Kalista

TEST & REVIEW

DreamPlay XC

SACD PLAYER · STREAMER · DIGITAL PREAMPLIFIER · DAC



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10 von 10 Punkten
REFERENZ

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EXCLUSIVE REVIEW — KALISTA DREAMPLAY XC

For the first time, French high-end hi-fi manufacturer Kalista is presenting a Super Audio CD player with the new Kalista DreamPlay X. It is in fact much more than that: an enormously versatile system that combines an SACD player, a streamer, a DAC and – if you opt for the Kalista DreamPlay XC version – a digital preamplifier as well. In other words, it is a 4-in-1 device of the highest quality which, according to French high-end hi-fi manufacturer Métronome Technologie, sets new standards.

In brief



According to the manufacturer, the new Kalista DreamPlay X now makes a revolutionary system available, particularly in its Kalista DreamPlay XC version, which provides a 4-in-1 device of the highest quality.

The promise made by the manufacturer, Métronome Technologie, sounded bold and full of promise: the new Kalista DreamPlay X was nothing less than a revolution for Kalista, the French high-end hi-fi manufacturer declared when the new product was first unveiled. And that was not all: the company went a step further, describing it as a revolutionary solution for the high-end hi-fi segment as a whole, since the new Kalista DreamPlay X was in fact far more than simply the first Super Audio CD player from the Kalista brand.

As a Super Audio CD player, the Kalista DreamPlay X was only the foundation for something far greater – a 4-in-1 device, as the manufacturer itself calls it. In its Kalista DreamPlay XC version, it combines not only an SACD player and a hi-res audio streamer, but also a D/A converter and a digital preamplifier, all at an outstanding level of quality and with a simply remarkable, unique design.

Backed by Métronome Technologie's expertise

As many will already know, and as briefly mentioned above, the Kalista brand belongs to the French company Métronome Technologie. Métronome Technologie sees itself as a recognised digital specialist and even claims a leading role in this field across the entire industry, particularly in the high-end segment.

At the company, based near Toulouse in southern France, the Métronome Technologie team – led by Jean-Marie Clauzel, the company's owner and designer – develops and manufactures products with the utmost precision, committed to one goal alone: achieving the most natural sound possible.

Métronome Technologie can therefore offer every relevant solution that falls under the heading of "digital" in the hi-fi segment, whether CD or SACD transports, CD and SACD players, D/A converters or streamers.

Kalista – Métronome Technologie's luxury brand

Naturally, the Kalista brand's products also benefit from these decades of experience, although here entirely different standards are applied to both development and manufacturing – standards that sit above even those of Métronome Technologie itself. Kalista can therefore rightly be regarded as Métronome Technologie's luxury brand, dedicated to developing products without compromise. Given the quality already offered by Métronome Technologie's own systems, it becomes clear that Kalista plays in a league of its own.

Kalista DreamPlay Collection

Until now, Kalista's product range has consisted primarily of source components from the Kalista DreamPlay Collection: the Kalista DreamPlay ONE, an outstanding audio CD player; the Kalista DreamPlay STREAM streaming client; and – surprisingly – the Kalista DreamPlay Twenty-Twenty. Surprising because it is a turntable, something rather unusual in the line-up of a recognised digital specialist. From Kalista's point of view, however, it is all but essential, in order to meet customers' expectations in this area as well as possible.

But, as this list shows, one decidedly crucial component has been missing until now: a dedicated Super Audio CD player. It is all the more understandable, then, that Kalista enthusiasts have been asking the company for just such a dedicated SACD player for years – a wish that Jean-Marie Clauzel is now fulfilling with the new Kalista DreamPlay X.

At Kalista, however, the aim was not simply to develop an SACD transport or even an SACD player. Instead, it had to be a truly outstanding system, one that would fully live up to the Kalista name and, like the brand itself, play in a league of its own.

Kalista DreamPlay X – The 4-in-1 system

It is worth stressing once again that the new Kalista DreamPlay X is the very first Super Audio CD player from the Kalista brand. And that is not all: it was never meant to be just a "simple" SACD player. The aim was to offer high-end hi-fi enthusiasts a true 4-in-1 system that handles every aspect of digital data processing.

As an SACD player, the Kalista DreamPlay X thus forms the foundation, while also functioning as a streamer. On request, it can also be equipped with a D/A converter and then even be used as a digital preamplifier.

A revolutionary product that sets a new benchmark

The manufacturer is therefore fully justified in describing the new Kalista DreamPlay X as a revolutionary product, and is convinced that it sets a new benchmark against which the entire industry will have to measure itself.

And if we are the last ones still building a CD player...



Naturally, with the Kalista DreamPlay X, many will ask whether it still makes sense today to invest in a CD or SACD player, when streaming is ubiquitous and available anytime, anywhere – especially since, there is no denying it, this is a decidedly expensive system.

Once again, the answer is simple: many high-end hi-fi enthusiasts still rely on CD – and SACD in particular – if only because they have invested eagerly in their collections over many decades and want to keep enjoying these treasures in the future. What's more, a good number of audiophiles swear by the sound of CD and SACD, which they consider superior to streaming.

Métronome Technologie, too, still sees CDs and Super Audio CDs as an immensely important medium – one that, from a technical standpoint as well, is by no means obsolete or "outdated".

Speaking with the author of these lines, Jean-Marie Clauzel states frankly that, for him personally, the CD has lost none of its importance and that he still enjoys relying on this medium. The designer even goes so far as to state explicitly that Métronome Technologie and Kalista will continue to build CD players even when no one else on the market does.

The company has put everything in place to make this possible, for example by stocking up on enough components with foresight. It sees this as an important investment in the future.

So much for the general considerations – let us now take a detailed look at the Kalista Dream-

Play X.

Drive designed to Métronome Technologie's specifications

At the heart of the new Kalista DreamPlay X is, of course, an SACD pick-up mechanism. Here the company relies on a solution from D&M, which has however been optimised to Métronome Technologie's specifications – so it is by no means an off-the-shelf part. Above all, it offers a resampling function and the utmost precision in reading data from optical discs, laying the foundation for the perfection in playback that the designers are striving for.

Streaming as an additional option

Even though many hi-fi enthusiasts still favour CD and SACD, most of them neither can nor want to rely on these media alone. Streaming naturally has many advantages, not least the convenience it brings and the enormous variety offered by a wide range of sources.

For Kalista, it was therefore an obvious choice to include this option as well, giving users every relevant possibility so that they alone decide what they play and from which source.

Streaming is thus available as a second source of digital data. Here the emphasis is on UPnP, the only true industry standard, but TIDAL, Qobuz, Spotify and Deezer are also integrated directly to cover a broad spectrum – even if these services do not always meet the high-end standards this system actually deserves.

As already mentioned, however, the manufacturer considers it important that music can be enjoyed as flexibly as possible, which is why users also have access to internet radio via vTuner. With a product like the Kalista DreamPlay X in particular, it is essential not to exclude anything the customer might want to access.

32-bit/384 kHz, DSD256 and MQA

Content can be played in linear PCM at up to 32-bit/384 kHz, as well as in DSD up to DSD256. Content encoded in the lossy MQA format is also supported, since this format has become particularly significant with some online streaming services that rank among the most important for audiophile hi-fi enthusiasts.

Wired or Wi-Fi? Network connection or music straight from USB

The network connection can be made either by cable via an Ethernet port or simply via the built-in Wi-Fi module. Here too, it is clear that Métronome Technologie, as a specialist, does

not rule out any option on the basis of misguided quality criteria. Of course, a wired network connection alone would be the only "right" choice when it comes to a consistently stable, reliable, high-performance data link. But many customers – yes, even in the high-end segment – cannot or do not want to run additional cables and prefer to rely solely on "wireless" data transmission. Wi-Fi offers them exactly the alternative they need, and one that, provided the right infrastructure is in place, generally works very reliably anyway.

For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned that files stored on a USB storage device can, of course, be played back directly.

Kalista DreamPlay X – Digital outputs only



In its basic version – if one can even speak of a basic version for a product like this – the Kalista DreamPlay X offers digital outputs only. Audio signals are output via AES/EBU, S/PDIF or I^2S. This provides the complete toolkit for connecting it to other components in a wide variety of ways and integrating it into one's own hi-fi system.

That said, in this configuration the product sells itself somewhat short. Why forgo the full range of capabilities on offer with such an outstanding product – especially since, as mentioned several times already, Métronome Technologie is regarded as a recognised digital specialist and is therefore behind some of the best D/A converters on the market?

It therefore seems almost self-evident that most buyers will opt for the fully equipped version of the Kalista DreamPlay X: the Kalista DreamPlay XC.

Kalista DreamPlay XC – With built-in D/A converter and preamplifier

With the Kalista DreamPlay XC, the manufacturer goes one step further than with the "standard" Kalista DreamPlay X, delivering the unique 4-in-1 system described above with an additional top-class D/A converter.

A further special feature is the digital preamplifier stage, which provides volume control. For this, the company relies on a very special solution from the specialist Leedh Processing, designed to deliver particularly accurate results.

External power supply

It goes without saying that a product in this class uses an external power supply, with a sophisticated design to ensure the very best possible results.

On the one hand, an elaborate power supply would simply not fit into the comparatively slim desktop chassis of the Kalista DreamPlay X or Kalista DreamPlay XC. On the other – and this is the truly decisive point – power supply has always been a particular focus for Jean-Marie Clauzel.

According to the designer, an optimal power supply for every single component of a system is an absolutely decisive factor in ultimately achieving nothing less than optimal quality. Accordingly, the power supplies at Métronome Technologie – and, of course, in Kalista products – are built to an exceptionally high standard.

When the author of these lines asked Jean-Marie Clauzel where the key to the Kalista Dream-Play X's quality was really to be found, he said nothing, but with a smile pointed to the rather imposing enclosure that stood almost inconspicuously behind the rack on which the player itself was placed.

The power supply is connected to the player itself by a dedicated system cable, which is of course included.

Outstanding design

All Kalista products stand out for their exceptional design, and the new Kalista DreamPlay X and Kalista DreamPlay XC are, of course, no exception.

Here, the designers ingeniously combine materials such as aluminium, stainless steel and transparent plastic – acrylic, to be precise. With its highly distinctive shape, the Kalista DreamPlay X resembles a work of art and is a prime example of innovative industrial design, skilfully picking up the brand's established design language while adding fresh new accents.

The silver tripod base; the main chassis in black anodised or silver aluminium, encased in transparent acrylic; the drive cover on top, again in silver or black; and on the front, a gene-rously sized round touchscreen display, once more flanked by silver or black elements – all of this looks refined and stylish, underlines the high standards the manufacturer has set for this product, and makes it a truly unique-looking piece.

It should also be mentioned in this context that, on request, Métronome Technologie will tailor the Kalista DreamPlay X to the customer's wishes. There are many possibilities for personalisation, although this naturally comes at an additional cost.

And although it is essentially irrelevant in this class, it should be mentioned for the sake of

completeness: measuring 445 mm wide, 420 mm deep and 125 mm high, the new Kalista DreamPlay X weighs a hefty 17 kg. It should be stressed that this applies only to the main unit itself; the power supply, housed as described in a separate enclosure measuring 440 x 430 x 160 mm, tips the scales at another impressive 22 kg.

Exquisite remote control included



This, too, goes without saying: a remote control is included. It is equally self-evident that it is a particularly high-quality piece, made entirely of metal, which conveys a true high-end feel the moment you hold it in your hand.

"We don't launch such an outstanding product every day, even though recent years have been rich in new releases, such as the DreamPlay STREAM and the Twenty-Twenty turntable. For me, the DreamPlay X confirms that Kalista plays in the top league – or rather, that we are one of the leading players in this field. There is currently no comparable device on the market."
Jean-Marie Clauzel, owner and designer, Métronome Technologie

In practice – Listening session at Audio Exclusive GmbH

We had the unique opportunity to put the Kalista DreamPlay XC through an extensive test, together with Franz Votruba, Sales Executive at Métronome Technologie, and Kurt Wögerer, whose company Audio Exclusive GmbH is responsible for distributing both Métronome Technologie and Kalista.

Kurt Wögerer's studio in Wels, Upper Austria – equipped with the finest high-end hi-fi components, acoustically optimised and yet extremely comfortable thanks to its living-room-like atmosphere – provided the ideal setting to devote ourselves to such an exquisite product as the Kalista DreamPlay XC.

Kurt Wögerer insisted on setting up a particularly fine system especially for this listening session and, interestingly, chose to pair digital with the finest valve electronics. So while the Kalista DreamPlay XC formed the foundation, the rest of the electronics consisted of valve pre- and power amplifiers from Jadis. The crowning touch was a Technics loudspeaker system, and the cables were, of course, top-notch too – everything possible was done to create the best conditions for evaluating this 4-in-one from France.

First contact

First of all, it must be said that photos of the Kalista DreamPlay X can only hint at the impres-

sion it makes when you see it in person. There is no other way to put it: this design is brilliant – full stop!

From every angle, the Kalista DreamPlay X radiates perfection, down to the last detail. The build quality is virtually flawless, and this particular combination of materials works so well that there is no doubt: you are acquiring an ornament for any living space.

Admittedly, we are leaving the power supply out of this: its design is technically sober and pragmatic, but then it is not meant to be particularly prominent – at least not in terms of looks. The system cable is long enough to allow it to be discreetly tucked out of sight.

And what the looks promise, the feel delivers: the Kalista DreamPlay X is simply a joy to use. This is how high-end hi-fi should feel – whether it is opening and closing the solid yet smooth-moving lid of the top-loader, placing the disc, or operating it via the touchscreen or the remote control.

The sound – Precision down to the very last detail

We won't even begin to analyse every single piece of music we played that day on the Kalista DreamPlay X – or, to be precise, the Kalista DreamPlay XC – because ultimately that is beside the point.

As always when music lovers and audiophile hi-fi enthusiasts get together, each of us gradually brought out our own reference recordings – and since there were three of us, that alone made for a very, very colourful mix of genres. And yes, there were some rather exotic recordings among them that we had never heard before – but that is exactly what makes it exciting.

Kurt Wögerer's shelves, well stocked with all kinds of media, offered an additional wide-ranging collection that we made eager use of. On top of that, we also had access to TIDAL, conveniently controlled via a tablet and app.

Whatever the piece of music, and whether it came from CD, SACD or the network, the Kalista DreamPlay XC always shone with a performance that can be summed up in a single word: precision – absolute precision.

The wealth of detail and the resulting clarity and definition, the enormously wide and equally deep soundstage that unfolded before the listeners – all of this is simply remarkable, and at times left us shaking our heads in disbelief. It may sound like a cliché, but many a recording, heard a thousand times and seemingly familiar down to the last detail, still revealed a secret or two here, and nuances never heard before.

For the sound connoisseur, a product like this is of course ideal for extensive comparisons – exploring whether one and the same recording sounds better from CD or SACD than via streaming in its various formats. That day, however, we didn't ask ourselves that question. In

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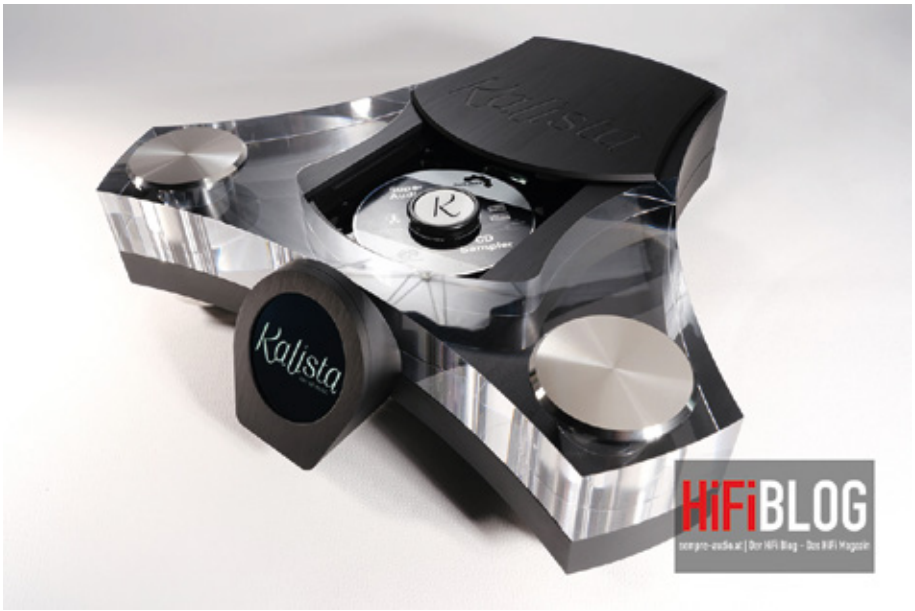
It’s the details that make the difference



Viewed quite soberly, the Kalista DreamPlay X is a CD/SACD player and streamer – a type of product offered by countless companies in all kinds of forms, and one where it is often claimed that the differences are marginal at best, since it's all "digital" anyway. But that is precisely what is not true, as the Kalista DreamPlay X impressively demonstrates. Above all, this product plays in a league of its own because its designer paid attention to every single detail that could have any bearing on the achievable sound quality.

Jean-Marie Clauzel doesn't exactly show all his cards in this respect, but he speaks openly – and, given the right opportunity, in great detail – about the factors he considers absolutely essential.

These naturally include the drive itself – in particular its (hopefully) impeccable mechanical construction and control – and, above all, the D/A converter, which must do its job precisely and as neutrally as possible. Here, the products of many manufacturers differ only slightly, at least on paper and when comparing within the same price range. So it is not the individual components that make the difference, since almost every company is limited to certain standard parts. What matters is the art of using these components to their best advantage. And that, of course, includes giving them the best possible operating conditions – and here, in Jean-Marie Clauzel's view, the power supply is of immense importance. It is therefore treated with remarkable meticulousness, and the results prove the designer right.

An exclusive system

Of course, it must be said clearly that a product like the Kalista DreamPlay X is a truly exclusive system which, on price alone, belongs in a league of its own – and whose target audience is therefore, well, rather limited. After all, the Kalista DreamPlay X is priced at €59,900, while the version with integrated D/A converter and digital preamplifier, the Kalista DreamPlay XC, comes in at €68,700.

But products that are developed and built without compromise simply come at a price – there is really no need to debate that. Nobody asks why a Bentley or a Rolls-Royce isn't available for the price of a mid-range car, and a current Formula 1 racer can't be bought by outsiders for all the money in the world. Figuratively speaking, the Kalista DreamPlay XC is both: in terms of design, feel and enjoyment, it is the elegant luxury limousine; at the same time, it is the nimble racer operating at the very limit of what is technically possible.

Our verdict...

Products like the Kalista DreamPlay XC play in a league of their own in every respect. They are systems developed and built without compromise, by designers such as Métronome Technologie who are guided solely by the resolve to create nothing less than the best, and who are wholly committed to achieving perfect sound. That they also rely on an outstanding design – one that undoubtedly stands in a class of its own visually as well – is surely due in no small part to the tradition of French hi-fi manufacturers, who are known for refinement in almost every price class and who, in a reference class such as that of the Kalista brand, would never let themselves down. The Kalista DreamPlay XC is a reference product that most people will probably never be able to call their own – but one you absolutely must hear at least once.

PROS

- ✓ Outstanding design
- ✓ Flawless build quality
- ✓ Sound of absolute perfection
- ✓ Combines CD, SACD and streaming
- ✓ Optional D/A converter upgrade
- ✓ Convenient operation

CONS

- ✓ No drawbacks whatsoever

TEST SYSTEM

- ✓ Jadis JP 30 MC Signature MK IV preamplifier
- ✓ Jadis JA 200 Signature MK IV mono power amplifiers
- ✓ Technics SB-R1 loudspeakers
- ✓ Nordost Odin 2 SC speaker cables
- ✓ Nordost Odin 2 PC power cable (mains supply)
- ✓ Nordost Odin 2 XLR interconnects (preamp – power amps)
- ✓ Nordost QB 8 MK II power distribution block
- ✓ Nordost QKore 1, 2 & 3 (grounding, overall power)
- ✓ Nordost Sort Füt loudspeaker feet
- ✓ Nordost Sort Kones TC (overall isolation)
- ✓ Nordost Valhalla 2 RCA (interconnect, DreamPlay XC – preamp)
- ✓ Audioplan Ampere S power cords (all components)