



Audio Ramblings – The Aurender N100H Music Streamer and More

I have become quite lazy and it is all to blame on the technology that we use today to get our music out into the room. It all started with CDs allowing me to sit and listen to something like 60 mins of music while never stirring. Of course a lot of time I never stirred as the music simply failed to stir me being early digital and all, but then digital got way, way better and, well... that stirred the musical pot in terms of not only how much music I was buying, but in what form... physical versus file. This naturally coincided with the emergence of computer-based playback and all that brought to the table. So many options, configurations, software, hardware (gadgets to fix things we never knew needed to be fixed) and so on. The whole computer-based playback created a new industry offering the end user anything and everything to make that experience so much better than just plopping a PC down, connecting that via USB to some DAC, and hitting play from say iTunes or whatever, and there you go.



At the peak of my Mac set-up it had become so elaborate that I was a reference for many of my fellow pf scribes in that I was being asked what they could change, insert, remove, whatever in hopes of getting that much more music from their files. But then things changed. The next evolution or step was to move away from a computer and go with, a different computer. A different computer in the sense of a purpose-built device that either streams or renders only your music, but for sure they are a computer.

These devices would be the likes from Auralic, Aurender, Lumin, Cary, and so on. The list is growing daily as more and more companies release their version of a device that will move your files from A to B, and do so with musical success. Some come with their own DACs, some are wired or act wirelessly, some utilize their own proprietary playback software, while others require that of a third party (these are renderers in general), some with their own internal storage, some with every output connection, with others being limited to whatever... the options are plenty with pretty much anything that should meet your needs. But one could now find something designed from the ground up to just play music... nothing more, nothing less.

Gone were any of the shortcomings or criticisms of a computer after it was adapted to the purpose of just being a music playback component. Purpose built. Sweet. But, even though these components are well built they do benefit from many of the devices and gadgets that helped make my computer-based set-up that much better. Noise within the network is still an issue, so using something like the Acoustic Revive RL-1 LAN isolation device on my Ethernet cables is good. Quieter, greater resolution, better music. And better Ethernet and USB cables. I like the Ethernet cables from Audioquest, Sablon Audio, and JCat. All slightly different sonically and all really, really good... they do make a positive difference for me, and am sure those from other companies would do the same. For USB the list is endless though my go-tos tend to be Sablon, WyWires, JCat, Audience, Curious, Light Harmonic... and well yeah, the list goes on. All of the USB cables come with their own character sound-wise but I find none to be straying too far from the rest. That is, they are more alike than different, and yet, each with that something that makes them ever so differently right and engaging when compared to the others. Love them all for individual their strengths and character traits.

And a solid NAS to store your music. Something again that is purpose built, or at the very least is mated with a better power supply and perhaps tweaked out to insure that your files are being treated with respect.

Of course with the majority of streamers and such being USB out to some USB DAC (there are a few that only do Ethernet connection like the Merging Technology unit and the PS Audio that does both Ethernet and USB) then you have a gaggle of gadgets to address the pitfalls of that with products from UpTone Audio (the Regen), iFi (the iPurifier2, iUSB Power, micro iUSB3.0, and DC iPurifier), and from Schiit Audio (the Wyrld). All of these work in their own way and some benefit or build from being used with those from others. I have these all here, and depending on the USB cable and what is coming from and heading to, either of them are requisite for the best sound I can get. Add in the SBooster Ultra right before the DC feed into the Regen, and you can take that unit much further than the stock unit. Even when used with say the LPS from HDPLEX, the Regen still sounds better with than without. The Sbooster Ultra acts to reduce ripple and such in the power feed getting the Regen to perform better than before.

Ditto power supplies like those from SBooster for any device that needs a solid, clean, noise-free power. I have them for my Netgear Gigabyte switch and Netgear 4G wi-fi extender, as well as powering the Auralic Aries (yeah that is three total units... I know.). And AC cords too. My go-to cords for digital are the Challenger AE15™ Anniversary Edition 15 Digital power cord from Dynamic Designs (reviewed [HERE](#) by Marhsall Nack and I really can't offer more than what he surmised... one of the best cords he has heard, ever!) and the Corona Reserve cords from Sablon Audio. Both cords are stunningly good, with the Challenger AE15™ being one of the best cords I have ever used... period. My only complaint is that I have only one Challenger AE15™ here, so where to place it becomes the biggest obstacle in me getting the best bang for the buck. I tend to keep it on the DAC of choice (either the Playback Designs MPS-05 or the PS Audio DirectStream DAC) with the Sablons seeing duty here and there. For sure I have other cords, and they all see duty wherever they work best: Kubala-Sosna Emotions, Audience PowerChord e, PS Audio AC12/AC5, Audioquest NRG-X3, Luminous Audio Power Lynx Ultra, PAD's digital, Kaplan Designs, and WyWires. The Sablons are really, really good and work well wherever they end up. I have three of these cords so placing them on various other digital or analog components is wonderfully good. In every case, either of these cords allow for the music to be more open with greater clarity and resolution. Way more musical in every way than without. Each cord was built to minimize noise while maximizing engagement in your music. Both are highly recommended.

Which brings me to the Aurender N100H

Nice. Yeah, a round-a-bout way to get to the N100H, but I found all of the above to be important with any streamer-like product regardless of how purpose-built it is... all of this made a difference

with the Auralic Aries and certainly did so with the Aurender N100H, though not to the extent it does with say a Mac... even a tweaked one like my own.

Anyhow, the Aurender N100H is not like the Aries (and obvious comparison at the price plus I have one here)... and yet in many ways it is, and no I am not going to say one is better than the other and therefore you should buy this and not that as any differences are of preference (and audibly they are subtle at best), but what I will say is that the Aurender is really, really good and should make anyone who chooses to go that route be as happy as a clam. Same with the Aries. Which one is for you is up to you to decide based on your preferences.



The Aurender N100H is like the Aries in that it is a purpose-built component to get your files from A to B in a way that obliterates the issues found within a re-purposed Mac or PC. Both cache files to address latency and drop-outs from a NAS drive with their internal memory, though the amount in each differs considerably. The Aurender does so in a way that means whether you access the files internally or externally... it sounds the same. Sweet.

Both use a linear power supply, but where the Aires moves it outside allowing one the option of tweaking and so on, the Aurender has it internally, meaning what is there is what you got. But what you got is stellar as Aurender has made sure that the power supply does all it needs to do. And you can play around with power cords (I did and like the unit with an earlier version of Dynamic Design's Heritage Digital cord, though all impressions for the review were with the generic stock cord. I will add that Dynamic Design's Heritage Digital will take the Aurender to a higher level.) allowing one the option to season their sound. The Aries uses their Lightning DS as its interface, and the Aurender uses their Aurender Conductor App. Consider these like those from either Amarra, Pure Music, etc. in how one access and interacts with their music. Yes, they evolve as new features and options are added. Way cool and they work. As a side note... you guys at Auralic and Aurender listening?... it would be nice if either App allowed for customizing colors and such allowing one to get what works best visually for the end user. Now that would be way cool.

The Aires has several options for digital out (S/PDIF, AES/EBU, USB 2.0), where the Aurender is limited to USB 2.0. Not a bad thing as one will tend to use it with a USB DAC anyhow and I know that both Auralic and Aurender have implemented the USB output to the the best it can be, so all is good. But having a few other output options does make things more universal. The Aires relies on being connected to a network for file access (either wired or wireless along with a USB 2.0 data port), where the Aurender has its own internal 2TB SSD as well the option of accessing any external NAS via

wired... or USB drives via USB 2.0 ports. This makes the Aurender an all-in-one solution that is simple and elegant! Want more storage (and outputs), go further up the Aurender line or add a NAS.



The Aires is light and unique in terms of its shape and styling, where the Aurender N100H is an elegant hunk of aluminum that is also quite nice to look at, and to hold in your hands. And the user interface on either does what they should do without a burp. No crashes, hiccups, or whatever... the Conductor App works.

So what we have here are two different solutions to the same problem or simply, there are two ways to skin a cat. Both get you there but with somewhat different priorities and such being addressed in the how and the what. The Aurender is custom built from the ground up, ditto the Aires... but they are hardly identical in execution. Different engineering, different implementations... perhaps different philosophies.

A few quibbles before I start gushing about how good the N100H is musically... I could never get Aurender's AMM to work as advertised. Paraphrased from the Aurender site... Previously, while the Aurender Music Server/Player series could play contents on the NAS by file/folder browsing, with the help of AMM for PC/Mac, N100H and all other existing Aurender Music server series can now display and use meta-tag information of the contents on the NAS so one can now have the same experience with the content in the Aurender's internal Storage. Meaning you get all covers and so on making the interaction more visually entertaining than just having titles and such.



Well, while I could certainly see and access everything on the Conductor App via folder view, I could never get AMM to see my NAS and get the files to appear in the Conductor App as I see the other files that were being stored in the N100H's own drives. I tried everything I could think of (except obviously whatever it is I need to do to get it to work) and so gave up and just listened to the files either on the N100H's drives or those on the NAS via folder view. Updates do allow one to transfer files from a NAS to the N100H via the App, as opposed to transferring them via a PC or Mac... now that is way cool, but I would love to get the AMM sorted out.

And while 2TB is pretty decent, there appears to be no redundancy in terms of backing up your files. Unless I missed something, having a RAID option would be nice, but I am wondering if perhaps Aurender felt this to hamper the performance in some way? Obviously one can back up to an external drive, but I am of the mind... let's make this as easy as pie.

Plug-n-play the N100H was for the most part. I had little if any problem getting the App up and running, ditto the N100H, though the speed it takes to find its way on the network or updating will not set any records. I found patience to be a virtue with the N100H as it took longer than I had expected to start up, sort itself out on the network, and be ready to play our music.

Well, the fact that the unit is software driven, by their software, means that any issues are fixable. Along with it being up-datable to be even better than it is... which is way cool. Though it is musically damn good as it stands.

Meaning, I loved my time with the N100H and sonically the unit runs circles around any PC or Mac I could imagine. It is dead quiet, offering a very resolving presentation that is neither lean nor mean. Extended at either end with air and space, music via the N100H is captivatingly good. Yeah, it is not going to do anything to make you go... "The N100H presents music from this perspective..." No it gets the music out into the room with such an engagingly organic way that it moves us far away from what we are used to hearing with digital from a computer. Smooth, etch free... no glare or grit. Airy and open. No nasty bits to get in the way. Nice indeed.



Big, robust, dynamic... and yet articulate, light, and airy. Sitting there nitpicking my music is not something I want to do when I am able to sit and listen... but yeah, as a reviewer you are asking me to do just that... so let me say this; I found myself not worrying what was going on, or not going on with my music... I listened to the music. The N100H does that to you. I never felt a rush to interrogate the N100H as to what it was or was not doing to any file I was having it send to either the Playback Designs MPS-04, the DEQX PreMate +, or the PS Audio DirectStream DAC. It worked flawlessly with any and all, making my music rather enjoyable. And if you have heard what I listen to, then that could be, for you at least, an insurmountable achievement.

Of course what I am describing here is what my music sounds like... through the N100H. And for the most part, through everything else I have here in the system. I want a certain sound and so this is what my system does... for me. The N100H presents my music in a way that I like. That I want to hear. That I think it should sound like. The Aires does that too (used here with the SBooster power supply as opposed to the stock unit provided with the LE option). I find each to be quite beguiling, though ever so different, with neither being the preferred. And like I said, they both present my music how I want it to sound. How should it sound? No idea. Can't say. Does not apply to me with my music. Maybe to you, but not to me. Either the Aires or N100H can do it... and do it right. Way better right than my Mac could ever do it.

As a whole the N100H works. It works quite well as a purpose-built streamer to get your music from A to B. No, make that it works REALLY well. By eliminating the issues of noise and such found in any Mac or PC, the Aurender N100H gets you way more from your music than previously experienced. For sure, audiophile software will do a lot to make things better, as will a tweaked out computer, but it is not close. Too much happening that simply degrades the sound and performance. Sort of like me being asked to do 10 things at once with the distraction of a classroom of 32 noisy and active 12 year olds... remove the kids and ask me to do one thing... done. No problem. That is the Aurender N100H. Remove the crap and you hear into the music like never before.

At \$2699 it offers you 2TB of audiophile-built storage in a simple and elegant box one-box solution and it takes up half the space of most components giving you some extra breathing room on the shelf. I highly recommend the N100H. Much love. Now when I retire and have the time, let's get that AMM thing sorted out.