

ROON Nucleus and Nucleus+ Digital music delivered - effortlessly

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By Jeff Dorgay



We've been using ROON at *TONE* since the final alpha release, and it's a powerful solution. None of the other music delivery platforms come close – if you love music and the discovery of more music, it's the only way to go.

ROON allows you to combine music saved on your computer or NAS with whatever music you stream, seamlessly in an album art oriented browser. It's like going to the record store and flipping through the largest group of record bins on the planet. Minus the crabby record store person with a dominant attitude behind the counter making fun of your music choices. Want to find everyone your favorite artist has played with or was influenced by? ROON will take you there, leading you down path after path of music exploration.

One of ROON's strengths has always been the "Roon Radio" function, picking up after your playlist is finished, finding music that is remarkably similar to what you've been previously enjoying. That function is improved; the radio function goes beyond your collection, searching whatever streaming services you are accessing. Now, in addition to having the world's biggest record store at your fingertips, you have the world's biggest and most diverse radio station to feed you new music.

But capability requires power, and we haven't even talked about all the other cool stuff ROON does like stream over multiple zones, offer DSP room correction and EQ, as well as a few other goodies. We'll talk about that in its own article.

The more you ask of ROON, the more it requires from your host computer. ROON actually gives you the specs to build a purpose-built server, but this requires a ton of computing knowledge and that kind of defeats the purpose of such an intuitive platform, at least from my perspective. Even dedicating a Mac Mini strictly to ROON service and stripping it down as much as possible, begins to drag with an extensive music collection and multiple zones.

It's all about dedication

Thankfully, last year, ROON developed their own box, the Nucleus and Nucleus +. [You can read all the techie bits in their white paper here.](#) The ROON crew not only came up with a dedicated box that is dead quiet, compact, and looks super cool, they even wrote their own OS that is optimized for ROON and nothing else.

Both the \$1,399 and \$2,499 Nucleus and Nucleus+ look precisely the same. The standard machine is meant to handle music collections of "less than 100,000 tracks," and the Nucleus +, collections larger.



Staffer Rob Johnson went for the standard model, and me with over 12,000 CDs ripped, and quite a few thousand more indexed via Qobuz, and to a lesser extent, Tidal and Spotify went all out for the Nucleus +. I can say without reservation, as much as I love the ROON platform, it finally delivers on the promises 100% with a Nucleus +. When scrolling through a full screen of albums, searching, or when we have all three of our ROON zones going at once, the Nucleus + never hesitates to deliver what we need.

This is even more important to those of you streaming high res files, either via MQA with Tidal or uncompressed via Qobuz. Even when playing 24/192 files in the house, garage, and studio simultaneously, we could not detect any performance gap. You will, of course, need your Nucleus and NAS (if you have one) connected via Ethernet and the fastest router you can put your hands on.

Connectivity

While the Nucleus needs to be hardwired into your network, you can access it wirelessly from your phone, tablet, or laptop anywhere in your listening environment. Simply go into ROON and create whatever “zones” you need. Now that so many streaming DAC’s can be used as ROON endpoints, there’s no need to be a computer-based music listener, tethered to your DAC. Considering what some premium USB cables cost, you can almost buy a standard Nucleus for the same price!

If you aren’t utilizing a NAS for some of your music collection, you can still select a hard drive that is connected to a computer on your network or plug a USB drive directly into the back of the Nucleus. Finally, there is an HDMI output that can be utilized for output, and the sound quality will work in a pinch, but streaming via a ROON ready DAC is still the way to roll for optimum sound quality. Either way, it’s nice that ROON offers the option.

Back to square one

As I mentioned at the beginning of this review – there is no better way to catalog, store and play digital music back than ROON, and taking advantage of the extra horsepower that one of their Nucleus devices is nothing short of perfection. The ROON team has made digital music playback as effortless and glitch-free as it can be made.



Considering what a Mac Mini runs these days, the Nucleus is a bargain in comparison. Get your email on your phone and leave the music serving to ROON. You'll be glad you did.

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