

Oppo Digital DV-970HD

Chris Martens

Universal Player

AUDIO REVIEW

Welcome to the Land of *Oppo-tunity*

Oppo Digital is slowly but surely earning a reputation for building products that, in car enthusiasts' parlance, are sleepers: that is, components that appear to be modest in price and appearance, but in fact turn out to be giant killers. I can think of no better example than Oppo's slim, \$149 DV-970HD universal player, which supports DVD-Audio/Video, SACD, HDCD, CD, Kodak Picture CD, and DivX discs, and provides HDMI outputs with 720p/1080i up-conversion. What really makes the Oppo special, though, is its

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displays that facilitate track-to-track navigation, but it can make

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unorthodox procedures for setting speaker distances and for controlling SACD playback. Strangely, when SACDs are first loaded into the player, traditional REV/FWD and SKIP BACK/FWD track controls remain inopera-

for counterintuitive operations when the player is used in audio systems without displays.

Sounds Good

The Oppo acquitted itself well with DVD-Audio, SACD, and CD

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Easy to Use

The DV-970HD's remote control and user interface proved easy to understand and use. In particular, I appreciated the way the Oppo lets me make on-the-fly audio and video adjustments during playback—a thoughtful touch.

tive until after disc playback has been initiated. To select and play a specific SACD track, then, you would first hit PLAY, and then use the SKIP BACK/FWD controls to advance to the track you wish

INSIDERS TIP:

Consider using high-quality interconnect cables in order to tap the DV-970HD's full performance potential.

to hear. This isn't a problem in home theater systems with

material, delivering well-balanced performance across all three formats—though DVD-Audio discs typically sounded the best of all. The DV-970HD sounded terrific on “Sunshine of Your Love” from Cream bassist Jack Bruce's *Shadows in the Air* [Silverline, DVD-A]. What wowed me was the way the Oppo caught the crying sound of guest artist Eric Clapton's Stratocaster guitar, as well as the deep, throaty snarl of Bruce's fretless Warwick Thumb bass guitar (I've



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never heard that instrument more convincingly rendered).

Overall, the Oppo sound is characterized by excellent top-to-bottom transparency and detail, tempered by a good measure of high-frequency smoothness. But the big news is that all these qualities are delivered with the sort of polish and panache rarely heard in sub-\$1000 players. As a result, the Oppo effortlessly reveals variations in production techniques from album to album, and song to song.

I put on Sheryl Crow's *The Globe Sessions* [A&M, multi-channel SACD], for example, and noted that the first track, "My Favorite Mistake," had the clean, tight, well-focused sound of a traditional studio recording. But the second track, "There Goes the Neighborhood," had an

altogether different sound that was huge, slightly raw, diffuse, and drenched in reverberation, creating the effect of hearing Crow and her band performing in a big garage. The point is that the Oppo made child's play of delineating the various textural and spatial differences



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between the tracks—something few inexpensive players do well.

Compared to more expensive players such as NAD's M55, the DV-970HD sounds a bit less smooth in the treble region, a little less full-bodied and three-dimensional, and produces bass that sometimes seems too lean. But when you consider that the DV-970HD costs less than one tenth what the NAD does, and that it sounds more like the NAD than not, the Oppo's minor shortcomings become easy to overlook.

Looks Good

While sound quality may be the DV-970HD's strong suit, it is no slouch in the video department. I put the player through its paces on films and with the Silicon Optix *HQV Benchmark* disc, and in both cases observed optimal performance through the Oppo's HDMI outputs with upscaling set for 1080i (the TPV test display is a 1080p-capable RPTV). Noise was minimal, detail was very good, and performance on various cadences (video, film, anime, etc.) was fine. The

only areas where the Oppo was decent but not great were on certain tests for jaggies and for motion-adaptive noise reduction. But even there the Oppo handily outperformed many mid-priced players I've recently tested.

One discovery I made was that the Oppo's SHARPNESS control was genuinely useful—not garish as

FACTOID!

Oppo Digital releases periodic firmware updates for its players to correct small bugs or, in some instances, to add (or refine) features and functions.

such controls often tend to be. When I watched *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* with the Oppo's SHARPNESS control set to SHARP, fine details became so clear that they almost reminded me of the way HD DVD material appears.

Is Good

The bottom line is that the Oppo DV-970HD, imperfections and all, is by far the best low-priced universal player I've heard or seen. It does so much, so well, for so little, that it will make many higher-priced players seem like underachievers by comparison. **TPV**

The Last Word



- Open, transparent sound; balanced performance across all audio formats
- Good video performance: 1080i upconversion that works
- Good remote and user interface
- Outstanding value



- Counterintuitive SACD playback controls
- Bass too lean; treble not as smooth as the best
- Gives most mid-priced players inferiority complexes

Specifications

- Formats: DVD-Audio/Video, SACD, HDCD, CD, Kodak Picture CD, DivX, CD-R/RW, DVD±R/RW, DVD+R DL
- Audio outputs: (1) 5.1-channel analog audio, (1) stereo analog audio, (2) digital audio (one optical, one coaxial)
- Video outputs: (1) composite video, (1) S-video, (1) component video, (1) HDMI
- Other inputs/outputs: Flash memory card reader, USB
- Dimensions: 16 1/2" x 10" x 1 5/8"
- Weight: 4.85 lbs.

Manufacturer Information

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