ohm source impedance is impressively low, suggesting the YBA CD4 will be broadly cable-agnostic. PM



ABOVE: Distortion vs. digital signal level over a 120dB dynamic range – 48kHz/24-bit LPCM (1kHz, red) versus 16-bit CD (1kHz, black; 20kHz, cyan)



ABOVE: High res. 48kHz/24-bit jitter spectrum (black) vs. 16-bit CD (red, with base J-Test pattern marked)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	4.42Vrms / 9-10ohm (XLR)
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD / 24-bit Optical)	106.5dB / 106.8dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBfs/-30dBfs)	0.0006% / 0.0004%
Distortion & Noise (20kHz, 0dBfs/-30dBfs)	0.0145% / 0.0009%
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/45kHz)	+0.0 to -0.58dB/-2.75dB
Digital jitter (CD / 48kHz/96kHz)	116psec / 21psec / 22psec
Resolution @ -100dB (CD / 24-bit Opt.)	±0.1dB / ±0.2dB
Power consumption	10W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x115x388mm / 11kg