



## **Shanling CDT-100**

Just linger and take a look at this player, it's utterly unlike any other player I've ever seen for CD playback. Putting this player on a shelf with other CD players is like putting Liz Hurley in the latest barely there Versace creation in a dole queue. The question is, does the Shanling have the brains to match the beauty?

The CDT-100 attempts to be a 'Jack of all trades' in its specification. There are 3 ways of getting information out of this player, a pair of RCA connectors fed via the valve output stage, a pair of RCA connectors from the solid state output stage, and a coaxial S/PDIF digital output. Both solid state and valve output stages are connected to the 100 step volume control on the remote allowing the CDT-100 to drive a power amplifier directly without a pre amp. This player has an in built upsampler allowing the player to deliver either 44.1 kHz or 96 kHz and HDCD thanks to a PDM-200 HDCD decoder. Furthermore instead of the usual lip service given to headphone outputs on sources, the CDT-100 uses the second pair of valves to feed a headphone output.

Let's start with opening the box. You initially see a pair of white cotton gloves, a shammy leather and a demo CD with two discs, one disc recorded in Red Book standard 44.1/16, the second recorded in HDCD. You also see a high quality mains cable, which is of such quality that it would sell for £50 - £75. There are also three high quality, gold plated cones to allow you to choose between sitting the player on its four felt covered feet, or cones. The enclosed remote control is very well made with a nice positive action and solid build.

After removing the top layer of packaging you finally get to the player, and trust me, it is absolutely stunning! There are only four controls on the player, stop, play/pause, next track, previous track, so you are expected to use the remote control for all day to day operations. The top loading mechanism is ingenious with the actual acrylic cover incorporating a mechanical clamp to lock the disc down onto the spindle, obviating the possibility of losing a separate puck. This cover also glows an alluring blue making this player stunning to look at in dim lighting, like the Hovland Sapphire power amp. The front panel delivers basic track / time information and a pair of blue LED's to the right of the display indicate the presence of a HDCD or activation of the upsampling circuit. The player was plugged in and, as is customary, left to cook for 100 hours before I started listening.

My reference system of Perpetual Technologies P1-A / P3-A Signature fed digits by my Sony DVP-S7700 with pre / power duties falling to my Krell KRC-3 and Bryston 7B-ST / 14B-SST amps. I used were my Martin Logan SL-3 speakers, cabling from QED, Chord and Deltec with mains conditioning provided via the Isotek substation and 2K Qube together with a Music Link mains distribution block. All equipment was on an RDC Aspekt rack.

After listening to the various combinations of valve / solid state outputs with and without upsampling, I felt the valve outputs with upsampling delivered a sound which I found most pleasing, the solid state sounding slightly thinner than the Perpetual's sound I was used to. I would encourage you to try all these variations yourself as these outputs interact with different systems to deliver varying results.

I was immediately impressed with the astonishing drive and clarity this player delivered. This was the first time a single box player below £3,000 had actually impressed me in this facet. The actual energy in the bass lines translated into a feeling of being in the room with a drum kit, or at least in the control room of a recording studio. Not only was the initial transient heard, but also the actual decay of the bass note was clearly portrayed as an element of the sound, something many lower price digital source fail to fully resolve. From the very lowest registers the CDT-100 has a pace and agility which few digital sources can match in my experience. On the dense bass lines of Celine Dion's 'Refuse to Dance' from 'Colour of my Love' [Epic 471508 2] the CDT-100 proved adept at separating out the bass lines allowing each one to exist as an individual whilst simultaneously never losing it's grip on the big picture of the whole track. With carefully, level matched A/B switching (be careful with the Shanling as it's internal volume control on maximum delivers almost 2.2V) I could discern the P1-A/P3-A being slightly more coherent and apparently faster with superior texturing of low bass notes, however the CDT-100 delivered greater richness and a touch of warmth that Perpetual combination lacked. Moving up through the frequency range the upper bass / lower midrange areas showed a slight emphasis in comparison with P1-A / P3-A Sig. with the lower range of Celine's vocals having a shade more warmth and richness. The violin on this track can easily turn strident and aggressive on a cheap digital source, but in the case of the CDT-100 the texture of the notes was portrayed with a slight emphasis on the resonance of

the body of the instrument, whereas the P1-A / P3-A combination slightly favoured the leading edge transient and subtle texturing of the strings themselves. In the upper registers the CDT-100 lost a little of the texturing that Perpetual combination could resolve, but this was traded for the HF being slightly smoother whilst losing none of the resolution from the recording.

I was astonished at how easy the CDT-100 was to listen to even over a prolonged period of time, drawing me to pull more CD's off my shelf. The imaging of the CDT-100 was uniformly excellent, with Anastacia's 'Not That Kind' from her album 'Not that Kind' [Epic 497412 2] being of particular note. The image perspective was much more forward than the Perpetual system, placing the listener in the front row right in front of the stage, delivering a near field listening experience even though I was over 10 ft from my speakers. Whereas in lesser players this perspective would quickly become tiring or overbearing, on the Shanling this was replaced with an ability to draw you further into the performance.

Even on more dance orientated material like that of Sophie Ellis Bextor on her 'Read My Lips' [Polydor 589 174 – 2] album the Shanling simply dropped down a gear and dug into this material with enthusiasm. The powerful bass lines of this album and Sophie's rich, slightly nasal voice were placed into the room and allowed to envelop the listener, seriously calling into question the need for multi channel in a system like this. On HDCD the report is uniformly excellent, the Bee Gees 'One Night Only' album [Polydor 559 220-2] proving a convincing argument as to the effectiveness of the HDCD process. This seemed to finally give the CDT-100 some extra soundstage depth, still to me not matching the Signature P3-A but certainly matching the abilities of the standard P3.

Finally a word about the headphone output, in short it's sensational. With my Sennheiser HD-600's the Track 'Halfway to Heaven' from 'Celine Dion' [Epic 471508 2] was put onto replay for at least 4 times and the sound was simply wonderful. Whilst the spatial relationships of the instruments were obviously highly artificial, the fundamentals of Celine's voice, the saxophone line and synthesised bass line swam in and out of each other that made you just sink back into your listening chair and enjoy the music. Every headphone output I've heard that even approaches this level of performance has belonged to a stand alone headphone output stage.

This player was, quite simply, a revelation for me. I've always considered the use of valves in a CD player to be either a cheap gimmick or to hide poor HF performance. This player proved otherwise in this implementation. This player will sell boatloads based on it's devastating appearance alone. Don't let this fool you, this is an audiophile CD player that, in my experience, can take on the £3,000 - £4,000 Accuphase one box players and not come off embarrassed. Nothing at this price range has even approached the Perpetual Technologies Signature combination I use, let alone been worth of direct comparison. The Shanling has. In a system with a soundstage perspective that is quite distant, lacking body or is slightly cool, then the Shanling could well be just what you need, even maybe surpassing the Perpetual

combination. Whilst my mind knows that the Perpetual is closer to the truth of state of the art digital replay (as compared with the £20,000+ DCS combination) the hint of warmth of the Shanling is welcome on many of today's digital recordings and my heart does veer off towards it's friendly, highly listenable presentation. This is a wonderful solution for those who do not want the three box solution of Perpetual or DCS but want the very best possible sound from their CD's. In spite of the slight warmth and foreshortened stage depth, the performance, build quality and presentation of this player are incredible for the price. If you're looking at a player over £1200, you really must listen to the Shanling. It is an incredible achievement for the price and warrants my strongest possible recommendation.

### **Key Points**

- HDCD and switchable upsampling
- Valve and solid state output stages
- Valve headphone amplifier

### **Technology**

The CDT-100 uses a Philips CDM 1201 transport secured to a solid Aluminium block. The data from the transport feeds a Crystal Semiconductor CS 8420 (as used in the Perpetual Technologies P3-A) and from there goes to the Pacific Microsonics PDM-200 filter and HDCD decoder. The valve output stage uses a pair of 6N3P triodes to feed the RCA connectors whilst the headphone output on the right uses another pair of 6N3P's. The 4 shrouded covers to the rear of the player house three transformers plus a choke filter for the HT line. DAC's are the well respected Burr Brown PCM-1704's, as used in the Primare 30.2 DAC, two per channel used in parallel. The 100 step volume control is implemented via the PDM-200 with the 6dB attenuation mandated by HDCD specs. being achieved digitally.