

**AUDIO  
FILE**

Network-enabled media player/USB DAC  
 Made by: Cambridge Audio Ltd, PRC  
 Supplied by: Audio Partnership PLC, London  
 Telephone: 0207 551 5413  
 Web: www.cambridgeaudio.com  
 Price: €1699



# Cambridge Audio Azur 851N

Cambridge Audio has been involved in digital audio as long as almost any manufacturer, its CD1 CD player dating back to 1984. Latterly it has also brought affordable streaming/network audio products to the market, with the €1699 Azur 851N its most ambitious music player to date.

Although described by the company as a network audio player, it's also a DAC, complete with USB and S/PDIF digital inputs, and a preamplifier. As well as wired Ethernet connectivity and built-in Wi-Fi (with a USB antenna provided), it supports Apple AirPlay and can also accept an optional BT100 Bluetooth 'dongle'.

Digital inputs are provided on two RCA phono coaxial sockets,

**'Piano sounded deliciously full-bodied while the brass had a beautiful blare'**

one AES/EBU input and two optical, the former supporting file formats up to 192kHz/24-bit, as does the Ethernet/Wi-Fi streaming capability, while the asynchronous USB 2.0 Type-B connection also allows DSD64 files to be played from a connected computer.

The three USB Type-A sockets to the rear can be used for the connection of storage media,

with one also being enabled for the charging of connected smartphones, and there's a further USB on the front panel. Add Internet radio and Spotify Connect, and you have a pretty comprehensive digital front-end for any system.

Thanks to a large, clear display it's possible to operate the 851N either from its front panel or across the room via remote. But for the smoothest experience it's better to use an Android or iOS tablet or smartphone running the Cambridge Audio Connect app.

The 851N draws on a digital design already familiar from the flagship range's 851C CD player and 851D DAC/preamp. Its 'Adaptive Time Filtering' provides flexible upconversion to 384kHz/24-bit and there's a choice of digital filter settings too – there's no 'right' setting, but rather only the one best suited to source, system and personal taste. Running the show is

a 32-bit SHARC processor, designed to maintain full digital resolution even as the volume is reduced, by resampling at every level-step.

### **A WIDE OPEN SOUND**

Starting off with some classic prog in the form of Rick Wakeman's *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII*, in a 96kHz/24-bit rip from vinyl [A&M], what was immediately apparent

was the low-end clarity of which the 851N is capable. Add to this an ability to drive even complex rhythms and present a stinging, but never tortured view of cymbals, plus those characteristically 'period' synth sounds – these were revealed in all their edginess.

This view was reinforced with Kyle Eastwood's *Timepieces* [Jazz Village] which makes clear the bass extension and definition on offer with the 851N, as Eastwood and drummer Ernesto Simpson bounce off each other, while above, the piano of Andrew McCormack sounds deliciously full-bodied and the brass of Quentin Collins and Brandon Allen has beautiful blare.

Switch to 'Pyongyang', from Blur's comeback album *The Magic Whip* [Parlophone], and again there's that sense of the music breaking free from the speakers and filling the room. The sound is instantly attractive, and yet rewards close attention with the information it contains about the tonality of voices and instruments.

Unsurprisingly, this sonic ability means the Cambridge Audio also makes a fine fist of classical music, and we greatly enjoyed Britten's *Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra* in DSD64 [Reference Recordings]. Every instrumental timbre was crystal-clear, even in the relentlessly building final fugue. Hugely exciting listening!

### **VERDICT**

Combining solid build with flexible, intuitive operation and a glorious sound, this is a fine addition to the flagship Azur range. Either as a source or keystone of a complete system, the 851N offers excellent value for money. ☺

**ABOVE: The 851N comes in black or silver; its big, clear display provides track/album/artist info and album/station artwork. A main rotary control offers turn-to-scroll/press-to-enter operation for simple 'hands on' navigation**

### **HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS**

Maximum output level (Balanced)	4.27Vrms at 45ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (S/PDIF / USB / Net.)	112.2dB / 111.3dB / 112.1dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS)–30dBFS)	0.00020% / 0.00022%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS)–30dBFS)	0.00024% / 0.00045%
Freq. resp. (20Hz–20kHz/45kHz/90kHz)	+0.0dB to +0.08dB/–1.4dB/–3.3dB
Digital jitter (S/PDIF / USB / Network)	50psec / 55psec / 385psec
Resolution @ –100dB	±0.1dB
Power consumption	22W (<1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x115x360mm / 8.1kg