

Let's Get Networking

The new SMS-200ultra network player is designed to add streaming capability to your present system. Jon Myles plugs it in and takes a listen.

With more and more people storing music tracks on computers and USB drives the question arises of exactly how to get best sound quality from them. Computers are notoriously noisy devices and not best used via their internal soundcard.

A much better option is to output to a dedicated streamer purposed for audio - which is exactly what the new SMS-200ultra from South Korean manufacturer SoTM (Soul of The Music) is intended to do.

Like the excellent Auralic Aries I reviewed recently (Hi-Fi World, June 2017 issue) the 200ultra takes your stored files from computers, USB stores and DLNA compliant devices such as NAS drives for output to a USB-equipped DAC or suitably-equipped integrated amplifier in your system.

The ultra is an upgraded version of the original SMS-200 - with the addition of a sCLK-EX2425 board for its internal reference clock. It's a slim, aluminium-cased unit measuring 48mm X 106mm X 227mm (W/D/H) and weighing in at 1.5kg. That weight

plus rubber feet on the bottom means it sits firmly on a hi-fi rack without sliding around.

Two LEDs on the front signal network activity and power while a larger green indicator bar also acts as the on/off switch. On the rear are two USB inputs, alongside what SoTM describes as an audio-grade USB output, a reset button, a microSD card slot for the Linux operating system plus the RJ45 socket for connecting to the network (there's no wireless built-in but an optional unit to add this is believed to be in the offing), plus a socket for



the wall-wart style power supply.

Inside, the unit utilises an ARM processor board and a dual-core AMD chip alongside the low jitter reference clock and active noise cancellation. In theory it should feed an interference-free clean digital signal to the DAC of your choice.

PCM file sizes up to 32bit/768kHz are supported (if, by any chance, you happen to have any) as well as DSD up to 512.

SET-UP

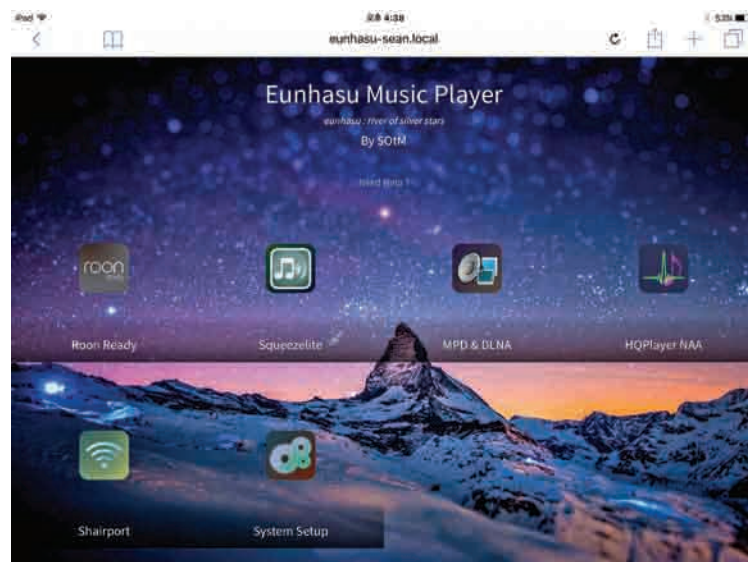
Once connected and powered up, set-up is via SoTM's own web-based Eunhasu Music Player interface accessed via PC, Mac or tablet device (both iOS and Android supported). It's Roon ready so this is how I used it but other alternatives include Squeezeelite, the DNLA/UPnP server on your own network, HQPlayer and Shairport.

Eunhasu (it means River of Silver Stars in Korean, apparently) is fairly intuitive for those used to this sort of software, but if you are not there's a comprehensive instruction manual available, although admittedly it does include some rather clunky English translations.

SOUND QUALITY

I connected the 200ultra to the in-built DAC of a Devialet Expert Pro 220 integrated amplifier as well as a Chord 2Qute digital-to-analogue converter running into a Naim amp and used music stored on both a MacBook Air and NAS drive.

As the 200ultra is simply a streamer it should, ideally, have no sonic signature of its own. However it's an electronic device that can add unwanted nasties to the sound and the Devialet and 2Qute are ruthlessly



The Eunhasu software allows for various options for connecting the network player to your digital files. Once installed it is easy to operate.

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revealing and would soon tell me if anything was amiss.

Luckily, there wasn't. What I heard was a crisp, clean and highly detailed sound from both set-ups. With Brian Eno and David Byrne's 'My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts' the cuts between the myriad samples were clean and quick while the throbbing electronic bass line on some tracks was rich and deep.

Through the Chord/Naim combination I heard a slightly darker but more propulsive sound compared

to the Devialet's pristine quality. Which is exactly as it should be as these two amplifiers have different characteristics.

Listening to Miles Davis's 'Porgy and Bess' his distinctive phrasing was perfectly in time with the backing musicians - and there was no hint of glaze or edge to the trumpet, simply a glorious, soaring rendition.

Thinking back to the Auralic Aries (which does very much the same job as the SoTM) I'd put the sound very close, although I didn't have the former unit for a direct comparison.

At £1495 the Aries is dearer than the £1200 price of the 200ultra. However the Auralic boasts wi-fi capabilities as well as a wider range of digital outputs. I'd recommend listening to both if you are thinking of going down this road to add music streaming to your system.

CONCLUSION

The SoTM sMS-200ultra does exactly what it says on the tin (well, box) - send a pure, clean signal to the DAC of your choice. The better the digital-to-analogue converter the better it will sound. It's a smart way to add music streaming capability to an existing system.



The sMS-200ultra's rear panel has connections for two USB drives, an RJ45 socket for connecting to a network and a USB out (bottom left) for attaching to a DAC.

SoTM sMS-200 Ultra £1200



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

A compact network music player which is well-built and sounds impressively clear and unsullied.

FOR

- no colouration
- detailed
- good software
- build quality

AGAINST

- limited to USB output

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