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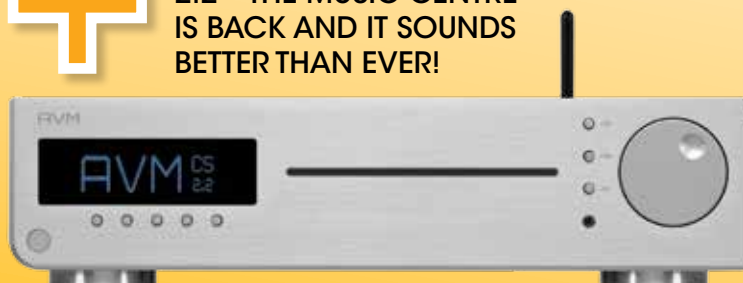
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## Resolution Audio Cantata Music Center CD/DAC/preamp and Cantata m100 mono amplifiers

by Alan Sircom

**W**hen first I proposed this test, I was keen to see the new Resolution Audio Cantata m100 amps, but thought we'd sideline the Cantata 'Music Center' CD-streaming-USB-DAC-preamp. The Cantata Music Center is far from old news, however. It's the perfect bridge between the old digital world and new, capable of playing CD

though its slot-load transport, network audio, USB audio, and – thanks to the clever Pont Neuf dongle – all points in between. And it will play these to 24-bit, 192kHz precision where relevant. It really is all digital; the front load CD player is joined by a USB, Toslink, S/PDIF coax, and an AES/EBU XLR input. And that's it. Vinyl? Unless it digitises its output, wake up and join the 21st Century. It has variable analogue balanced XLR and single-ended RCA sockets, which should be dimed (set at 100) when used as a source component. It's not possible to set the Cantata to fixed output, however.

Although the Cantata speaks UPnP like a native, the optional Pont Neuf ('New Bridge') is ideal for those wanting to use USB across a distance of more ▶

▶ than 5m. It plugs into a USB socket and provides a simple Ethernet connection designed specifically for audio use (up to 24-bit, 96kHz, without the need for third-party drivers for Mac or PC). If there is a wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi connection following the Pont Neuf, it's all good. Note that this is somewhat different in intent from standard USB-Ethernet ports in that it treats Ethernet like an enormous USB cable, allowing you to run your iTunes library direct from your computer over long distances, rather than supplement existing Ethernet connections for UPnP.

But it was the all-new Cantata m100s that really took our fancy. As you might have guessed from the name, it's a 100W per channel mono amplifier, not dissimilar in effect from the c50 stereo amplifier that has been in the range for some time, except it that removes the control amplifier section.

There's a little extra 4mm plug beneath the red and black terminals that might give some suggestion as to the DNA of the Cantata m100. Not many amplifier companies have promoted the idea of a signal ground at the speaker terminals, but one comes to mind: DNM Design. Jeff Kalt of Resolution Audio might know his way around an audio circuit, but he handed the op-amp/bi-polar Class AB design over to DNM's Dennis Moorecroft for optimum performance. Resolution Audio's distributor Redline also supplied a set of DNM interconnects

and loudspeaker cables for the purposes of the test. The plug sockets in the amplifiers only accept 4mm connectors, which might be an issue in some parts of the world. Resolution also supplies the amp with little jumper-connectors in its XLR sockets as standard, which must be kept in place when using RCAs. Simple answer; use RCA, as they sound better in this context.

All three amps come supplied in neat little wooden crates (another DNM touch), which are best retained for later use should the need arise. And all three boxes (four if you count the Pont Neuf) sport Resolution's distinctive style; slim, black-based with a solid (but not grotesquely thick or heavy) aluminium top panel, and a unique dimpled top pattern that looks surprisingly organic in the flesh. ▶



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### Cantata Music Center

#### Ethernet/USB DAC preamp

**Inputs:** S/PDIF: Coax RCA, Toslink, AES/EBU (to 24 bit, 192kHz)

**USB:** Asynchronous to 24bit, 192kHz

**Ethernet:** 100-BaseTX, 10/100Mbps/s, full duplex, UPnP renderer mode (to 24 bit, 192kHz)

**CD transport mechanism:** slot loading  
Ethernet link for iTunes (via optional Pont Neuf)

**Outputs:** 1x pair RCA single-ended, 1x pair XLR balanced

**Output voltage:** variable, 5.5Vrms max balanced, 2.5Vrms max single-ended

**Output impedance:** 100Ω

**Analogue attenuation:** 1dB steps from -70dB to -31dB. 0.5dB steps from -30dB to 0dB

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 42x5x22cm

**Weight:** 5kg

**Price:** £4,995

### Cantata m100 mono amplifiers

**Inputs:** 1x RCA single-ended, 1x XLR balanced

**Outputs:** 4mm banana sockets x3 (positive, negative, ground)

**Power output:** 100W into eight ohms  
THD+N and full output: <1%

**Input sensitivity:** 700mV for rated output  
Gain: +31.5dB

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 42x5x22cm

**Weight:** 5.5kg

**Price:** £6,990 per pair

**Manufactured by:** Resolution Audio

**URL:** [www.resolutionaudio.com](http://www.resolutionaudio.com)

**Distributed by:** Redline Distribution

**Tel:** +44(0)1268 858222

**URL:** [www.red-line.co.uk](http://www.red-line.co.uk)

▶ Then there is that elegant dot-matrix style front panel display, as seen on the Music Center. It manages to look elegant, and yet can be seen across a room, all the while not at eye-ball scorching levels.

It was a good thing the three devices showed up, because they work together superbly. The m100's by their very nature bestow more grip and authority on the sound compared to the c50, more than enough for most real-world users. Yes, those who think amplifiers are there to be crushed under the weight of a loudspeaker will think the amps lack sufficient low-impedance drive, and they have a point. But for most of us, this is an academic argument pushed by those who think amps don't sound good unless they come with a hernia.

The Cantata amps show strong similarity of tone and character. Tone is the key word here, but 'detailed' is another; incredibly, intensely detailed. These amps deliver tone with accuracy and even mojo. But it's the detail that will woo and wow you. These are information retrievers par excellence, and if a scintilla of musical data is on the disc or in the file, the Cantata Music Center will pick it up and the m100's will convey it with the least amount of reduction and the absolute maximum amount of speed of delivery.

Your ability to recognise this speed of delivery occurs about as quickly too, although initially it blind-sides the listener. There's so much information being sent to the listener, you become almost overwhelmed and start from a position of picking out one instrument in the mix for your attention. This is not necessarily the one front and centre. On 'Holes' by Mercury Rev [*Deserter's Songs*, V2], you're not drawn by Jonathan Donahue's depressed vocals, not even the use of the musical saw (although that's hard to avoid), but rather it's the strings that accompany that musical saw. It isn't an exceptional string part, and it isn't exceptionally well recorded, but it catches you unawares.

After a short while, your listening begins to open out more, and you start to notice that what applied to that one instrument actually applies to the lot of them, and you are just struggling to take it all in. Pretty soon, you can progress to complex, multi-tracked music like the *Innervisions* album by Stevie Wonder [Motown, CD], taking in the whole experience in one hit. And it really is an experience; on a good set of speakers, you are in front of those faders listening to every last part of that recording, good, bad, or indifferent. The image is as wide as the recording, the dynamics are unaffected by the electronics, and practically everything just moves out of the way to let the music through.

Standalone or as team players, the Resolution Audio equipment works well. The Cantata Music Center gives great digital in all its guises – from CD to iTunes to servers in one. And the m100 proves big, detailed sound need not come from amplifiers the size of car engines. This just sounds like music was always supposed to sound, and is highly recommended! +

