



high levels of internal contrast. The bass, too is just right, if arguably not quite as authoritative as the best of solid-state as implied earlier, but the mid and high frequencies are notably sweet and pure. This was clearly audible in a recently

“...this is a relaxed, easy sounding and genuinely musical player that nevertheless gives a broad, expansive stereo image...”

DAC_OP2 DAC UPGRADE

The DAC_OP2 upgrade board fits on risers attached in the main audio board of the player, just above the standard issue Crystal DAC which remains in place. It is a plug-and-play device and is self-configuring – there is no need to tell the player it's there, though it must be selected from the appropriate menu and it can be hot selected from the stop mode, without turning the player off or digging around inside.

The Wolfson Micro WM8740 is a high-performance stereo 24-bit/192kHz DA converter intended for use in CD and DVD players. In this application, Unison Research has gone further than the baseline processor, by using two stereo converters in a dual mono, dual differential circuit, with benefits to noise and dynamics as a result. It is proposed to design further converter boards for this player in the future.

acquired disc of Grieg, including the evocative music used as the soundtrack for the recent Joanna Lumley TV programme about the Northern Lights. Through the Unico CDE, the music, which when reproduced with less distinction can sound hackneyed, sang with an understated, but still very real passion that made the hairs on the back of the neck rise. There were similar experience on offer with other recordings, one very good example of which was the second movement and the vocal finale from the excellent Bernard Haitink/Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra version of Mahler's *4th symphony* (see review on page 27). In both cases and with a number of other recordings, too the sense of a living, breathing sound stage was palpable.

There's a feeling among many hi-fi devotees that valves often lead to a lazy attitude to design – which does many things superficially right, but when push comes to shove often doesn't work. This player is the opposite: a

design based on a clear understanding of what valves can and can't do and which doesn't fall for the usual pratfalls.

It is, in short, an excellent player, well built, well priced and one that plays music extremely well, with great purity, expressiveness and range, irrespective of its enabling technology. And it benefits from an unusually welcome degree of flexibility, thanks to the upgrade able DAC option from the factory plus its ability to act as a simple, high-quality D/A converter for external digital sources. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Elegant, uncontrived sound quality that makes the most of virtually all discs used, with no noticeable artifice. It also has flexible output options and easily upgradeable DACs.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Hint of softness in the bass extreme, though this is never taken to excess. It won't play SACD discs.
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
Here is a first-rate CD player from the Unison Research team, who have taken on board the lessons on the Unison CD and extrapolated the design to a higher level – at a price that allowing for the excellent build quality, is very reasonable.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

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