



Review 2015

New CEC Belt Drive CD Player and USB Sound System CD 5

“an extremely successful, really well prepared CD player with analogue sound flair and with the highest level of powerful converter section, which can do justice to all current and foreseeable digital challenges.”

Review: HiFi einsnull 2015 | Holger Barske
more information: www.cec-international.com



For any situation

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Luckily, there are still only a few “real” CD players around. As there are only very few suppliers for appropriate drives left, if you’re in any doubt you need to do the job yourself.

Peripherie:

- SACD-Player: Accuphase DP-550
- Pre AMP: Accuphase C-2420
- AMP: Accuphase A-46
- Linux-PC via SOTM-USB-Card
- Loudspeaker: KLANG+TON „Nada“

And fortunately, the premium Japanese manufacturer CEC has no problem with that – making devices to play disks has been the main business area for the Tokyo company since their founding in 1954. In the 80’s came the general trend towards digital technology, initially however with bought-in drive solutions. Since the early 90’s, the company’s reputation has been based mainly on their own belt-driven CD drives, produced in-house.

The CEC classics TL 0 and TL 1 are regarded as icons of the craft, and are still lovingly and carefully produced to this day.

That aside, there are however considerably more affordable yet highly modern solutions such as the CEC CD 5. Naturally, this 3,000 Euro unit boasts the latest generation CEC Belt Drive, and the manufacturer has quite deliberately given it the title of a “USB Sound System“. That means: It contains a state-of-the-art D/A converter, which allows external data suppliers to dock. That’s exactly how a CD player has to function nowadays. As befits a unit of this construction type, the CD 5 is a toploader. That means: the CD is loaded into the top of the unit, and a manual push-cover closes

the drawer in operation. An impressively heavy “puck“ holds the CD securely on the drive spindle, which is, of course, mounted by hand: You can’t get a more turntable-like feeling on a digital component anywhere.

The improvements to the drive mechanism are hidden in the details: The most obvious change versus previous generations is the fully accessible drive belt, which can be replaced in a few simple steps if required. A drive belt on a CD player? You can argue about whether this makes sense or not, but there’s no getting away from the fact that this kind of drive has gained a die-hard following of fans, and is regarded as particularly musical. The fact of the matter is: In a unit such as this, it is best to de-couple the drive motor from the spindle, so that potentially damaging vibrations are nowhere near the scanning process. The sheer weight of the puck, together with the elastic drive belts, form a mechanical low-pass filter, where high-frequency vibrations fall by the wayside

The drive itself hangs in an elastic assembly under the metal base plate, and the spindle motor – also decoupled – is located on the base of the unit. No expense was spared when it comes to the electronics on the CD 5 either. A well respected chip from the US manufacturer ESS acts as a D/A converter, which delivers a fully

symmetrical analogue output signal, and so can be fed by practically anything with a PCM format with maximum 32 bit resolution and a sampling rate of 384 kilohertz or a DSD data flow with double sampling rate (DSD128). Naturally in CD operation there is nothing higher than 44.1 kilohertz and 16 bit. It’s a fundamentally different story when using the digital inputs: There’s an optical S/PDIF and a coaxial cinch input (up to 24 bit/192 kHz), but, naturally enough, the star of the show is the USB port. This facilitates the full spectrum of digital signals possible. The signal is received by a currently relatively rare receiver chip, with excellent support in terms of software: Linux and Apple computers can operate the input without any difficulty, without any drivers, suitable drivers are available for windows players.

There are also digital outputs for the data from the CD drive, either via coaxial or optical cable. Analogue signals can be connected either asymmetrically (cinch) or symmetrically via XLR, and the analogue signals are processed using a very modern solution with integrated operational amplifiers. The unit is fitted with an excellent power supply with a classic toroid transformer and various electronic stabilisers – absolutely ideal here. Let’s just position the silver front

nine kilogram machine on the rack and put a few CD’s on. First let’s check the two available, remote controlled, switchable digital filters: “Flat“ for a straight frequency response up to the audible limit, “Pulse“ for impulse-optimised reproduction with a slight roll off.. I can barely hear any real tonal differences, but the character of the reproduction changes. “Flat“ sounds more spectacular, more spacious, more wiry, “Pulse“ sounds finer, more gentle, with greater clarity in the details, spatially more compact. In CD mode, I would tend to favour this option – but the disks I’m playing always have something to say about this too.

A classic in the form of Marc Cohn’s eponymous debut album from 1990 displays the audio character of the CD 5 really clearly: It plays quite clearly on the light, relaxed side.



Listen to:

- **Marc Cohn**
Marc Cohn
(CD, 44,1 kHz, 16 Bit)
- **Bob Dylan**
Shadows in the Night
(CD, 44,1 kHz, 16 Bit)
- **VA – 2L DXD-Sampler**
(352 kHz / 24 Bit)
- **Marilyn Manson**
The Pale Emperor
(44,1 kHz / 16 Bit)
- **Eric Clapton**
Pilgrim
(DSD)



Rear View of CEC Belt Drive CD Player and USB Sound System CD 5

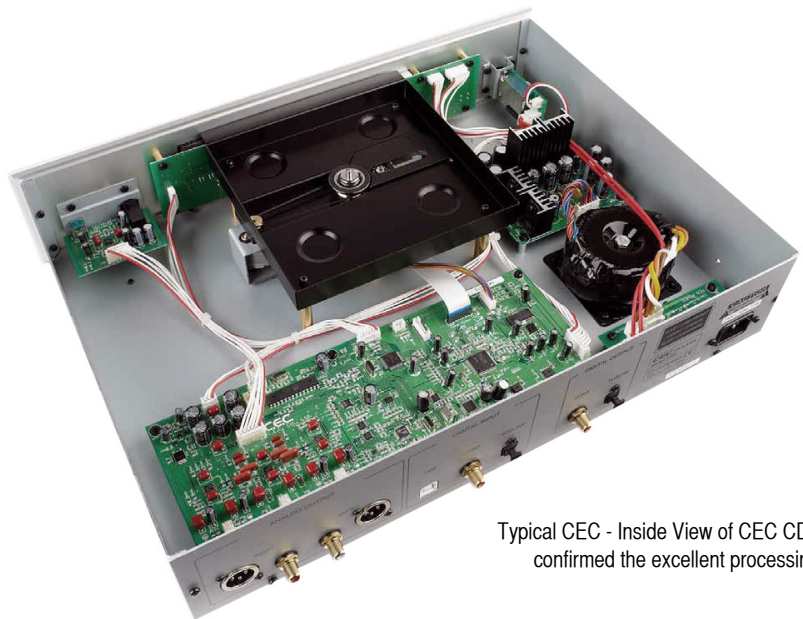
Agile, colourful bass, very lively at the top end of the range. The CD 5 reproduces the characteristic, slightly restrained tone of the singing voice perfectly, and it also places the organ in the correct position in the room perfectly, finely outlined and easily understandable. If you feed the CD 5 with external data, then you become aware of the distinctive audio character of the CD drive: The quiet, the delicate, that comes predominantly from the drive.

The converter proves itself to be extra ordinarily flexible and can handle everything from the down and dirty to everything else: A quick check with the famous DXD recordings of the Norwegian label 2L reveals that the unit can fill enormous spaces and also has extra-fine texture up its sleeve. And when you really need to rock out – the new Marilyn Manson album loves that – then you can do that in spades too. A really fine piece of equipment for any situation.

Holger Barske
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Typical CEC - Inside View of CEC CD 5 confirmed the excellent processing.

CEC CD 5 | USB Sound System

Drive System	Belt Drive// Spindle (One Belt Drive)
Playable Discs	Audio CDs & Finalized CD-R/RW
CD Stabilizer	Diameter 70mm, weight 330g (Brass)
DAC	ESS ES9018K2M x 1 (Hyperstream)
Digital Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaxial x 1 0.5Vp-p/75Ω • TOS x 1(optical): -21~-15dBm EIAJ
Digital Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COAXIAL x 1: SPDIF 24bit/32 to 192kHz • TOSLINK x 1: SPDIF 24bit/32 to 192kHz • USB 2.0 x 1: PCM 32bit/32 to 384kHz, DSD2.8224 to 5.6448MHz
Analog Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced XLR (pin2=hot) x 1 / 4Vrms • Unbalanced RCA x 1 / 2Vrm • Headphones - 6.3mm x 1 - on the Front
Digital Filter	FLAT / PULSE (switchable)
Dimensions	435(W) x 335(D) x 109(H)mm
Weight	approx. 9 kg (incl. CD stabilizer)
Color	Silver

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CEC The Drive | since 1954

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