# Melco N100 – intelligence made simple

The new N100 is an addition to the Melco range, rather than a replacement for any existing model, and comes in the same 21.5cm-wide casework as each component of the N10. It uses the same low-profile main board as the flagship model, mounts its storage on the same HS-S² isolation system, and like the top model will support data rates up to 384kHz/32bit and DSD512. In fact, the main differences here are that the power supply is an offboard computer-style 'brick', connected via a simple coaxial barrel plug and with the filtering inside the unit rather than an offboard box, and the internal storage is 2TB.

As with all the company's new machines, but particularly important for what is designed to be the 'beginner's Melco', is an interface designed to be simple and logical in use. Indeed, the N10 can even be operated from the front panel controls, or using an approved third-party radio frequency remote, straight into a USB DAC without any need for a network connection, this being called Standalone Isolated Mode.

However, most users will run the N100 with a network connection, enabling control using the Melco app or third-party control software on a tablet or smartphone, and as is usual there are two network ports: one to connect to the home network, the other the special isolated 'player' port to feed a network audio player. There's also the usual trio of USB ports: one to connect to a suitable DAC, plus two for import/backup/expansion devices. The front panel one is especially handy for quick loading of music onto the N100's internal storage from a USB device.

How does the N100 sound? Well, let's put it this way: I switched directly from the N10 to the entry-level model, and I have to say I didn't notice any real losses . The basic Melco still seems to have that extra crispness and focus when replacing a standard computer as a source for a USB DAC – even a very good USB DAC – and with the new firmware in place is a very satisfying way to play music, especially when you want to delve deeper into a collection of jazz or classical recordings.

However, like the N10, I'm not quite sure it's the solution for me, however good that library software – but then I'm very deeply immersed in both the way my Naim-based system does things, and also the possibilities of Roon. But I'd have no argument whatsoever with anyone who feels the Melco way, whether in the form of the £1800 entry-level model or the two-box flagship, is the appropriate answer to his or her needs.

And it's with Minimserver that the Melco team has also worked in developing this IML system, which not only improves the tagging, but also allows the user to select the genre of music to be played, and then adapts the search fields accordingly.

For example, when searching for classical music, one might want to search not just main artist/album/title, but also for specific orchestras, conductors, composer and so on, while for jazz enthusiasts there may be an interest in finding all the recordings in your collection with a particular drummer, bassist or pianist.

Another neat trick of the software, in particular with classical music, is that it looks at works, not albums. So you don't have to remember that, say, that Bruch piece you really want to hear is a 'fill-up' on what is otherwise an all-Mozart programme, and so search for the main work to which is appended. Nor need you be concerned that a particular release combines Grieg and Mendelssohn works: the software does away with the restrictions of how the music was marketed, and lets you find the piece for which you're looking.

True, other manufacturers are working on similar systems, and are constantly refining the way their products handle music, but the Melco set-up takes a holistic approach to the problem, tackling it from the initial tagging to the searching/playing process. At the moment, in the initial version of the Intelligent Music Library, the user needs to choose between the musical genres to ensure the correct parameters are applied, with three settings – rock and pop, jazz and classical – available. However, talking to Alan Ainslie when he demonstrated the system to me, I said 'Of course, the really good thing would be if it could detect the kind of music being played, and adjust itself automatically.'

With a decided twinkle in his eye, he deadpanned 'Yes it would, wouldn't it?'

Watch this space…