



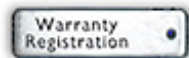
Product Review Information

D-1xe DVD CD Player

Love is in the Ayre -- Audiophile D-1

by: Joachim Pfeiffer

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Translation of the Ayre D-1 DVD/CD player review by Joachim Pfeiffer in Audiophile 2/2001.

One of the requirements of every DVD player is that it has to be able to play CDs. But to what level of excellence? With the D-1, Ayre's Charles Hansen has created a player whose goal is to be the reference for CD playback -- can this be true love instead of a marriage of convenience?

There is a new sensation to report, a real one, not an overblown one. We can discern a milestone, a true one, and not in this case one of those small mosaic tiles that fall so often on to the heap. The Ayre D-1 DVD/CD player is a component that is skating on the thin ice of the high end, and it is ready to overthrow prejudices and lay the basis for new judgements. With your permission, this review is one of the most important in my career, in every way comparable with the first description of a loudspeaker from Wilson Audio, or the homage to the first great transport/converter combination from Wadia.

What brought about this review can be told in a short tale. Not at all in an aggressive manner, instead rather cautiously, the German distributor of Ayre, Active Audio, asked me to try out the D-1 as a CD player, solely as an audiophile component. "Oh, God", I thought, this thing is after all a DVD player, and I expected the sound of compact discs to be somewhere between "OK, it's just bearable" and "fairly poor".

My enthusiasm was kept well under control -- nothing like "sweaty palms" were present when I brought the test piece into the familiar listening room. Via balanced connections (I started out with the Fadel-Art Reference One) I hooked up the player to the Cello Audio Suite preamplifier. From this point it was connected with NBS Monitor-I cables to the Accuphase M-2000 power amp, which kept the Dynaudio Evidence loudspeakers on a tight leash.

Providing tremendous competition for the listening tests, all at the expense of the Ayre, were the front-end components which normally grace my listening room at home. The role of CD reference was undertaken by the Accuphase DP-100/DC-100, one of the best digital separates to date, which also reproduces SACDs at the top level. A tough competitor for the 50% less expensive Ayre, but it soon became even tougher for this rare challenger. With the Goldmund Reference turntable equipped with the T3F tangential tone arm, and the

Clearaudio Insider Reference Gold attached to its ceramic head shell on the look-out for vinyl contact, a seductive machine stood in front of me, which put almost every source (especially those of every kind of digital toy) into perspective.

Before the first listening check I let the Ayre run for 24 hours, and on the rear panel I moved the switch from "Measure" to "Listen". (The D-1 operates in two modes; hiding behind them are two digital filter types. One represents the standard type of algorithm, the second, "Listen", on the other hand, works in a time-optimized manner).

The first CD, from a reader, a perfectly recorded CD-R with the cumbersome title "Live am Bühnenrand Posthofkeller Hattersheim", went into the innards of the D-1 and pricked up my ears. Aha, if this wasn't a good sign -- the Ayre accepted CD-Rs (with DVD players this is the exception rather than the rule), and off it went.

Hey, could it be that I found myself at a magic show? Then how could something be happening that really shouldn't be? Not only did the Ayre present an exceptionally stable soundstage, it moreover managed to recreate a mercilessly accurate, yet most delicately differentiated bass. And then the piano -- incredible how vividly the D-1 was reproducing it, how it understood to preserve the ingenuity of playing, breathing life into the jazz musicians.

As a check, I quickly let the disc spin in the Accuphase transport. But the expected counter-attack failed to occur. Indeed, the dream player from Japan controlled the event even more fully, but as a witness for the Ayre, being tuned to music and not tuned to high-end sound, the DP-100/DC-101 was wrong. My initial skepticism had waned very quickly, for the Ayre could recreate, for instance, the abyss-deep bass from one source to the next, and that the enormous resolution in the upper mids was identical from CD to CD. With every disc, the American dream player again placed me in a new venue, simply reflecting the product of the recording engineers.

In the next period (we are talking about long weeks) I preferred a long string of CDs to be played on the D-1 rather than on the Accuphase combo. Always when complex female voices were on the program, the D-1 overtook the components from Accuphase slightly. That is to say, the Ayre could not achieve the combo's precision in this peaceful contest, but was overtaking it with a natural blend in the voices. Subjectively, I had the impression I could listen to such CDs louder than normal - the stress factor got smaller. The D-1 costs DM 26,000 -- to me at this price you can't find even any CD-only players which can surpass it.

With the Ayre, I could keep on listening forever. But one day, while studying the German (very commendable!) manual, I was reminded to test the D-1 on its obligatory video function, which allows for the playback of CDs almost as an aside. Whether it was coincidence or fate, in any case the effect immediately occurred which turned my point of view completely upside down. More from technical curiosity -- sticking to the question, "Does the D-1 function as DVD player, anyway?" -- I moved a video monitor to the middle of the Dynaudio

Evidences, hooked up a video cable, but left the audio cabling to the Cello preamp.

"Scream 3" (eek! a horror flick!), which I handed over to the D-1, showed on the screen. Its picture seemed good, but just at the moment I was planning to disconnect the Cello and install my surround-sound equipment, something happened -- I realized I was listening to a stereo downmix from the soundtrack. My goodness, everything which has been learned through a long life of experience with hi-fi, and later with high-end equipment, had been confirmed.

With no home-cinema demonstration in the world could I hear a film in such an outstanding fashion. I was staring at a small screen, yet was amazed like a adolescent teenager encountering his first love. Finally, crazy sound effects came without booming stridency. I experienced a clarity of dialog that I had never ascribed to this format. Musical sequences came across as if, next to my system, a second system was built up and properly tuned the same way, with the its sole purpose to play music. After this learning period I also tried of course the multi-channel output, and as a result I'm not aware of any other DVD player which can compete with the D-1. But as it is well-known, the good things always have their enemy in the better things -- even much, much more emotionally exciting and moving was the stereo experiment.



Future proof: Besides CD and DVD-Video it may soon be possible to read DVD-Audio data as well - an upgrade will be offered if there is sufficient demand. What this might cost is still in the stars.

At the final judgement bar:

Quality Hifi *	Premier League **	Champion's League ***	Top High End ****	World Class *****	State of the Art *****

Extra comments:

Already as a CD player the D-1 exceeds all expectations. Wonderful

depth, lively timing, and not the least, a mighty illumination from the higher frequency regions ensure this newcomer a place at the top of world. Moreover, the D-1 is a DVD player too.

This last section is from an editorial by chief editor Mr. Joachim Pfeiffer in the same issue:

Fundamentally I have nothing against progress, but does this mean a decline for the lovers of joyful stereo sound from turntables and CD players? What is recommended for audiophiles with fine stereo equipment, when they also want to experience the benefits of DVD video? Should they add three more giant monoliths to their large floorstanding loudspeakers in a reference-standard attempt, or do they have to say good-bye to them and instead invest in something new?

"Buy new!", says the industry. "Keep them!", I would say to those who own ultimate loudspeakers. In this new DVD-dominated time, you can also participate with two-channel sound. A component like the DVD/CD player from Ayre (test in this issue) cuts the knot between the advocates of two-channel and home-theater enthusiasts. The Ayre D-1 isn't just able to reproduce CDs optimally, it also devoted itself to a rarely observed accuracy. In stereo mode, the sound of movies was more convincing and spectacular than anything else sold under the name of home theater than I have been allowed (or forced) to experience so far.

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