



# Swede Dreams

**Adam Smith takes a listen to the new CD100 CD player from Sweden's XTZ...**

It's interesting how ye olde Compact Disc is refusing to be kicked out of the way by digital downloads. Although the silver Frisbee was never the ultimate sonic wonder that was billed upon its arrival, it has undoubtedly made an impression. The lure of convenience, the lack of fuss, the compactness and the apparently high-tech aspect of the format have ensured that pretty much everyone across the listening world has a machine capable of playing these devices, be it on their computer, in their car or sat in their hi-fi rack.

On the face of it, the digital download would seem to be even more convenient – no media to scratch, no hard format to store, lug around and lose, and no need for a clunky transport, but the CD isn't going without a fight. Even more surprising is that, whilst the likes of dCS, Meridian and Naim sell huge CD-spinning behemoths that take the format as far as it can go, one might have expected that, at the bottom end of the market, 2010 would seem a pretty pointless time to introduce a budget CD spinner. Well, the likes of Cambridge Audio would undoubtedly

disagree and now XTZ have raised their voice and added it to the dissent...

A relatively new name to the UK, XTZ hail from Sweden and first made their mark with the Room Analyser package, but are gradually introducing a range of separates, such as the 99.25 loudspeakers that impressed editor DP back in the May issue. The company itself is a conglomeration of "engineers, technicians, manufacturers and producers" who collaborate with several companies across Europe and Asia for their design and manufacturing activities. They have





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also taken the seemingly increasingly common concept of selling directly to the customer; the main advantage of which is that the prospective purchaser can take advantage of a home trial period to check out the equipment in their own system and surroundings, which is never a bad thing.

The CD100 is XTZ's first CD player and I have to say that the weight of the box and the sturdiness of the machine contained therein are quite at odds with the selling price of £365. Even better is the truly delicious remote control handset sat in the top of the box. I'm sure many of you out there are as sick of reading about me moaning about plastic remotes as I am of writing about them, so suffice to say that the XTZ's is a lovely thing and gets the Smith thumbs-up.

The player itself tips the scales at a healthy 9kg and some of the features found on it are, again, astonishing considering the price. Class A output stage based around

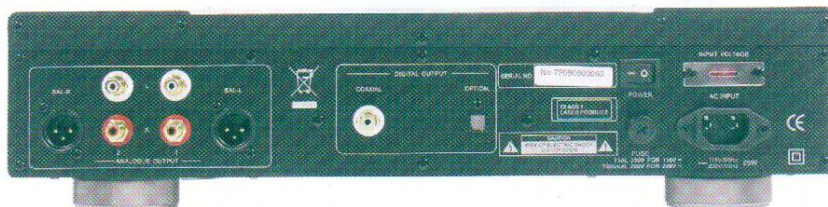
discrete components? Check. Balanced outputs via XLR sockets? Absolutely. Separate transformers for the digital and analogue sections? Certainly. All in all, the player is very well specified and a peek inside reveals a sprinkling of decent quality components plus three separate shielded chambers containing PSU, transport and output sections. Frankly, if you'd told me the price had an additional '1' on the front of it, I wouldn't have batted an eyelid...

So, first impressions good but second impressions when I powered it up were more reserved. Firstly, I have a pathological hatred of any piece of equipment that flashes "Hello" in the display when you

turn it on and the review sample CD100 compounded this by its drawer occasionally refusing to open properly; instead creeping out by an inch or two and then shooting straight back in again. Of course, the ultimate arbiter is, as always, sound quality and, as I was beginning to wonder if the word "Divine", which is bizarrely written on the front panel, was some strange subliminal message, it was time to start spinning some tunes...

### SOUND QUALITY

With the XTZ thoroughly warmed up, the first thing that hit me as the music started was the bass, which did literally hit me – one of my first





test tracks was the title track from Emiliana Torrini's 'Me and Armini' album and I had the volume control set higher than I realised. The upshot was that the opening drum strikes and heavy bass line nearly blew me off my listening seat until I adjusted the level appropriately. Bass was full, perfectly rounded and incredibly tight – I have heard players costing many times that of the XTZ make a ham fist of this track and, so considered this to be a good start.

The CD100 certainly majors on rhythms, I found as I listened further. That healthy bass is not all just grunt and hump, but there is plenty of detail to be found as well, so bass guitar notes were easily distinguishable and well separated from their neighbours, double basses had their customary woody thrum present and correct, and the XTZ was able to focus the performance well in low end terms. I was also impressed by its abilities when it came to imaging; it does not set up a hugely wide or deep soundstage, nor would it be expected to at the price, but it really does spotlight the central action vividly and, as a result, helps to focus the main aspect of the performance, be this a solo instrument within an orchestra, or the singer at the front of a band. As a result of this, the XTZ's overall presentation arranged performers well within their space, even if this space wasn't all that extensive.

At the top end, treble is clean but as I listened more closely, I became aware of a lack of impact and insight in this area. Cymbal action from a good drum kit, for example, had a pleasantly metallic sheen to it but the XTZ seemed to be glossing over the initial strike itself. On one jazz track I played, which is underpinned by a softly brushed cymbal, the CD100 had a tendency to blur this into a soft, continuous hiss rather than allowing the shape and form of each stroke to come through. An unfortunate side-effect was that this aspect seemed to carry over into the upper midrange as well, and the overall result was

to make such performances a little recessed and rather 'nasal'.

A perfect example was to be found back on the Emiliana Torrini CD with which I started the evaluation. The aforementioned title track came across very well indeed, being of a reggae-type nature and dominated by the impressive bass line. Skipping forward to the track 'Gun', however, changed things completely. This is a harsher track for a player to manage, featuring Miss Torrini's vocals alternating between fairly soft and quite lacerating, and underpinned by an occasionally scything solo electric guitar. Here the CD100 almost seemed unnerved; it certainly soldiered on valiantly but the casualties were the guitar play, which started to lose its sense of focus and stridency, and the backing percussive effects that appear later in the track which lacked their customary impact.

Ultimately I found that the XTZ was quite material-dependent and turning up the wick to something demanding seemed to make it a little uncomfortable on occasions. Although retaining its puppy-dog

eagerness to perform at all times, it did occasionally seem to trip over its feet every now and then. However, offer up something more languid and spacious in recording terms and you really can hear the strength of the machine in action and with this sort of material in mind it is an easy and enjoyable listen.

## CONCLUSION

The CD100 is an impressive start to CD player manufacture for XTZ. Incredibly well built and specified and offering an astounding level of value for money, it has a great deal to recommend it, particularly at its eminently affordable price. With an easy rhythmicality and a weighty and well ordered low end it will find many friends. It is not quite up with the best at the price when it comes to sorting the minutiae from more densely layered recordings but, taking into account its very reasonable price, it deserves a warm recommendation.

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Marantz CD94/CDA94 CD player  
Naim Supernait integrated amplifier  
Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers [modified]

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the CD-100, shown in our convolved impulse analysis, measured flat right out to the usual 21.2kHz limit, with just the slightest loss at high frequencies imposed by anti-alias filtering. As this amounts to -0.35dB at 20kHz it isn't enough to subjectively alter tonal balance but it should ensure the XTZ sounds neither hard nor sharp.

Distortion levels were low throughout the player's dynamic range, our analysis showing a low 0.18% at -60dB. Lack of quantisation noise hash helped toward a decent EIAJ Dynamic range value of 100dB, close to the best, but not significantly better, but then that is hard to achieve with the fixed performance of a digital system.

Jitter (random) on the digital output was high at around 300pS up to 500Hz, and 1nS below 100Hz. This is much higher than the 10-20pS achieved by good, modern players and is a mark against the XTZ.

The XTZ CD-100 measured well except for jitter on its digital output. If this also affects the internal data stream to the DACs, as is likely, then it will impact sound quality. NK

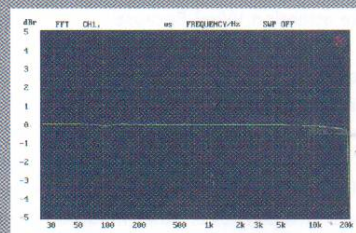
Frequency response (-1dB)  
2Hz - 21.2kHz

Distortion (%)  
0dB 0.004

-6dB	0.002
-60dB	0.18
-80dB	4.3

Separation (1kHz)	130dB
Noise (IEC A)	-98dB
Dynamic range (EIAJ)	100dB
Output	2.16V

## FREQUENCY RESPONSE



## DISTORTION



## VERDICT

Superbly built and with an impressive sense of pace and weight, the CD100's performance belies its affordable price tag.

XTZ CD100 £365

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## FOR

- image focus
- low end impact
- remote control
- build
- value

## AGAINST

- recessed upper mid/treble
- "Hello!"