



Full stream ahead

Chris Ward takes a ride with this talented digital source that brings together CD playback and network audio streaming

As the fourth incarnation of Leema Acoustics' CD player, the Stream IV adds an integrated streaming engine. Combining CD and streaming in one component seems like a smart move and neatly caters for music fans with extensive CD collections that also want to add the infinite content access, simplicity and improving quality of streaming. It might not support DSD playback, but the Stream IV sets its stall out to provide a higher quality playback of PCM formats up to 24-bit/192kHz. Many competitors have integrated streamers into amplifiers, but I prefer this 'combined digital sources' approach, which allows me to retain my favourite amplification.

The front elevation is elegant, simple and uncluttered. Turning and pushing twin rotary controls cleverly facilitates all the usual actions of on/standby, eject/close, play/pause, track selection and scanning with similar functions echoed on the remote. The CD drawer is of the slim and lightweight variety, but performs accurately and faultlessly. Around the back, the Stream IV provides two sets of analogue RCA outputs and single coaxial and digital outputs should you wish to use your own DAC. A USB-A flash drive input is included as well as an Ethernet port for connecting to a home network router or directly to a media server. Twin wi-fi antennas are also provided to facilitate stable wireless connectivity.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Leema Acoustics Stream IV

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
CD player/network audio player

WEIGHT
5.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
435 x 95 x 330mm

FEATURES

- 24-bit/192kHz-capable DAC
- Outputs: 2x stereo RCAs; 1x optical; 1x coaxial
- USB-A port; Ethernet port

DISTRIBUTOR
MIAN Distribution

TELEPHONE
01223 782474

WEBSITE
leema-acoustics.com

The Stream IV is connected using Chord Company's Epic analogue RCA interconnect to the matching Leema Acoustics Pulse IV integrated amplifier that drives my Cadence Arca loudspeaker via Black Rhodium Foxtrot (HFC 412) speaker cable. Getting it to see my home network initially necessitates a direct Ethernet cable connection to my router before the wireless option locks into operation. Once done, wireless connection is trouble free and stable throughout. Streaming playback is controlled via the free MConnect app available for iOS or Android devices. This enables access to numerous subscription streaming apps like Tidal, Qobuz and Spotify alongside internet radio or your own local music servers.

Sound quality

Spinning *Late* by Ben Folds on CD, the vocals are clean, finely textured and well projected, while the tone of the piano is compelling with plenty of harmonic richness. As bass guitar and drums join the mix, the sound is warm, extended and fulsome while the drums feel sharp and alive, clearly placed in a totally convincing acoustic space that is natural, fluid and refined. There is something very relaxed, even-handed and assured about its CD delivery with a natural sense of timing and a vivid depth to the soundscape. CD playback by lesser



HOW IT COMPARES

If you're on a tight budget Arcam's £700 CDS50 CD/SACD/network audio player (HFC 440) is worth an audition. Naim's £2,300 ND5 XS 2 network audio player (HFC 446) is a closer quality match to the Leema with a more comprehensive DAC than the Stream IV, but it will need to be paired with a separate Naim CD5si CD player (£1,150) to achieve the same functionality. Pairing Leema's Elements Streamer network music player at £1,300 (HFC 448) and Elements CD player at £1,400, the Stream IV saves cash as well as keeping the box count down.

an informative hand-held display. Replaying the same Ben Folds track from Qobuz streamed as a 16/44.1 FLAC file is insightful. Changing from CD to streaming usually reveals compromises in streaming engines, but the Leema ekes out more quality than expected. CD feels a tad more assured and relaxed, while the streamed version is a tiny bit more brightly lit, with cymbals and snare drum a little drier. It's as though the Leema can dig a little deeper with streamed content, but I prefer the more natural execution of the CD replay. There really is very little in it, though, and Leema confirms both the CD and streaming sources utilise the same

Bass is rock solid with visceral depth that positively grips your solar plexus

onboard ESS Sabre 9018 chipset. Clearly, streaming quality can partly depend on the calibre of your network, but this is as narrow a performance gap as I've heard without spending vast sums on high-end components.

Playing Shostakovich's *Festive Overture* from the Sheffield Lab *Moscow Sessions* on CD, the opening brass fanfare is opulent and imposing with strident horns reaching high and wide into the room. The Stream IV teases out the slight vibrato of the Russian brass section, full of glorious rasping textures and complex overtones without sounding shrill or grating. Timpani drums have potent depth and punch, while triangles glisten and twinkle over the lush orchestration. Again, it's the natural flow and tempo allied to a deep transparency that stands out, with these qualities bringing notable scale and stability to the sonic image.

The infectious funky bass riff on *Cola* by Arlo Parks – streamed as a 16/44.1 FLAC file from Qobuz – is absolutely rock solid with visceral depth that positively grips your solar plexus. Conversely Parks' jazzy vocals are beautifully silky, sweet and airy, showing this is highly adept at handling light and shade while marrying the luscious rhythm section with more subtle and intimate vocals.

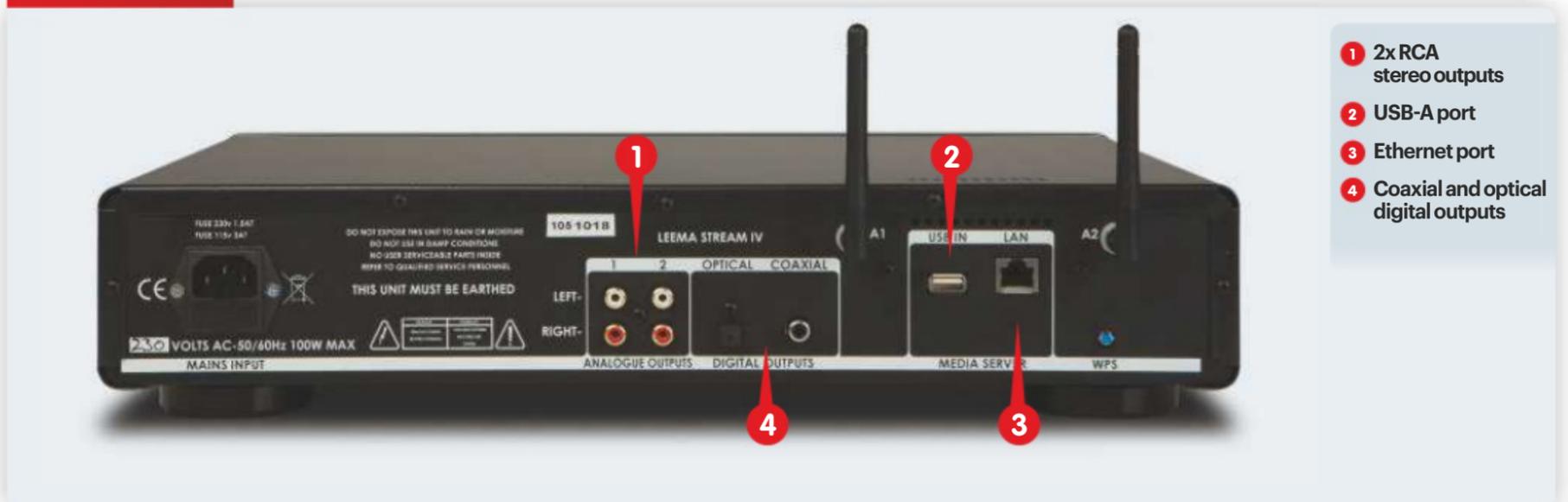
Conclusion

The Stream IV may be the fourth incarnation of a long-established player, but this hybrid update feels fresh and a considerable step forward. CD playback is highly refined, assured and transparent and the streaming performance shares all these qualities while opening up a vast new world of music discovery. Seen as a £2,300 CD player, some competitors feel more robust, but the Stream IV must be viewed as two quality products in one box with the associated decisions about where money is spent. Leema has allocated the budget on things I value most – performance, functionality and attention to signal purity. A great hybrid product that delivers excellent replay of your CDs alongside highly refined streaming performance for the best of both digital worlds ●

exponents can have a tendency to spotlight lead performers and leave other layers more opaque, but here the recording is revealed to be highly transparent as the Stream IV does a wonderful job of throwing a little more light on fine textures, without ever sounding dry or grainy.

Swapping to the streamer function is as simple as downloading the MConnect app and selecting the Stream IV as the playback device. The app is refreshingly intuitive and responsive while playback is instantaneous and glitch-free. I'd value more streaming information on the front panel display, but accept that my iPhone effectively becomes

CONNECTIONS



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Musical transparency and timing with both sources
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Basic remote control; no DSD support
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A versatile digital source offering solid CD and streaming performance with practical functionality
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL

