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Oppo Digital BDP-83 Blu-ray Player

While the major electronics manufacturers have all but abandoned the market for high-priced DVD-only players, Oppo Digital has been successfully manufacturing high-quality DVD/SACD players for the past several years. What's more, they sell their players for only a few hundred dollars, and have received unanimous accolades for them.

Now, as the high-end audio/video market quickly moves toward Blu-ray Disc as the dominant physical format, specialty manufacturers are scrambling to release BD players. With mass-market manufacturers now offering BD players for as little as a couple hundred dollars, the pressure was on Oppo to offer a BD player that would sustain its reputation of offering state-of-the-art A/V performance at a reasonable price.

They seem to have achieved this with the BDP-83. Not only does it offer all the features expected in a current BD player, it ups the ante with exceptional build quality and top-of-the-line VRS video processing by Anchor Bay. It also continues Oppo's support of both SACD and DVD-Audio playback, a feature valued by many A/V enthusiasts. And the price for all this is an almost unbelievably low \$499.

Description

The BDP-83 is a well-built, full-size A/V component. There is a refreshing lack of plastic in its construction, and it weighs a relatively hefty 11.2 pounds. The sturdy metal front panel sports a large, blue, easy-to-read LED display, Power and Eject buttons, and playback and navigation controls. A USB 2.0 port with plastic cover is also included. Around back are 7.1-channel analog audio outputs, a separate set of dedicated two-channel analog audio outputs, and optical and coaxial digital audio outputs. Analog video connections consist of composite and component outputs, but no S-video. There are also a single HDMI 1.3 output, an Ethernet jack, another USB 2.0 port, IR In/Out ports, and an IEC connector.

Audiophiles will be pleased to note that a separate, high-quality, two-channel Cirrus CS4398 DAC is used for the stereo outputs; the multichannel outputs use an eight-channel CS4382A DAC. The main switching power supply is further filtered and regulated by second-stage linear power regulators, which Oppo claims improves the player's audio performance.

Some of the BDP-83's highlights include Anchor Bay's VRS video processing, normally found only in high-end players and standalone video processors, as well as support for SACD and DVD-A. The latter includes allowing DSD to be converted to PCM, or sent as an unaltered DSD bitstream via HDMI. The BDP-83 even decodes HDCDs.

Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio can be sent as bitstream, or converted to

and offers all the necessary and expected adjustments for controlling both picture and sound. The ABT2010 VRS chipset used in the BDP-83 is one of the best video-processing systems currently available. It includes 10-bit precision deinterlacing and video scaling, noise reduction, and other picture-enhancing technologies. My only complaint is that the crossover frequency in the BDP-83's bass-management settings is fixed at 80Hz and is not adjustable.

The remote control is full-sized and a little square and angular, but well laid out, with large, easy-to-read, backlit buttons. It's one of the nicest remotes I've seen included with such a low-priced component. The player comes wrapped in an attractive cloth bag and well packaged in a sturdy box. An HDMI cable is included, as well as Spears & Munsil's *High Definition Benchmark: Blu-ray Edition* setup disc.

The BDP-83's many features are too numerous to list here, but the well-written instruction manual provides a comprehensive overview of the player's

operation and can be downloaded from Oppo's website.

Setup was straightforward. The menu system is refreshingly clean and professional looking, and an improvement on the menus in Oppo's SD DVD players. While the adjustment options for the video settings aren't as comprehensive as you might find on a good surround processor, I think most users will find them more than adequate.

Performance

Before the BDP-83's official launch, during what Oppo calls their Early Adopter Program, they had already released several revisions of the player's firmware. Although I didn't test every possible setup configuration and playback method, I experienced no



PCM via HDMI. The VRS video processing provides scaling up to 1080p with 24fps output, as well as a Source Direct mode for those who prefer to use a high-quality outboard video processor. The BDP-83 can convert between PAL and NTSC video formats, but unlike Oppo's SD DVD players, it reportedly cannot be made region-free. It also supports a multitude of optical disc and multimedia file formats, including AVCHD and MKV. The USB 2.0 ports support only drives formatted with FAT32, *not* NTFS. This limits to 4GB the maximum size of files that can be played back through storage devices attached to the USB ports.

The BDP-83 is BD-ROM Profile 2.0 (BD-Live) compliant, has 1GB of internal memory,



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operational problems while using the June 26, 2009 version of the firmware. The BDP-83 loaded discs quickly and played them flawlessly, and was able to play AVCHD DVDs and high-definition MKV and AVI files from both optical discs and USB drives.

The BDP-83's picture quality through its HDMI connection was absolutely stunning. The blacks in the night scenes of *The Dark Knight* on BD were as black as I have ever seen on my system. *Baraka*, shot in 70mm, then mastered in 8K digital video prior to being transferred to BD, looked absolutely filmlike — from the pristine natural beauty of tropical rainforests to the grime and squalor of South American slums, every detail and nuance of picture quality was visible. Not only was *Baraka* eye-popping through the BDP-83, but the natural lighting and panoramic shots were some of the most realistic cinematography I've ever seen.

Standard-definition DVDs scaled up to 1080p also looked superb through the BDP-83. The challenging flyover scene of Rome and the Colosseum in chapter 12 of *Gladiator* was smooth and free of flicker. Even the minute gold accents on the ornate Roman costumes were reproduced without difficulty. CG animation, as in the delightful *WALL-E*, looked impressive when played from DVD through the BDP-83. Compared to the BD edition, the picture was a little soft and the colors weren't as vibrant, but it was still extremely watchable. If, like me, you have a lot of SD DVDs, the BDP-83 will help you make the most of your collection.

The BDP-83 can transcode to PCM high-resolution audio formats such as Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD MA, and even SACD, for transmission via HDMI — which was primarily how I used it with my Anthem Statement D2 A/V processor. *Baraka* may be the best-looking Blu-ray Disc I've seen on my system, but the Trondheim Solistene's *Divertimenti* (Blu-ray, 2L Records 2L50SABD) is perhaps the best-sounding recording I own. The sound of strings on this recording was sweet, with none of the harshness often associated with recorded violins. Whether it was a gentle

pizzicato or a massive crescendo, the BDP-83 reproduced this wonderful disc with a great sense of the sound of a live orchestra.

High-resolution movie soundtracks on Blu-ray were equally impressive. In uncompressed PCM, Nancy Sinatra's sultry voice under the opening credits of *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* on BD was alluring. The sound was clean, with amazingly tight bass, in chapter 12, "Showdown at House of Blue Leaves." Bass abounds on this disc, but there was little if any bloat in the sound. In the next chapter, Al Hirt's trumpet on *The Green Hornet* theme is brassy and bold and, along with the percussion, imaged ultraprecisely. During the Bride's duel with O-Ren, the clashing of swords was loud and ringing but not grating, and stunningly contrasted with the absolute silence of several pauses in the swordplay.

SACDs and DVD-As also sounded exceptional through the BDP-83. Sent via HDMI to the Statement D2, the sound was difficult to fault. Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms: 20th Anniversary Edition* (SACD/CD, Universal 602498714980) sounded smooth and extended. The DVD-A side of Talking Heads' *Speaking in Tongues* (DualDisc, Warner Bros. 08122 76453 2 8) was punchy, with plenty of bass slam, and the funky 360-degree effects on "Girlfriend Is Better" sounded wonderfully dynamic and clean. David Byrne's anxious voice was placed squarely between the front speakers, while various deliberately discordant synthesized sounds emanated from the surrounds.

The performance of the BDP-83 through its analog outputs, especially its dedicated two-channel outputs, was also excellent. Willie Nelson's *Stardust* (SACD/CD, Columbia 074646594667) sounded both liquid and airy. Most inexpensive SACD and DVD-A players can play back these hi-rez discs with great detail, but lack the smoothness and dimensionality of more expensive players. In that regard, the BDP-83 reminded me more of a high-quality audio player than of a budget-priced A/V player. The opening guitar chords of "Stardust" resonated as if I were listening to them in a large space, and

Nelson's voice was silky and inviting.

Even standard CDs, such as Mark Knopfler's *Kill to Get Crimson* (Mercury 1724910), sounded wonderful. All of the bass was present yet tight. The midrange was refreshingly vibrant and clean, which made Knopfler's voice startlingly powerful on tracks such as "Madame Geneva's," and his acoustic guitar sparkled on "In the Sky."

If I hadn't known better, I would have thought I was listening to a high-quality, mid-priced CD or SACD player.

Comparison

Comparison? You're kidding, right? There simply *isn't* anything else on the market at or anywhere near \$500 that offers Blu-ray and SACD and DVD-Audio playback and state-of-the-art video processing. Marantz and Denon make massively built, statement Blu-ray players that play SACDs and DVD-As, but they cost nine to 12 times as much as the BDP-83. Marantz has just announced a less expensive, high-end, universal BD player that should retail for \$2200, and early models of the Sony PlayStation 3 (\$499-\$599) played SACDs (though current models do not). At its price, the Oppo BDP-83 has little, if any, competition.

I found the Anchor Bay VRS video processing in the BDP-83 to be essentially equivalent to the Gennum VXP processing built into the Anthem Statement D2 processor — which costs \$7499. The upscaling and deinterlacing of SD DVDs by both components were superb. Pictures were smooth if a little soft, but with very little noise. I've come to expect this type of performance when watching DVDs, and now find it essential whenever watching SD material on a large HD display. This level of video processing, considered absolutely cutting-edge only a few years ago, has found its way into a few players and video processors costing under \$1000 — and now, with the BDP-83, into one for under \$500.

The BDP-83's sound quality through its analog outputs was surprisingly good for a



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\$500 player. In fact, the BDP-83 was clearly superior to Oppo's own DV-970HD (\$149), a decent CD and hi-rez audio player. Hi-rez SACDs and DVD-As that sounded good through the DV-970HD sounded exceptional through the BDP-83. The BDP-83 simply had a more balanced sound from top to bottom, with a smoothness that didn't sacrifice detail. Whether it was relatively straightforward acoustic albums such as Diana Krall's *Girl in the Other Room* (SACD/CD, Universal 602498620465), or more boisterous music, such as Talking Heads' *Speaking in Tongues*, voices sounded more lifelike through the BDP-83, which was also able to sort out complex arrangements with more precise imaging. The same could be said of "Red

Book" CDs, which the BDP-83 reproduced with a solid and coherent quality.

Ultimately, I still preferred the sound of my system with signals processed by the internal DACs of the Anthem Statement D2 — but the sound of the BDP-83's analog outputs wasn't far behind.

Conclusion

I can't think of another Blu-ray player at anywhere near its price that I would rather have in my system than the Oppo Digital BDP-83. It features excellent audio and video performance, state-of-the-art video processing, above-average build quality, and playback of both SACD and DVD-Audio.

For only a couple of hundred dollars more than the price of an entry-level Blu-ray player from a mass-market manufacturer, Oppo offers a truly reference-quality player. The BDP-83 deserves a Reviewers' Choice recommendation. For anyone looking for a top-notch Blu-ray player at a reasonable price, it's an absolute no-brainer.

...Roger Kanno
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DESCRIPTION

Model: BDP-83

Price: \$499 USD

Dimensions: 16.9"W x 3"H x 13.25"D

Weight: 11.2 pounds

Warranty: One year parts and labor.

FEATURES

Blu-ray Profile 2.0 with 1GB internal memory

Support for most optical disc and A/V file formats, including SACD, DVD-Audio, AVCHD, MKV, AVI, HDCD

Anchor Bay VRS video processing

Onboard decoding/transcoding or bitstream output of Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD MA, and SACD

Optimized, separate two-channel stereo analog outputs with dedicated Cirrus CS4398 DAC

PAL and NTSC compatible

Firmware updates via Ethernet, optical disc, or USB

Backlit remote control

Includes HDMI cable and Spears & Munsil's *High Definition Benchmark: Blu-ray Edition* setup disc



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REVIEW SYSTEM

Speakers	Paradigm Reference Signature S8 (mains), Paradigm Reference Signature C3 (center), Paradigm Reference Servo-15 v.2 (2 subwoofers), Mirage Omni 260 (surrounds)
A/V processor	Anthem Statement D2
Amplifiers	Bel Canto e.One REF1000 and eVo6
Sources	Oppo DV-970HD SACD/CD/DVD-A/V player, Sony PlayStation 3, Trends Audio UD-10.1 USB converter
Cables	Analysis Plus, DH Labs, Essential Sound Products
Surge suppressor	ZeroSurge 1MOD15WI
Display device	JVC HD-56FC97 RPTV

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