

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

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£270 **Page 15**
A plusher, punchier version of one of our favourite pairs



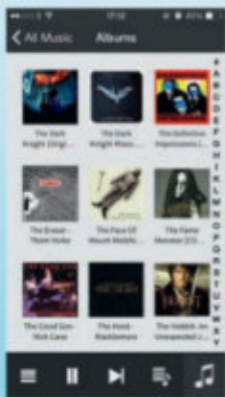
Sony BDP-5500
£110 **Page 21**
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Booming wireless sound from new Danish company

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The app



There's no substitute for a neat, easy-to-use interface

Cambridge Connect app on Android/Apple

The Cambridge Connect app is free to download and has a neat interface. And it's the app - rather than the streamer - that accesses and sorts through the music stored on your server, laptop or phone. This means your smartphone's powerful processor is doing the grunt work, so songs load more quickly. The app is speedy, displays album artwork and track information, and is especially handy for scrolling through your vast music collection. You can also queue up tracks for an immediate playlist.

All-round excellence from a high-res wonder

Cambridge CXN | Music streamer | €1099

Cambridge Audio is back with a splash. The new CXN streamer - part of the company's new CX series launched earlier this year with all-new design and improved sound - is a stonkingly good high-resolution network streamer for €1099

The Cambridge CXN streamer is built on the success of the Award-winning Stream Magic 6 v2 (also €1099 but the new CXN's fresh, modern design makes it feel like a complete overhaul.

But it's the hugely enjoyable sonic performance that really singles the CXN out. It sounds fantastic.

Enthusiasm and entertainment

There's an enthusiastic drive to the CXN's performance, combining subtlety, snappy timing and rich detail to deliver a sound that's just wonderfully entertaining.

It's a punchy sound that has a really good grasp of rhythm and low-end impact. We've seldom heard a Cambridge product sound so muscular. Basslines are meaty, textured and bound along happily to the lively sense of rhythm. The stop and start of notes are precisely and snappily delivered, and there seems no end to the streamer's energetic

drive. The CXN is skilful at conveying the space between instruments too, a point made obvious when we hear Ghostpoet's atmospheric *X Marks The Spot* filling the room with effortless dynamic headroom.

No holding back

The sound isn't overly smooth, but the Cambridge does deliver a full-bodied performance that's hugely pleasing to listen to. The CXN certainly doesn't hold back from delivering the full impact of a song: the intensity of The Dead Weather's brooding, screeching *60 Feet Tall* is fully conveyed, while you'll be blasted with the full force of Extreme's funk-metal anthem *Rest in Peace*.

The admirably balanced tone in evidence on these samples never puts a foot out of place, either. Drums hit accurately, the bass digs deep, and the top end sparkles - yet stops shy of sounding bright or coarse. The midrange in particular sounds lovely, with voices fully fleshed out and packed with character. This streamer is not fussy with file type, either, sounding fluid and dynamic with high-resolution and Spotify-streamed tracks alike.

The CXN is fully decked out with all the latest streaming features, so it's crucial you

have a stable network connection. You can connect to your home network via ethernet, but Cambridge does include a wi-fi antenna in the box if you prefer the flexibility of a wireless connection. All you need to do is make sure your NAS drive, laptop or smartphone is connected to the same network, then just press play. Setting up the network is swift, and we experienced no dropouts while streaming.

Apple users can stream songs stored on their devices using AirPlay, but we're not too keen on the rather weedy sound quality that is the result. Instead, we'd suggest hard-wiring your iPhone or iPod into either the front or back USB port for a more solid sound. Those ports will charge your device while playing, too.

Ready-made music - in any form

The CXN also features Spotify Connect and internet radio, so you have access to a few million songs from around the globe. File support is extensive: all the popular formats such as WAV, FLAC, AIFF, ALAC and MP3 are supported, as well as DSD 64

files (which you can only play using the back-panel USB input).

Ready for high-resolution

All digital inputs on the CXN are capable of playing high-resolution files of up to 24-bit/192kHz, and they can be upsampled to 384kHz too. That includes the USB type B input for your laptop, and the optical and coaxial inputs. There's also a pair each of RCA and balanced XLR outputs, along with two digital outputs.

We have to hand it to Cambridge Audio - the CXN is one classy-looking streamer. It's a neat, modern construction that's

moved away from the more traditional looks of the previous Azur 351 and 651 components. The 'floating design', the brushed aluminium chassis and the sleek finish (in either black or silver) look and feel premium-quality. We have to give special mention to that lovely volume dial - it has a smooth, perfectly weighted resistance, and the way the menu responds is delightful.

We also like how neat the design of the front panel is, as it shows off the crisp and

vivid TFT (thin-film transistor) display in all its glory. The 4.3in screen is packed with information but never looks cluttered. Track, artist, album and sampling rate are displayed, as is album artwork in full colour.

Control options

You can use the panel buttons to control playback and access the input menu, but using the included remote control (also redesigned) is far more intuitive. We tend to



It really is a thing of beauty front-on. It's clean and unfussy but that display carries a bundle of information



It's the hugely enjoyable sonic performance that singles the CXN out. There's an enthusiastic drive to its performance, combining subtlety, snappy timing and rich detail to deliver a wonderfully entertaining sound

Round the back



- 1 Wi-fi dongle** There's an antenna included in the box that gives the CXN wireless abilities. Network is easy to set up, although we prefer the stable wired connection.
- 2 USB Media** If you have DSD files stored on a USB stick or hard drive, plug your stick into this USB port to access them. It will charge smart devices, too.
- 3 Digital inputs** All of the CXN's digital inputs – whether optical, coaxial, USB or wireless – will support 24-bit/192kHz high-res files.
- 4 Labelling** The upside-down labelling is a stroke of genius. No need to crane your neck or squint your eyes when connecting inputs from above.
- 5 Control bus** Use the cable included to link the CXN to either of the CXA60 or CXA80 amplifiers, and you'll be able to control both using the Connect app.

use the remote interchangeably with the new-look Cambridge Connect app, as the app is more suited to scrolling and selecting lists of songs. There are some hiccups in operation, but they're relatively minor and certainly not enough to stop us from using the app on a regular basis.

It's the little things...

Another masterstroke from Cambridge Audio is its ongoing policy of writing input labels upside down, which means you can easily read the inputs when you're leaning over the unit.

It's clear a lot of thought and attention went into the creation of the Cambridge CXN. The functionality, design and ease of use are the best we've seen at this price, and the engaging, vigorous sound is sure to win buyers over. Those in the market for a streamer should really give this one a listen - and be prepared to put it at the top of their wishlist.

Well worth the extra

The closest rival to the CXN is the excellent Pioneer N-50A, an updated version of our Award-winner that easily won five stars recently. Yes, the Pioneer does cost less than the Cambridge Audio, but we

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would happily dish out that additional cash for the Cambridge. The CXN feels more special, is nicer to use and delivers a more robust, more revealing sound.

TECH SPECS

- High resolution** 24-bit/192kHz, DSD64
- Streaming features** UPnP, AirPlay, internet radio, Spotify Connect
- Inputs** 2 x USB type A, USB type B, optical, coaxial
- Outputs** Optical, coaxial, balanced XLR, RCA
- Network** Ethernet, wi-fi
- Remote** Yes
- Finishes** 2
- Dimensions (hwd):** 9 x 43 x 31cm
- Weight** 4kg


Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive and enjoyable sound quality; sleek design and high-quality build; excellent features and file support; lovely to use

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT A stylish, feature-packed streamer that sounds great and is a joy to use

**Needs to beat
Pioneer N-50A**

★★★★★  This excellent Pioneer makes it a tough contest, especially when it costs £200 less, but it isn't quite as subtle or burly as the CXN, nor as much fun to listen to.

SYSTEM BUILDER

These three will complement the CXN in a way that'll make streaming more fun than ever



Stereo amplifier
Arcam FMJ A19 £650
★★★★★

Our Award-winner's refined, dynamic sound and subtle detail make a fine match for the CXN



Stereo speakers
B&W 685 S2 £500
★★★★★

Hefty, loud and detailed with deep, rumbling bass - these B&Ws are bags of fun



Tablet
Apple iPad Air 2 £400
★★★★★

You'll want to use that slick Connect app on a large, crisp display... Great interface, too

Total build £2250

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE CAMBRIDGE CXN

- 1** We love the sleek, uncluttered design of the CXN. We immediately peel off the British flag sticker to keep it neater still.
- 2** The back panel's labels are written in both directions - that's a great touch that'll make connecting inputs easier.
- 3** That volume dial feels lovely to use. We spend a while just playing around in the menus and admiring its smooth action.
- 4** We download the Connect app and find it works instinctively with the CXN. Artwork doesn't always appear, though...
- 5** Time to start streaming - wow, it sounds brilliant! The muscly, detailed and lively rhythm is utterly engaging to listen to.