



Bryston

BOT-1 Optical transport

BDP-2 Digital player/streamer

RICHARD SCHNEIDER

In this review, we'll see how two devices can work in tandem to offer an interesting solution to managing a digital music library. In the fast-changing field of digital audio, these new offerings from Bryston offer an alternative that we believe will be of interest to many of our readers.

BRYSTON, BRIEFLY

Located in Peterborough, Ontario, Bryston remains a thoroughly Canadian manufacturer, recognized here and abroad for its high-level audio components. Who can forget their virtually indestructible amplifiers backed by a 20-year warranty, a source of pride for their owners and of envy for many audio enthusiasts? Bryston designs and manufactures audio components for both the domestic and professional audio markets, with the same level of care and attention to detail. Many musicians, recording studios, radio stations, television stations and arenas around the world rely on Bryston equipment for its sound quality and its reliability. Bryston's craft heritage extends back almost 35 years, with all components designed, assembled and tested by hand by Canadian artisans dedicated to providing exceptional products.

THE BOT-1

Despite pronouncements of its imminent demise, the CD format refuses to play dead. Certain manufacturers, like Linn, have stopped production of CD players, perhaps prematurely? Does the industry really understand the intentions of music consumers? I'm not sure, but I do feel that manufacturers shouldn't dictate trends but instead respond to the tastes and lifestyles of music enthusiasts. A striking example of the latter approach is Apple, which has never forced consumers to adopt their products, preferring instead to offer attractive solutions for people who want a

compact, complete and efficient device. Returning to our subject, while the CD may eventually disappear, I am far from certain that its demise will be as close as one might expect. Sales of vinyl are a good example showing that we must never take urban legends for granted. Sales are declining, yet consumers still massively use this medium.

Many music lovers remain loyal to CD playback while adapting to the technologies of streaming and music servers. These technologies are not incompatible and can happily coexist. They both have their charms, such that the majority of CD player owners have no intention of selling their "digital turntables". I am the perfect example. While I am a strong advocate of dematerialized music, I do not intend to sell my CD player. Bryston understands consumer sentiment and has responded well. The traditional approach of a dedicated CD player doesn't address the new reality that dictates that a CD player should not only play CDs, but also rip and burn CDs without using a computer. The versatile BOT-1 is Bryston's answer.

The BOT-1 is a device of great simplicity with no external control, requiring no technical knowledge to operate. It must, however, be paired with Bryston's BDP-2 player. Doing this transforms it into a highly versatile component. I connected it to the BDP-2 via a USB cable designed specifically for this purpose and provided by Bryston. Once connected, the BDP-2 recognizes the BOT-1 immediately.

The BOT-1 optical drive essentially performs three tasks. First, it is a transport that will play your CD, CD-R or CD-RW discs just like a conventional CD player. Secondly, it acts as a CD ripper, neatly replacing a computer for this task. Finally (and importantly), it allows you to burn CD-R discs. That is a lot for such a small device, but it does even more. The BOT-1 contains a buffer that temporarily stores data in memory, allowing for error correction when reading CDs. Thus, when data arrives at the BDP-2, it is



free of any timing errors, for jitter-free playback. Control is via the front panel of the BDP-2 or through an optional remote control, or via an application running on a tablet, a laptop or a smart phone. I found a tablet to be the most practical option, due to the larger screen size than that offered by a phone, and less cumbersome than a laptop. Refreshingly, operating the duo requires no complex configuration or programming. From a web browser, accessing the BDP-2 simply requires typing in *bryston-bdp-2*. This immediately opens up the latest version of the BDP-2's dashboard, dubbed "Manic Moose" by Bryston. While the interface doesn't have the look of JRiver, it is ideal for both devices and far simpler to navigate than JRiver or Foobar 2000, for example.

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THE BDP-2

Being unfamiliar with this type of component, it took me a little while to grasp the BDP-2's functions. Simply put, it is a digital player and streamer. Some describe it as a high-resolution file reader that can handle any audio format up to 24 bit/19kHz. In fact, it can do more, because if your digital-to-analog converter is able to play DSD and DSF files, the BDP-2 will be able to read them, making it a player of great versatility. Unlike most digital audio devices on the market, the BDP-2 has no digital-to-analog conversion circuit, CD transport or internal hard drive. The idea was to build a simple and flexible future-proof device that can adapt to new technologies, in the same way as its predecessor, the BDP-1.

I see the BDP-2 as a computer serving as a control centre of a great musical universe onto which can be grafted other computers, but also a variety of digital sources, not forgetting that it is also a streamer. If your converter has some input limitations, you'll be delighted to learn that you can connect almost all digital audio devices you have on hand to the BDP-2. As expected, the player can be connected to a home network, which vastly increases its versatility.

The BDP-2 builds on the BDP-1USB, reviewed by my colleague Jan-Erik Nordoen in Volume 16, Number 3 of the magazine. His description of the player's function could

not be clearer: *"The role of the digital player is to read data from an external source ... transforming it into a quality signal and transferring this signal to the converter."* The BDP-2 is a revised player with several new features, the most obvious being the number of inputs. The two front USB inputs are present as before, but Bryston has added four to the rear panel of the unit, as opposed to the two found on the BDP-1. The USB inputs, by the way, are a must if you play DSD files. Moreover, two RS232 ports and two Ethernet ports provide enhanced options for control and connectivity. The addition of the S/PDIF and AES/EBU connections is a big step forward, expanding the range of converters that can be connected. The BDP-2 also offers the possibility of connecting an eSATA hard disk drive for direct playback from that medium. As you can see, times change and Bryston has adapted.

On the technical side, the BDP-2 features a more sophisticated power supply, where one circuit feeds the digital section while a second linear supply sees to the needs of Bryston's Integrated Audio Device card (new on the BDP-2) covering output and sound processing. Separating the digital and audio sections in this way minimizes electrical interference, greatly improving sound reproduction. The Bryston BDP-2 features eight times more memory than the BDP-1USB and a processor that triples the speed of its predecessor, resulting in much faster access to one's music library. The end result is a device that is far more efficient and responsive to commands.

The new motherboard sports an Intel Atom processor running Linux, with a network connection allowing full control via an iOS or Android device. While the interface lacks a bit of charm when compared to JRiver for example, it manages playback of digital files exceptionally well, regardless of the source. The basic Bryston application is free while third-party apps can be purchased inexpensively.

Internet radio stations are increasingly popular, and every digital playback device should provide access, and here it was no exception. You can literally spend hours browsing without borders, from one country and culture to another, all in the comfort of your home..

OPERATION AND START-UP

Operating the BOT-1 is simplicity itself. Connect it to one of the jacks on the back of the BDP-2 using the USB cable provided by Bryston. That's it; no configuration required, as the BDP-2 handles its operation. Note that the BOT-1 optical drive must be used with Bryston's BDP-2, as the duo is designed to work together. Connection to your converter is via one of the three alternatives. First is USB, essential for DSD playback, as mentioned earlier. Then there is the



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S/PDIF input (RCA or BNC) available on most converters, and eventually the AES/EBU 110 ohms balanced connection. From there, the BDP-2 is connected to the network via the Ethernet input so that it can recognize network components, a NAS drive, for example, that are not connected directly to the player. The network connection enables use of a tablet that becomes the control centre for the player. Finally, all you have to do is connect your tablet (or phone or computer) to your network, download the application and you're good to go. Note though that because the BDP-2 is a computer, it takes a little time to boot up, just under two minutes.

IN SHORT

It would be pointless to repeat a complete critique of this device's sound, because as Bryston states, the BDP-2 retains the same musical features as its predecessor. However, I should mention that while listening to different tracks, I found myself in familiar territory, in other words, the BOT-1 and BDP-2 did nothing to alter the sound of my system. The synergy with my Meitner converter was total, with no compatibility issues. So, is the BDP-2 worth stepping up to from the BDP -1? The difference between the two is notably in the improved features and connectivity that accommodate standards expected by the modern consumer. Bryston has directly addressed new technologies and brought a foolproof flexibility to their use. Mission accomplished. As for music reproduction as such, Bryston has, to their credit, not tampered with their approach. The tandem formed by the BOT-1 and the BDP-2 is a winning combination.

BDP-1: \$1,295

BDP-2: \$2,995

Available with silver or black front faceplate

Manufacturer and distributor: Bryston

1-800-632-8217 • www.bryston.com