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HI FI NEWS YEARBOOK



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AUDIO
FILE

Balanced headphone preamp/DAC
 Made by: Simaudio Ltd, Canada
 Supplied by: Renaissance Audio, Scotland
 Telephone: 0131 555 3922
 Web: www.simaudio.com; www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk
 Price: £2700 (£3300 with DAC)




Simaudio Moon Neo 430HA

Simaudio offers the option of a built-in DAC with the fully-balanced Moon Neo 430HA, which is priced at £2700 in analogue form, or £3300 with the DAC and a range of digital inputs.

The solid, machined casework has a luxurious feel, and the front panel features Moon's distinctive curved side cheeks – the right-hand one accommodating a comfortably-sized volume knob.

Drawing on developments for Moon's top Evolution series, the volume control system boasts 530 steps in level and a claimed channel matching accuracy of 0.1dB. Similarly, the comprehensively regulated power supply – with a 'virtually unmeasurable' noise floor – sustains a fully-balanced amplifier

"The Art Pepper "hole in the middle" effect was successfully removed"

section using discrete components and offering a rated output of 667mW/600ohm or 8W/50ohm.

User features include high and low gain settings, for 'phones of differing sensitivity, and a switchable crossfeed setting to give a more relaxing 'out of the head' stereo effect on many recordings. The DAC is described as 32-bit, fully asynchronous, and intended to accept virtually any digital source.

The front panel is well populated with control buttons and a standby switch lights up the large display

window with an indication of selected input, volume setting and (briefly) sampling frequency. Input selection is via a pair of buttons.

The 430HA has two unbalanced analogue inputs and one balanced, with SPDIF digital inputs including Toslink optical and two coaxial, the latter accepting LPCM audio up to 192kHz/24-bit. A USB port extends sampling rates up to 384kHz and DSD to DSD64, DSD128 and 'quad-speed' DSD256.

There's a 6.35mm headphone fascia socket output and a 3.5mm mini-jack socket input, while the 430HA also has concealed balanced headphone outputs: two three-pin XLRs and a single four-pin XLR socket. A compact remote duplicates all the fascia functions.

Apart from the rear analogue and digital inputs there are connections for Simlink system control, a 12V trigger input and output for remote operation, and an RS-232 port to facilitate firmware updates.

CLEAN AND CLEAR

Listening first via analogue inputs, we were soon won over. The treble was clear and clean, not sparkling in any exaggerated way, but allowing you to enjoy enticing musical nuances. The treble blended seamlessly into a neutral midrange that again seemed to foster musical communication. The bass end was clean and unfettered, so that acoustic bass instruments appeared to breathe with a natural presence.

ABOVE:
 Along with comprehensive controls, the front panel offers a 1/4in headphone socket, plus balanced XLR output connectors revealed by sliding back the display panel

To listen to 'Snow' from Patricia Barber's *The Cole Porter Mix* [Blue Note] was to hear a familiar track coming up fresh in new sonic glories. There was a depth and sonority to the piano sound that exceeded anything we'd heard before on 'phones and it retained every bit of its character when guitar, bass and drums came in.

Moon's crossfeed facility had the effect here of flattening the stereo image behind or over your head and reducing its lateral spread. The 'hole in the middle' effect with *Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section*, recorded in 1957, was successfully removed. So this is a useful option.

With the title track from Eric Bibb's *Get Onboard* [Telarc], bass and drums had a lightness and bounce that really had our feet tapping. Glen Scott's organ phrases shone through to perfection and even tiny elements in the mix were clearly delineated.

After this, we tried the 430HA's built-in DAC. With 'Get Onboard' the sound was still excellent – a big, expansive sound – but it didn't seem to have quite the last bit of foot-tapping life and bounce that we expected. High-res downloads included the RPO's Mozart *Wind Serenades* and cellist Tim Hugh's recording *Hands On Heart*, both from Naim. The wind music was appealingly clear-toned yet forceful, and Hugh's account of the Kodály Sonata was gripping.

VERDICT

The 430HA offers useful facilities, balanced operation and great sound. It ensures the music comes through with freedom and aplomb while its USB DAC option only bolsters its desirability. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output (re. 1% THD into 47kohm)	12.5W
Max. power output (re. 1% THD into 25ohm)	4208mW
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	1.10-1.18ohm
Maximum gain (High/Low setting)	+16.1dB/+10.1dB (balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	97.8dB (balanced)
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz/25ohm)	-0.0dB to +0.1dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 40mW)	0.0018-0.00012%
Power consumption	22W (2W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	429x89x351mm / 9kg