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Raysonic CD-168

I became a part of the music.

Review By Brett Rudolph

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Over the years it has been my pleasure to review a number of CD players ranging from entry level to cost no object models. While each one had its assets and liabilities, for some reason I never had the opportunity to review one that offered a tubed output stage. Luckily, this was about to change.

The first thing you are struck with when you unpack the Raysonic CD-168 is that it is a truly beautiful piece of equipment. The brushed aluminum chassis, coupled with the soft blue glow that emanates from the top of the CD player, makes it virtually a piece of art. Although the blue light can be turned off, it makes the unit look far more magnificent. The other thing that you notice is the fact that this particular CD player is a top loading model. This is an important because it does influence where in your system the unit needs to be placed. In fact, you need to make sure that you have more than adequate space to be able to load and remove CDs without having any obstructions. The best location would be at the top of your equipment rack, if that were a possibility.



Setup And Connection

Setting up the CD player is a simple process. The CD-168 has a number of different connections that can be utilized to integrate it within your system. It has single ended (RCA) and balanced (XLR) connections as well as a SPDIF (RCA) digital output. Naturally to enjoy the tubed analog stage you will need to connect the CD player with either of the analog outputs, thus not employing the digital output to feed an external DAC.



Once the unit is connected, it is really a matter of sitting back and letting it break in. The CD-168 takes a bit of time, about 300 hours, to perform to its greatest ability.

Another consideration when setting up the CD-168 is that because of its tubed output stage, using four Russia 6922EH tubes, it produces a fair amount of heat and it takes about an hour to achieve the best sound. Although it doesn't really need to be "warmed up," you really should take to time to do so if you are looking for its ultimate performance. Personally, I would leave it turned on all the time.

Things Are A Tad Different

So the unit is now all settled in and its time to sit down, relax and enjoy the music... or is it? The remote is not the worst one ever designed, but it certainly is not the best either. While it is a piece of art on its own, being made of metal, it is somewhat clunky and you should be careful because the sharp edges tend to scratch some furniture. Luckily, experience has provided me with a certain amount of care and I made sure to place the remote on something other than directly on the surface of my table. The remote itself is well laid out and is as full featured as one would expect from a high-end manufacturer. Although the fast forward and reverse do take a little getting used to, you need to be careful not to hold them down too long or they will have the unit scanning extremely quickly and you'll never find what you are looking for precisely. However, with a little practice you will have no real issue moving back and forth on tracks looking for your intended selections.

The next thing you have to get used to is loading CDs from the top rather than from the front. It is quite easy and those who have only dealt with front-loaders might find this refreshing. It seems silly, but it took a few tries until it felt like there was not something missing (like the tray coming out and going back in). To me, it seem more cosmetic, at least on the outside, but every little thing can change your overall experience and there may be merit to the way this unit handles the disc as opposed to front-loading devices. Once you get accustomed to the Raysonic CD-168, you are good to go. As mentioned earlier, the front display panel is perfectly designed and is not over bearing. Unlike lesser players, you have all the information you could possibly need without feeling as though you are being "blinded by science." Pardon the pun Thomas Dolby, yet I could not resist.

Art And Music Come Together

Well, once everything was set up and broken in, it was time to put the Raysonic CD-168 through its paces and see how good, or bad, the equipment performed. Sitting back, the first thing played was that all-time favorite of mine *Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd. Actually, I played it all the way through the first time, which isn't normal. However, the music came alive in a way that is hard to describe. Although very familiar with this album, it was as though it had been heard for the first time in many ways. There were both subtle and dramatic differences from my previous experiences. Firstly, there seemed to be a far more holographic and enveloping soundstage. This allowed for a far more captivating experience, which created a better understanding of the artist's abilities, if such a thing were possible. On "Us and Them," it almost felt as though I became a part of the music. The highs and lows were produced as such a way as to allow a synergy of sounds, rather than an overlapping that would have taken away from the tonal qualities. It was neither too forward nor too laid back, nor seemed to be too warm sometimes happens where tubes are concerned.

Moving to another type of music entirely, the next CD that became part of this evaluation was *The Caribbean Jazz Project - Afro Bob Alliance*, on the Heads Up label. It is sort of a combination of Jazz and Latin music combined into a tapestry of sound and experience. It also has some very challenging tonal combinations that tend to sound metallic and dull. However, the CD-168 once again performed admirably and was able to accurately portray the details. The saxophones were extremely detailed and

delightfully poignant in their overall sound quality. Although at times I have heard them overwhelm other instruments, there was no such problem with this reproduction by the player. In fact, this was true of all the instruments utilized on this album. With the Raysonic CD-168 they were all extremely lifelike as one could hear their exact placement without having to strain. It became very hard to remain cognizant of the fact that this was a recording and it wasn't being performed live.

The final type of music enjoyed during this review was classical. In order to truly determine the ability of the CD player, Giuseppe Verdi's *Messa Da Requim* performed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt was selected. The sheer majesty of this selection is often very hard to capture well on playback. Luckily Raysonic's CD-168 did not suffer many of the drawbacks I found in other players. The choral sound was soft and sweet. It came alive without seeming to sound overly syrupy. There was detail so that the sounds did not become a complex tapestry of noise rather than a synergistic combination of individual choral members and instruments. Although it may have lacked a little air in a few of the most complex passages, it revealed more than I had heard before. In fact, it was only on this last selection that the few flaws of the Raysonic CD-168 could be experienced. If it had been just a tad more revealing over the entire range of the choral selection, it would have been as perfect as I have heard thus far. However, while it did not lose its sense of realism or holographic imagery, it did seem to lose some of its control.

Other Features


As was mentioned in the beginning, the CD-168 has both balanced and unbalanced connections. The CD-168 utilizes a pair of Burr-Brown PCM1792 DACs, which at least makes it likely that the player is fully balanced. This seems to be the case as the overall music quality was improved by utilizing the balanced interconnects rather than the unbalanced. There was a bit more control and a slightly richer soundstage. All the auditioning for this review was done using the balanced connections. The other major feature of this player is the ability to use it as a transport rather than utilizing the tubed output stage. As a digital disc transport, it did fairly well. While there are several stand alone transports in the same price range that I believe provide better performance when paired with the correct stand alone DAC, if you need to use it in a pinch it most certainly will not let you down.



Conclusion

The Raysonic CD-168 would absolutely be a piece of equipment that I would put on my short list of products that I would love to include in my reference system. The tubed output stage provides all the benefits you would expect from utilizing tubes in your system without many of the drawbacks you might find in lesser units. There is an extremely lifelike and warm quality to its musical reproductions. I would

stop short of saying the Raysonic CD-168 is the best CD player I have heard to date. As mentioned earlier within the review, on extremely complex musical selections it does tend to lose its accuracy. While it still produces great music, it stops short of being exceptional. However, unless you have a system that is capable of revealing this flaw you need not look any further. The unit produces excellent detail and an enveloping soundstage not found in lesser units. Please remember that this is a top loading CD player and the amount of heat a tubed unit produces. If you are looking for a moderately priced and great performing CD player, you owe it to yourself to give the Raysonic CD-168 player a chance. It is worth it!

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	
High-frequencies (3,000Hz on up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape width front	
Soundscape width rear	
Soundscape depth behind speakers	
Soundscape extension into the room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	N/A

Value for the Money



Specifications

Type: Stereo tubed CD player / transport
Transport: Philips VAM 1202.
Conversion Rate: 24-bit/192kHz
Output Level: 0 to 2.3V
Frequency Response: 20Hz to 20kHz (?0.2dB)
S/N Ratio: >100dB
Distortion: < 0.003%
Dynamic Range: 110dB
Analog Output: balanced (XLR) and single ended (RCA)
Digital Output: 75 ohm
Vacuum Tubes: four Russia 6922EH
Dimensions: 48 x 30 x 13 (LxWxH in cm).
Weight: 11kg
Price: \$2550

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