

Melco NZ1

MARTIN COLLOMS EXAMINES MELCO'S NZ1 MEDIA AND MUSIC SERVER WITH ITS SOLID STATE DRIVE



The Melco name may not be familiar to many readers, although this audiophile-oriented Japanese brand did have a pre-1980 presence, as the manufacturer of some high end turntables which were at one time distributed in Britain by Bey Yamamura. What is less well known was Melco's subsequent decision to concentrate on the computer component market, specialising in hard drive design and manufacture – specifically the famous Buffalo brand with its billion dollar plus turnover.

The increasing use of hard drives for storing downloaded and ripped digital audio, including basic versions of Buffalo drives in NAS form (network attached server and media store) has led Melco to look to its roots and use its manifest experience and production resources to create a high fidelity music vault under the original audio brand. It is important to note that this *NZ1* and its lower cost brother the *N1A* are not conventional network servers. Rather they are designed to be connected *in line* rather than *to* a network. By design they are high quality music vaults, ideally to be placed local to an audio replay streamer thus presenting the lowest noise and jitter audio feed possible for improved sound

quality. Their network connection mode is that of a feed-through unit rather than a spur, and in this role they constitute the final link to the streamer which actually replays your music. In a sense it can be regarded as a low noise network isolator and filter, opto coupled.

Combined with an audiophile streamer, such as those from Linn, Naim, Chord Electronics or any of the many other choices now available, the Melco concept is a successor to the two-box CD player, replacing a *disc drive* and *DAC* by a *music vault* and *streamer/DAC*, now linked by a network cable rather than a S/PDIF or equivalent data path.

Certainly the audio streamer market has expanded in leaps and bounds in recent years, and many audio enthusiasts now enjoy convenient access to their digital music libraries from network connected hard drive storage. This storage is typically an audio dedicated and configured NAS drive, frequently with a degree of storage redundancy to allow for automatic safe recovery from partial failure of a storage division. For the terabyte or so needed for a good sized audio library, such drives are now so inexpensive that there is no excuse not to have a