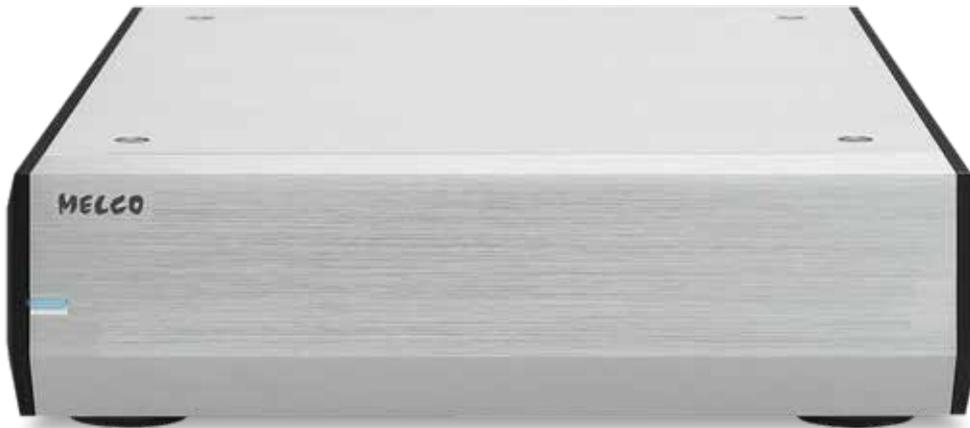




Network switch with wired and optical ports
 Made by: Buffalo Technology, Japan
 Supplied by: Audiophile Digital Music Masters Ltd, UK
 Telephone: 01252 784525
 Web: www.melco-audio.com; www.audiophiledigital.co.uk
 Price: £2000

**AUDIO
FILE**



Melco S100

Recently there's been an explosion in the availability of switches designed to fit between your Internet connection, your music storage and your network audio player. Enthusiasts claim 'magic properties' for particular existing IT-type network switches, and a variety of companies now offer their own 'audiophile-tuned' products.

The Melco S100 occupies its own position in this new market.

'The Melco S100 simply revealed more of everything played'

It's comfortably the most expensive unit of its kind, at £2000, so what is Melco offering here?

The idea of the S100 is not just to complement the company's range of digital music libraries, but also upgrade any network set-up that employs Ethernet connectivity for audio. Nor is it a modified version of an existing IT-grade design, but a new solution that draws on the expertise of its parent company's Buffalo division.

This bespoke box includes its own processor, a 1.5MB packet buffer, plus audio-grade capacitors in its PSU, which is fed from an offboard power supply 'brick', used for isolation and to allow for future upgrades. It's all mounted in

a vibration-isolating steel chassis, with shielding provided by external aluminium casework.

In practice, the S100 provides three means of connectivity: there are four 100Mb Ethernet ports, four 1Gb ports, and two SFP ports to connect fibre optic cables via suitable adapter modules at around £20 apiece. The 100Mb ports are designed for sound-critical devices such as network players and NAS units (or a Melco library) and also your Internet router if you're using streaming services.

Meanwhile, the 1Gb ports are designed for high-traffic connections to a Roon Core, or for control if you're not streaming from online services,

while the optical connections provided will offer an isolated link to compatible players.

POUNING BARGAIN

Inserting the Melco S100 between our QNAP servers and Naim ND555 DAC [*HFN* Apr '19] in place of a simple budget Netgear switch, the music gained body, detail and insight – and not in a subtle way.

Even with a period recording such as David Bowie's Newleyesque 'Love You Till Tuesday', from his self-titled 1967 album [Deram/Universal], the complexities of the arrangements became much clearer, the thunderstorm of 'Please Mr Gravedigger' more ominous, and Bowie's intonation of the

ABOVE: Melco's S100 network switch has no more than a single blue LED at its front, while ten ports populate the rear – four each of 100Mb and 1Gb, and two optical fibre SFP (small form-factor pluggable)

developing story all the more chilling. What previously sounded like a trite piece of music theatre now came unsettlingly alive.

How obvious you find the gains with the S100 in harness will depend on the quality – and in particular the resolution – of the player you have employed downstream. In our system it was clear-cut, at least when compared with a basic switch configuration.

Playing the excellent Linn compilation *A Bach Offering* [Linn Records; 192kHz/24-bit] the S100 carried the depth, texture and expression, and well-captured acoustics of this familiar performance with aplomb.

Similarly, even with the pounding 'Bargain' from The Who's *Next* [Qobuz; 96kHz/24-bit], this 'audiophile dataswitch' brought greater insight into the component parts of the mix, from the rumbling bass and frenetic drumming to the strike and sustain of the lead guitar.

And so it goes on, with the Melco S100 simply revealing more of everything we played. That said, however, we'll stick to a belief that one can obtain similar gains for less with some DIY network fettling, but if you want a simple plug 'n' play improvement for a high-end network music system, the S100 will take some beating.

VERDICT

It's hard to give an absolute verdict on a device where the gains will depend as much on the rest of your network as on the ability of your network player to reveal what it does. But if you've invested heavily in network playback, and want a simple, easy-to-install upgrade for your system, the Melco S100 can bring major sonic gains to any Ethernet-based set-up. ⬇

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Ethernet Ports (RJ45) | 4x100Mb / 4x1Gb |
| Ethernet Ports (SFP/optical) | 2x100Mb |
| Digital jitter (Arcam CDS50) | 5psec (6psec without S100) |
| Digital jitter (Mytek Brooklyn Bridge) | 5psec (5psec without S100) |
| Digital jitter (Lumin D2) | 10psec (15psec without S100) |
| Power consumption | 6W |
| Dimensions (WHD) / Weight | 215x61x269mm / 2.5kg |