

Raysonic CD128 Tube CD Player Review



The highest performing audiophile components are very expensive, which renders them inaccessible to average consumers. Luckily for the rest of us, there are a number of affordable brands that offer audiophile-grade sound, excellent quality and value. Canadian-based Raysonic earns a spot in this category. Personally, I've been enjoying the warm sound of the Raysonic SP-120 integrated tube amplifier since I bought it a little over a year ago. So when Raysonic announced that a matching tube CD player was on the way, naturally my interest was sparked.

With a price of \$1880, the Raysonic CD128 is an attractively priced audiophile component. The features that should make this CD player interesting to audio enthusiasts are its exceptional build quality, vacuum tubes in the output stage, top-loading operation as well as its unique looks. If you're just getting into high-end audio gear you might be tempted to ask, why are there tubes in a CD player? The answer is actually quite simple. A tube CD player uses tubes in place of transistors (and other supporting components such as capacitors) in the output stage.

The CD128 has a modern design that is undeniably very elegant. The elegant styling and build quality of this CD player are as good as I've ever seen in an audiophile product. The casing is constructed out of very thick metal and feels solid like a tank. Its front bezel is completely free of buttons and contains only an LED display. The top of the CD128 has a clear and silver lid that covers the compact disc compartment. Basic disc function buttons are placed in a circular arrangement on the left and right sides of the lid. Four sunken vacuum tubes complete the top of the semi circle. The rear panel contains an analogue RCA output, a digital coaxial output and balance left and right outputs. The supplied remote control is made out of two pieces of thick metal (a little over 1/16-inch in thickness) and has a significant weight. Its build quality is as solid as remotes come. This is also one remote you don't want to drop on your foot. A removable power cord is also supplied with the player.

The CD128 uses a 24-bit Burr Brown PCM 1732 DAC chip with 96/88.2 kHz up-sampling and HDCD decoding. The up-sampling of a standard music CD from 44.1 kHz to 96 kHz can be engaged with a button on the remote, while the CD is stopped. The laser pickup inside the CD128 is a Sony KSS-213Q. Other technical specifications of the player include an S/N ratio greater than 100 dB, a distortion of less than 0.003%, a dynamic range of 102 dB and a power consumption of 22 Watts.

When the CD128 is powered on, it comes to life unlike most hifi components. Cool blue lighting appears around each of the buttons, inside the disc compartment and around the vacuum tubes. "Raysonic" appears on the LED screen and then a "Warm Up" message flashes.

Playing discs on the CD128 is quite different than using most CD players because of its top-loading design. To load a CD, the disc lid and a magnetic CD puck must be removed. Once a disc is on the platter both the lid and the puck must be replaced. Loading a CD felt more like placing a record on a turntable. To an audio enthusiast like myself, there was an exciting level of involvement when using the CD128.

I performed my listening tests with the CD128 connected to our Axiom Audio M80 v2 speakers and the Raysonic SP-120 integrated tube amplifier (using Monster RCA interconnects). I used an ARCAM DiVA CD73 CD player as a reference. All the gear was plugged into a Furutech eTP-80 power distributor. Raysonic recommends about 100 hours of break-in time for the CD128 before it delivers sound to the best of its abilities.

Grabbing a wide selection of CDs including classical, jazz, and rock, I began my listening tests after roughly 70 hours of breaking in. After several songs into my initial listening session, it was clear to me that the CD128 has a classic, warm character. This initial impression in fact remained true during the entire time that the player spent at my house.

The CD128 produced a soundstage that was impressively grand and airy, while listening to classical recordings. During Allegro from Spring - Four Seasons by Vivaldi, I could approximate the size of the violin section and where it was positioned on the soundstage. I could easily tell what positions solo instruments emerged from on the stage. The ringing of xylophone bars was full and natural to my ears. The CD128 completely immersed me in the performance of the classical recordings that I listened to. It created a musical energy in my room that elevated my listening experience to a great height. Diana Krall's voice on The Look of Love album sounded romantic and passionate. The CD128 transitioned through the entire frequency range with wonderful fluidity and balance. The dynamics of each performance were fluent and realistic. High frequencies sounded pleasant and never irritating or harsh to my ears. The CD128 pulled a great amount of detail from CDs. Compared to my reference ARCAM solid state CD player, this detail was ever so slightly softer. But this is in fact one of the reasons for the CD128's warm, natural presentation. Details that are too forward, particularly from solid state CD players, can sometimes come across as sounding harsh.

Switching the pace slightly, I put on Oasis' Don't Believe the Truth album. Song after song, this album sounded more like a live performance than a recording, minus the screaming fans. Both acoustic and electric guitars sounded fantastic - the string tones, picking and sliding all sounded like they do on a real guitar. The cymbals were full and real-sounding. Crashing of the cymbals decayed naturally as it does in real life.

Square One from Coldplay's X&Y album once again reminded me of how large of a soundstage this CD player is capable of creating. The intro of this song brought back memories of when I heard this song live at the concert when Coldplay was in town last year. The bass performance of the CD128 was super smooth. Bass notes reached deep but were always tight and well integrated with the rest of the sonic landscape. There was definitely no lack of low end with this player.

Musically, the CD128 was a great match for the Raysonic SP-120 integrated tube amplifier that I used during my evaluation. Since my CD128 review unit was black it didn't exactly visually match the amplifier but of course a silver model would be a perfect match.

Ultimately, the Raysonic CD128 had a very natural, affectionate musical character. It achieved an optimal balance between musical ability and design. At \$1880, the CD128 is attractively priced compared to other tube CD players on the market. I was actually pleasantly surprised at how much value the CD128 delivered for its price. This is definitely one component that you should audition if you're looking for a sweet sounding tube CD player. Keep in mind that as with any top-loading CD player, this player is most suitable for placement on the top shelf of an audio rack. If the top shelf of your rack is already taken by a turntable, you might have to get creative with the placement. The CD128 comes available in a choice of black or silver finish that will match other gear.

Manufacturer:

Raysonic Inc.

<http://www.raysonicaudio.com/>

Price:

\$1880 MSRP (Canadian)

Raysonic CD128 Tube CD Player

- Output level: 0 - 2.2 Volts
- Frequency response: 20 Hz - 20 kHz (+/- 1 dB)
- S/N ratio: >100 dB
- Distortion: <0.003%
- Dynamic Range: 102 dB
- 24-bit Burr Brown PCM 1732 DAC (with 96/88.2 kHz up-sampling and HDCD decoding)
- Laser pickup: Sony KSS-213Q
- Power consumption: 22 Watts
- Vacuum tubes: Russia 6922 x 4
- Supplied remote control
- Dimensions (LxWxH): 480 mm X 300 mm X 130 mm
- Weight: 11 kg