

Ayon CD-10 II CD Player

HFA

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Regular readers may have spotted it in my system on several occasions starting as early as January last year. That first exposure for the CD-10 II was the result of it having been delivered to me along with the [Ayon Spirit III](#) amplifier that was the main focus for the review. I did listen to the CD player in a limited setting and added a brief description to the amplifier review but left it at that.

Long after the CD-10 had been returned, I received a review request for the [Jay's Audio CDT-2 MkII CD transport and DAC-2 Signature](#) and this re-acquainted me with what a good CD transport can do. Soon, I realized that there is a certain involvement aspect to a good CD player or transport that is lacking with music servers which is hard to define. It's certainly not the rounding of transients or the overt smoothness of old and off-spec players. In fact, a good CD player or transport can sound more lively and dynamic and even more immediate than any server that I heard to date. The [Ayon CD-T II Signature](#) CD transport is the perfect example of this. When I reviewed it in 2018, I already noticed that it outperformed my music server in terms of transient sharpness and dynamic impact but by that time I was already so much invested in Roon that I did not want to go back to the CD format.

After the Jay's review, however, I proceeded to audition [several other CD transports](#) and as a result, the Compact Disc is now once again the primary source in my main system for attentive listening sessions while the music server remains in use for casual listening, reviews and assessments.



CD-10 II

Now that my affection for the CD format was fully re-sparked I remembered the CD-10 II and decided to request a review sample to give it a proper review after all. The CD-10 II is the company's most affordable CD player and this is its latest incarnation. Compared to its forebear, the MkII version incorporates a new AKM DAC design with optimized new low-pass filter technology and the power supply, the CD-mechanism and its new integral magnetic clamp were reworked. The CD-10 II is available in three versions: CD-10 II

“Standard”, CD-10 II „Signature” and CD-10 II “Ultimate”. This review covers the Standard version.

For a quality brand such as Ayon, “most affordable” does not mean cheap but the CD-10 II does actually offer an excellent price/performance ratio. For starters, it has many of the features as the higher-end Ayon models and the exact same build quality. Further, it’s not just a CD player. It is a DAC, digital preamp and CD transport in a single housing. Ayon did not slap on just any DAC, either. The CD-10 II has a Class-A triode vacuum-tube output stage for single-ended & balanced operation and it outputs to both cinch and XLR. These outputs can be selected individually or, if desired, simultaneously, using a switch on the rear. All outputs can be used at the same time but as Ayon mentions in the manual, the best sound is obtained by using one set at a time.

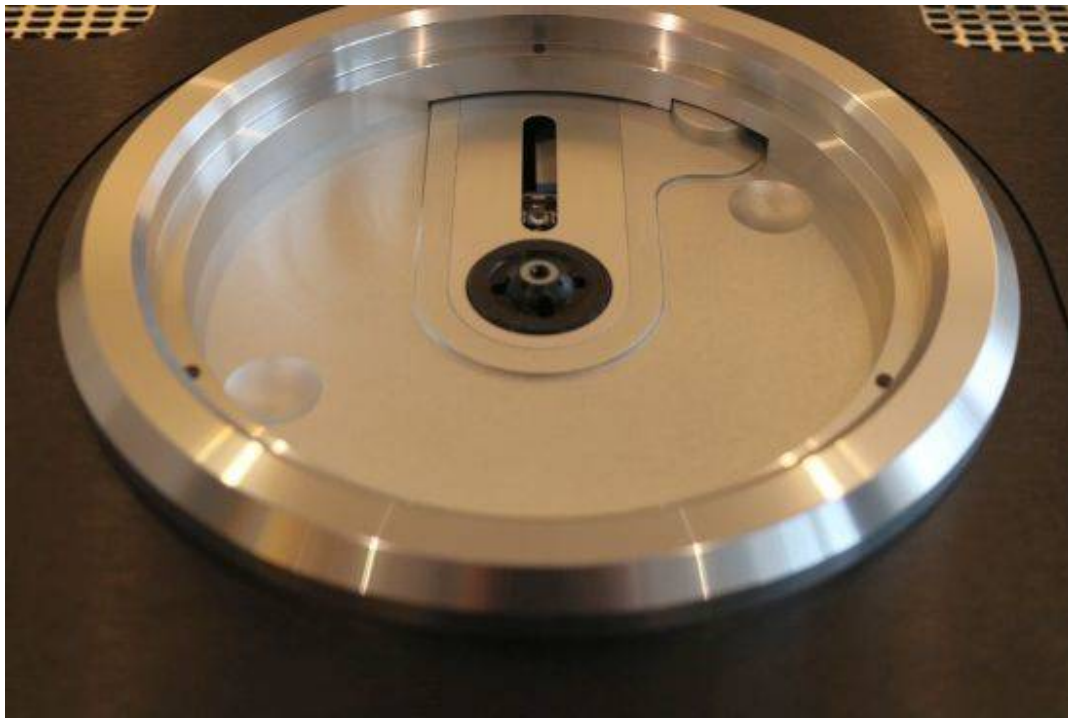


The coaxial, optical and (DSD 64x/128x-compatible-) USB inputs make it possible to use the CD-10 II as the control center of a minimalistic but very high-quality digital-only system.



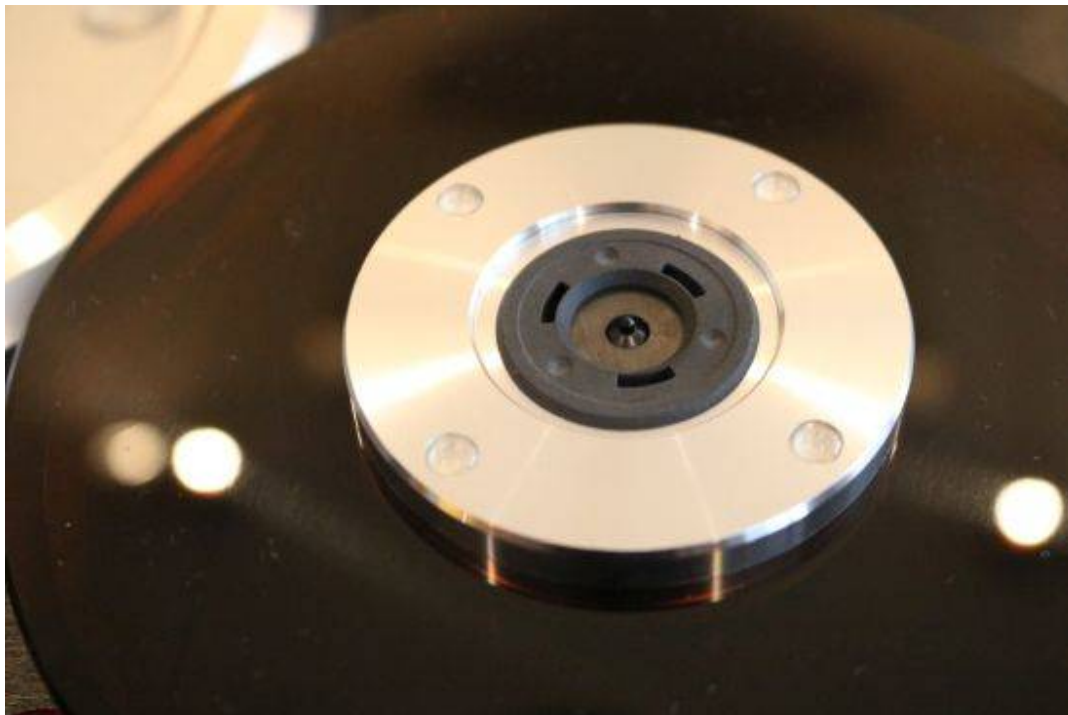
The CD-10 II can be switched between line-out mode (normal) and amplifier-direct mode. The latter should be selected when the unit is connected directly to a power amplifier. In this mode, the player always starts at -40dB after having been switched off. Also, it disables the Volume Bypass function that otherwise can be selected from the remote control. This is a safety feature that prevents heart attacks and speaker damage.

Conveniently, the player offers dedicated back-lit volume buttons on its top panel and a permanent volume indication on its front panel. With the very comprehensive IR remote control, all of its functions can be controlled, including those for Ayon amplifiers.



As per usual for the brand, the power switch is on the bottom of the unit, near the left side of the front panel. There are two more switches on the bottom that are labeled DMP which, I assume is short for "damping". From the factory, they are set to ON but when I tried the OFF setting the volume is lowered which seems counter-intuitive. For what the function is

intended is not made clear. The manual mentions only the following: "Only for factory settings and DMP is set to ON" from which I deduce that "ON" is indeed the factory standard setting. However, I know from earlier experience with the [Ayon S10 MkII](#) that DMP reduces the level by 6dB and increases the damping factor, thereby reducing the audibility of tube-related noises. Because the level was in line with other sources, I left them at the factory settings.



Conveniently, the puck is integrated into the lid making loading a CD a breeze

The CD-10 II offers two filter options. Filter 1 is described in the manual as a slow roll-off filter that sounds smoother and Filter 2 is described as being a fast roll-off filter that sounds more analytical. From my listening tests, I think these two descriptions are probably mixed up in the manual as Filter 1 sounds the liveliest and most open in the treble to me. In any event, I preferred Filter 1 and used this for the remainder of the review.



The Ayon combo sounds great in every setup that I tried it. Here, with Wilson Benesch Precision P1.0's.

Listening

In the secondary system, I use the [Ayon Spirit III](#) KT-150 tube amplifier with an [Antipodes EX](#) music server and an ever-changing selection of turntables as sources but, so far, without a CD player. The CD-10 II sure looks great in tandem with the Ayon amp but does it also pair well? Let's find out! Normally, this setup is flanked by Xavian Perla Esclusiva speakers and it was with these speakers that I first listened to the CD-10 II.

Powered with a Belden 19364 cable with Bals schuko and Oyaide C-004 IEC and connected to the Spirit III with an AudioQuest Water interlink, I loaded the first CD. Even fresh from its box, the CD-10 II sounds solid, upbeat, dynamic and immediately engaging!



Break-in period

Rather than straying away from the subject, Ayon addresses the break-in period and describes precisely what happens during running in.

“The unit will not perform to its full sonic potential when first installed in your system. This is partially due to a residual polarization of the dielectric materials used on the printed circuit board such as resistors, capacitors, chokes, transformers and internal wiring. As music is played through the unit, the electrical signals will gradually anneal these materials”.

Ok, that’s something I can relate to. The manual goes on to describe the audible effects and notes that the break-in period should normally last 30-50 hours.



The regular setup with Xavian Perla Esclusiva's

But instead of letting the unit just sit and play music, I jumped right in to hear it from the very first notes that it played. In line with what I have known to be the Ayon house sound, the CD-10 II has a bold, sonorous and earthy presentation. There are good openness, transparency and detail but it's in many ways the antithesis of the typically overly-clean and dry super-analytical sound and that's precisely what I like so much about Ayon. The brand always puts the music first. It starts with the bass which is solid, upbeat and remarkably powerful. The midrange does not have the kind of a ripe lushness that some tube aficionados may expect. But that overly euphoric creaminess, in my view, is a sign of bad tube design and no Ayon component that I heard has ever shown any signs of such flaws. Rather, its midrange is rich in texture and highly credible and lifelike. With this player, wooden instruments also sound wooden and real and absolutely in no way synthetic. The treble treads a fine balance between articulate precision and airy finesse. I wouldn't say it is the most delicate or refined treble I've heard but it's certainly well-integrated, not white, not blurred and not hard but just highly credible.



Switching to the USB input, the CD-10 II functions as a DAC with volume control, just as with the CD player. The input can conveniently be selected from the unit's top panel or with the IR remote control.

Although I currently feel that CD's bring something extra and this is the case with the CD-10 II as well, using a [CAD USB 1](#) USB cable with the Antipodes EX, however, the CD-10 II still sounds great! There are the same robustness, the same convincing tonality and very similar textures. What's different when fed from the server, mainly, is the way that the music flows slightly less organically and the soundstage that is now a little bit more stuck to the speakers, more static, as it were. But it's still a darn good sound!

When you want to switch back to CD, all it takes is a press of the play button and the appropriate input is automatically selected.

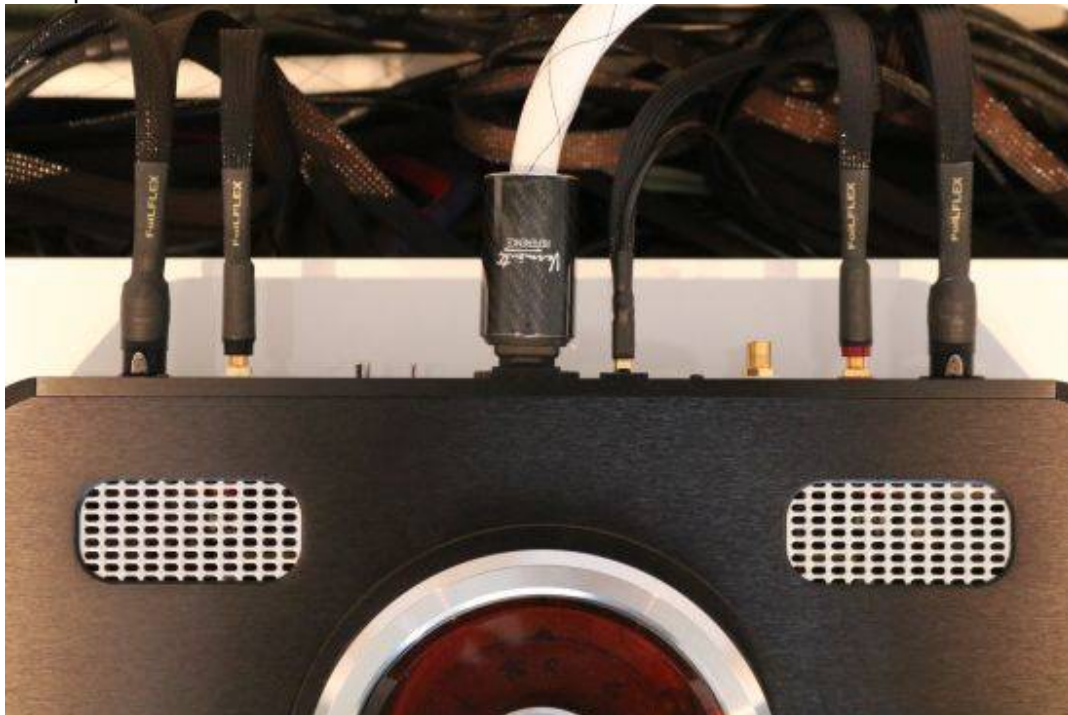
And all this was with pretty much no break-in. Imagine what is still in store! Well, of course, I don't have to imagine it as I have heard how it improves over time. What happened, mostly, is that it developed a slightly more organic nature (less rigid but still very solid and authoritative) and its soundstaging flowed more freely, the more it played. I had a feeling that it stabilized already before even reaching 30 hours.

The CD-10 II also has a digital output to use it with an external DAC. While this works as it should, I wouldn't look at this as a means to upgrade the player down the line. First, the CD-10 II is designed to be used as an integral player and as it happens in many cases, going via SPDIF to an external DAC brings advantages as well as disadvantages. The CD-

10 II really is pretty hard to beat as a whole and second, as a transport, the unit is less impressive. Into any other DAC, it has a fluid, open and agile sound but it lacks the authority, solidity and dynamic impact that makes it such a cracking integrated player.

Also, there is a much better means of upgrading the CD-10 II that can be done right at the moment of purchase or later on. Significant steps can be taken by opting for the Signature version of the CD-10 II which includes a PCM-DSD converter for all PCM signals and very high-grade capacitors. If this works out as it did with the [S-10-II Signature](#), then this will dot the last remaining i's by filling in the last bit of refinement and resolution, further elevating it closer to the reference level. If you want to take it to the max you can opt for the Ultimate version which includes the PCM-DSD converter as well as a 6H30 Tube-output-stage and very high-grade coupling capacitors and other parts. This should take it all the way up to the reference level.

If the idea is to assemble a top transport-DAC combo, now or down the road, then the [CD-T II](#) should be on the top of your list. I've already reviewed it and it is one of the very best transports I have heard.



Connected with Vermouth Reference power cable and FoilFlex interlinks

Power cables

While the very neutral Belden cable works well pretty much everywhere and it clearly upgrades the standard power cord that is in the box, the CD-10 II's inherent qualities are maximized by using the [Vermouth Reference](#) power cable. This cable has precisely the same qualities as the Ayon and joins forces to make the player sound even more solid, well-textured and authoritative.



More Listening

Due to speaker experiments in the main listening room, I moved the very heavy Kroma Carmens to the secondary listening room. While I know that the Kroma's can sound cleaner when given more space, with the exception of some unneeded room gain in the lowest frequencies, the sound is well balanced, intimate, richly textured and there is a surprisingly large soundstage that even extends beyond the front wall.



I also used the CD-10 II as the central hub in the role of a CD player and preamp in a minimalistic setup as part of the [atm-audio EPM-50](#) review and that also worked absolutely marvelously.



Much more so than with the Xavians and now using [FoilFlex](#) speaker cables and interlinks, the Kromas highlight how fabulously well-textured and sure-footed the CD-10 II is and how natural it sounds. I already heard it with the Xavians but the Kromas confirm that the CD-10 II not only has an organic and emotionally captivating delivery, it's also highly dynamic and rhythmically infectious.

Listening to this system, it is hard to imagine one could desire for more authority or dynamic impact. But these are actually the main areas in which dearer Ayon models distinguish themselves, usually along with even bigger soundstaging. But as it stands, I already feel that the CD-10 II offers class-leading performance in its price class. Heck, I like it so much that I made it a permanent part of my system!

Conclusion

Even in the Standard version, the CD-10 II impressed me enormously. Regular readers will know that I am used to listening to very esoteric gear but somehow Ayon always manages to stir my music-loving soul, and, as it turns out, even with their entry-level products.

Fabulously well-textured and sure-footed, organic and emotionally captivating, highly dynamic and rhythmically infectious, the CD-10 II pushes all the right buttons. It is the kind of sound that engages immediately, making one want for nothing more than just listen to more music.

[Associated Equipment](#)

Manufacturer: [Ayon](#)

[Audio](#)

Distributor for the Benelux: [Mafico](#)



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