



## EQUIPMENT REVIEW

December 2009

### NAD Classic Series C 565BEE CD Player



In October, I reviewed Zandén Audio Systems' ultra-expensive [2500S CD player](#) (\$22,000 USD). If you've read some of the comments I've made in the last few years about the future of CD playback, you might find it strange that I'm now reviewing my *second* CD player in a single year. CD sales have long been waning, and when I reviewed Slim Devices' (now Logitech) Transporter network music player in late 2006 and experienced firsthand what a computer-based source for digital recordings could do, I knew the handwriting was on the wall for the Compact Disc and its players, even for audiophiles.

But the CD is dying a *slow* death. And despite what some feel about the ability of SACD (now relegated to niche status) and audio-only Blu-ray Disc to encode high-resolution sound in two or more channels, no new physical medium is going to supplant the CD. Computer-based audio is where everything is heading.

That doesn't mean we all should immediately scrap or sell our CD players. Nor does it mean that we might not need another player, particularly if the price is right. The Compact Disc has been the dominant physical music format for almost 30 years now; it's likely to be quite a few more years before everyone considers it obsolete. A good CD player bought today can still be considered a wise purchase because it's a convenient way to play what discs are and will be available. Not everyone wants to rip their entire music collection to a computer just to play some music.

Enter the C 565BEE (\$799), the top model in NAD's very reasonably priced Classic Series of CD players. For a CD player, it's a lot more interesting than you might think.

#### Description

The Classic C 565BEE measures 17"W x 3.5"H x 11.5"D, including connectors and feet, and weighs 11.5 pounds. My experience with some past NAD components has been that, while generally inexpensive, they looked and felt *too* cheap -- with flimsy chassis, wobbly knobs, and buttons that seemed ready to fall off. The C 565BEE is a good bit better than that, with a substantial-enough chassis, excellent fit'n'finish, and sturdy-feeling buttons and connectors.

The rear panel has one pair of single-ended RCA analog outputs, an optical digital input, one optical and one coaxial digital output, a 12V trigger input, an IR (infrared) remote input, an RS-232 port, and a two-prong mains receptacle for the basic black power cord.

The C 565BEE is chock full of features. At its heart are 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson DAC chips in what NAD calls a "dual-differential" configuration, and a transport that reads CD, CD-R, and CD-RW discs. In addition to 16-bit/44.1kHz "Red Book" CDs, the C 565BEE can decode MP3 and WMA files (up to 320kbps) stored on a CD-R, as well as MP3 and WMA files (again up to 320kbps) stored on a FAT-formatted storage device hooked up to the USB port on the NAD's front panel. The C 565BEE lets you browse through up to 128 folders and eight subfolder levels on the attached device using the



**Category: Budget Leader**



#### Associated Equipment

**Speakers** -- Revel Ultima Salon2, Magico V2, PSB Synchrony One, Mirage OMD-28

**Preamplifiers** -- Blue Circle Audio BC3000 Mk.II, Benchmark Media DAC1 HDR D/A converter, Anthem Statement D2v

**Power amplifiers** -- Blue Circle Audio BC204, Axiom Audio A1400-8

**Integrated amplifiers** -- Classé Audio CAP-2100, Zandén Audio Systems Model 600

**Digital sources** -- Simaudio Moon Evolution SuperNova CD player; Oppo Digital DV-980H DVD player; Benchmark Media DAC1 HDR, Stello DA220 Mk.II, Blue Circle Audio BC501 D/A converters

**Speaker cables** -- DH Labs Silver Sonic Q-10 Signature, Siltech Classic Anniversary

**Analog interconnects** -- Nirvana Audio S-L, Nordost Quattro Fil, Siltech Classic Anniversary

**Digital interconnects** -- Nirvana Audio Transmission Digital, i2Digital

front-panel display and controls or its remote control.

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The USB port is handy for rippers of MP3 and WMA files (I'm not one, which is why I didn't use this feature), but the one thing I really wish the C 565BEE could do is provide support for WAV, Apple Lossless, or FLAC files at 16/44.1 or higher resolution. If it could, this player would be a game-changing device for audiophiles whose music is already stored in a lossless, CD-resolution format; it would basically make the C 565BEE an audiophile-grade music server. Unfortunately, the NAD doesn't do that -- and that's the only knock I have against it.

The C 565BEE's front panel is unique in lacking the usual Play, Pause, and Track Skip buttons. These functions are instead handled by the large Play/Pause/Skip knob on the right, just above the USB port. You skip through tracks by turning the knob left or right, and Pause or Play by pushing it straight in. Clever.

The fluorescent display is bright enough to be read from across the room. Under it are eight pushbuttons; from left to right, these are: Stop/Open, for stopping play as well as opening and closing the disc drawer; Source, for selecting the playback device (transport, optical digital input, or USB port); SRC, which activates the sample-rate converter and toggles between the native sampling rate of the recording being played, or upsamples it to 24/96 or 24/192; Random, equivalent to Shuffle play of the tracks from the selected source; Repeat, to program disc tracks (CD) or files and/or folders (via USB) to play repeatedly; Display, which toggles to show different types of playback information, depending on the source; and Scan Back and Scan Forward, to search within the track or file being played.

The remote control basically duplicates the front panel, but adds one particularly relevant option: Filter. This button lets you select among five digital filters, labeled Filter 1 through 5, each of which has its own sonic signature based on how it handles group delay, ripple, and stopband characteristics. Along with the choices of upsampling, these filters make possible some interesting fine-tuning of the NAD's sound (see below).

Another thing I particularly like is how the C 565BEE is turned on and off. As long as it's plugged in, the player is always powered up and, therefore, warmed up; to ready it for day-to-day use, you press the Standby button, at the far left of the front panel. But if a disc is already loaded in the drawer, you don't have to first press Standby -- the C 565BEE will come to life and start playing the disc as soon as you press Play. Likewise, pressing Stop/Open will open the drawer without your having to first press Standby. Finally, the C 565BEE automatically goes into Standby mode when it's been left idle for ten minutes -- handy if you don't like walking up to the player and pushing the button to turn it off for the day, or if you doze off while listening to music.

One-button startup is a small thing, and NAD isn't the only company to offer it. But not all CD players do this, and it's little things like this that make using the C 565BEE that much easier and more enjoyable to use. Furthermore, the number of features and the clever way some of the button functions have been conceived indicate to me that NAD is constantly looking for ways to improve their players, even in CD's twilight years. More important, they've found ways to greatly improve sound quality, as you'll read about below.



## Sound

I'm not sure I knew exactly what to expect when I inserted the C 565BEE in my system, but I sure didn't expect it to sound much like my reference CD player, a Simaudio Moon Evolution SuperNova (\$6500). The SuperNova is of reference grade for both its build (massive, all-metal construction) and its sound -- the latter is basically beyond criticism. These two players weren't similar in how they were built but in how they sounded -- when I closed my eyes and listened, I could swear that they weren't just siblings, but identical twins.

The C 565BEE had the same warmth, richness, and presence as the 'Nova -- qualities that give all music played through the Simaudio a feeling of tangible weight. Voices were rich and present, but without any syrupy character or hazing-over of detail. Willie Nelson's voice on *Stardust* (CD, Columbia CK 35305) hung perfectly between my speakers, isolated in space, with sound that was deeply textured and present. It sounded *really* real. The NAD's bass was deep and tight, and with that warmth and presence of the mids, drums had wallop and weight, and an overall sense of robustness that translated into a very realistic, natural sound.

As impressed as I was by the NAD's rich, present sound, I was blown away by the refinement of its high frequencies -- always the Achilles' heel of lower-priced CD players and DACs. Most often, inexpensive CD players make cymbals sound splashy, and the top end of acoustic guitars exceedingly brittle. My Oppo Digital DV-980H DVD player sold for under \$200 when available, and its reproduction of CDs is decent enough for the money -- but that doesn't mean it sounds good, period. Through a hi-rez system such as mine, the Oppo sounds splashy and brittle, and it's fatiguing to listen to for any length of time.

The C 565BEE had not one of those objectionable qualities. In fact, with most recordings, the C 565BEE's HF refinement was neck-and-neck with the SuperNova's -- astonishing, given that it costs less than one-eighth as much. Cymbals were ultraclean, guitar was never brittle, and, provided a recording contained such information in the first place, the NAD's re-creations of "air" -- the sense of physical space surrounding an instrument or voice -- and HF detail were beyond reproach. This level of refinement was why I didn't hesitate to include the C 565BEE in my reference system when I reviewed Revel's amazing [Ultima Salon2 speakers](#) (\$22,000/pair). The player might cost only \$799, but it's suitable for use in systems that approach the state of the art.

I used my trusty ol' reference CDs to test the NAD's soundstaging and imaging: Ennio Morricone's choral-based score for the film *The Mission* (Virgin CDV2402), and Ani DiFranco's mainly acoustic *Up Up Up Up Up Up* (Righteous Babe RBR013-D). With *The Mission*, I listen to the delineation of the choral voices, to hear if they're clearly separated, as well as to the expansiveness of the soundstage, from left to right and from front to back. That stage should sound *big*, and through the C 565BEE it did. The NAD conveyed a lot of space, allowing the chorus to fill the front half of my large room -- the width and depth were outstanding. Within that stage, individual voices, and their positions relative to other voices, were easy to discern. I haven't heard any CD player, at any price, do substantially better than the C 565BEE did in this regard.

Playing the very beginning of "Everest," track 7 on *Up Up Up Up Up Up*, I listen to the positioning of the male voice counting "one, two, three, four." The voice should be centered in the stage but recessed, surrounded by a certain amount of ambience. Throughout the rest of the track, DiFranco's voice should be placed very close to but not touching the left speaker, and "housed" in a tightly focused space about 3' behind the plane described by the speaker baffles. Those unfamiliar with this recording are usually surprised by where DiFranco's voice is positioned in the mix, but, deliberate or not, that's where it is. These voices were not only correctly positioned, the spatial cues around them were extremely easy to hear, and the space around each sounded exactly right. For me to be able to hear so well *into* recordings indicated that the NAD C 565BEE was a CD player of very high resolution.

In fact, the C 565BEE's level of refinement and its ability to extract detail so impressed me that I took some extra time to switch back and forth between it and the SuperNova, to hear precisely how close their performances were, and if there were any areas in which the NAD might actually surpass the Sim. To do so, I relied exclusively on the highly resolving, full-range Revel Ultima Salon2s to ensure I was hearing the full audioband -- a decision that proved vital.

The two players' high-frequency detail and refinement were so close that I'd call it a draw -- high praise for the NAD. When I played discs that don't have much truly deep-bass content -- e.g., most pop and rock recordings, which shelve off at 50 or 60Hz -- it was basically another draw. At the very low end of the audioband, the SuperNova edged ahead with a slightly more weighty and impactful sound; but the two players were still very close. And this slight difference was audible only with certain recordings, such as Ola Gjeilo's *Stone Rose* (SACD/CD, 2L 2L48SACD), which effectively captures the low end of an acoustic piano; and the Cowboy Junkies' *The Trinity Session* (CD, RCA 8568-2-R), whose opening track, "Mining for Gold," pressurizes the room. With these, the SuperNova eked out a touch more grunt and heft, to sound more powerful overall. This was where the Revels came in: If I'd been using smaller, less-than-full-range speakers, I probably wouldn't have been able to hear much difference at all.

The C 565BEE had a gorgeous richness and presence in the mids that made voices sound tangible and real; the 'Nova has basically the same character -- then ups it with just a bit more of the same. But that little bit more results in great presence, which makes for a slightly bolder, more realistic sound. The players' overall characters may be almost the same, but even identical twins reveal tiny differences over time; in this pairing, the 'Nova had just a bit more robustness and richness -- it was the twin with just a little more charisma.

Most remarkable, perhaps, was the level of detail the C 565BEE revealed, something I would never have expected from something costing under a grand. I'd received for review a Benchmark Media Systems DAC1 HDR D/A converter (\$1895), and was listening to it hooked up (via an i2Digital X-60 digital link) to the transport section of the Simaudio SuperNova. In terms of detail, the \$799 C 565BEE equaled that \$8395 combination. Going head to head with the SuperNova revealed that the C 565BEE got awfully close, falling just a bit short on only the smallest things. For instance, the SuperNova makes those tiny spatial cues just a little bit easier to hear; in DiFranco's "Everest," the space around the male speaking voice extended slightly more, and the edges of the room were easier to hear. And the expansive soundstages throughout *The Mission* expanded by just a percentage point or two.

To make a credible CD player for under \$1000 that invites few criticisms is impressive. To create something at that price that, across the board, can hang with something that's close to the state of the art is extraordinary -- and that's what NAD has created in the C 565BEE. The player comes within inches of the very best, at a fraction of the cost.

## Digital doodads

The two features of the C 565BEE I haven't yet touched on are the user-adjustable upsampling and digital filters. Neither drastically changed the player's sound, and thus don't affect anything I've said so far. Instead, they made very subtle changes to the sound that will likely have you picking one setting for some types of music, and another for other types.

I experienced the same thing with the NAD's upsampling options as I did with other components offering this feature: no upsampling offers a starker, more immediate sound, and as I moved up from 16-bit/44.1kHz to 24/96 and then to 24/192, I heard a touch more high-frequency emphasis, which resulted in an increased sense of spaciousness -- but with a slight loss of the immediacy provided by *no* upsampling. There was one more thing: Depending on the recording, the HF emphasis and increased spaciousness could sound a touch like a swirly DSP hall sound that was sometimes distracting. When fellow reviewer Philip Beaudette listened, he heard the same thing, and described it as a slight "ringing." Some people might like it because it makes the C 565BEE sound almost "golden." Not I -- most of the time, I left the upsampling off.

The five digital filter options proved more interesting. I heard far greater differences among these settings with a straight 16/44.1 datastream than when upsampling the same to 24/96 or 24/192. My preferred settings were in order of preference: Filter 2, described in the manual as "Medium rolloff filter that has high group delay, low ripple, and medium stopband characteristics"; Filter 1 ("Slow rolloff filter that has low group delay, low ripple and wide stopband characteristics"); and Filter 5 ("Medium rolloff filter that has lower group delay and wider stopband characteristics"). Filter 1 gave the starkest, most immediate presentation. Filter 2 was just a touch more subdued, imparting a hint of ease that worked well with recordings that had some inherent bite or edge. Filter 2 also sounded more spacious -- similar to what upsampling provided, but without the swirliness. Filters 3 and 4 were very similar to Filter 2, and were often indistinguishable from each other with a lot of the music I was listening to. Because Filter 5 sounded like a combination of attributes of Filters 1 and 2, you'd think it would be the one I used most often, but that wasn't the case. Instead, Filter 5 sounded more like a compromise between 1 and 2. If I wanted what Filter 1 was doing, I would use that; likewise for Filter 2.

In short, each filter offers something subtly different; which one you'll prefer will be dictated by the recording and your personal taste. I mostly listened to the C 565BEE with the upsampling off and Filter 2 engaged, but I can easily imagine someone else using a different combination of settings.

## Conclusion



Although I've now reviewed two CD players in 2009, I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't review one in 2010 -- or ever again. CD playback is dying out; from here on, computer-based audio at higher resolutions is likely to be the focus of my reviews of digital source components.

That said, the NAD Classic Series C 565BEE is about as good as any to be the subject of my final CD-player review. It's well built, rich in features, and easy to use. Most important for audiophiles, it delivers sound quality that approaches that produced by the very best players on the market, and for only \$799. That's no insignificant thing -- the world doesn't need a cost-no-object player for a dying music format; it needs a player that will provide cutting-edge performance for a budget price. In short, it needs the C 565BEE.

The NAD Classic Series C 565BEE is a CD player that's close to the state of the art while being something regular people can afford. For many, it will be the last great CD player they'll ever need to buy; in fact, it's so good it might tempt even those who are convinced that they've already bought their last CD player. For so many reasons, very highly recommended.

. . . *Doug Schneider*  
[das@soundstage.com](mailto:das@soundstage.com)

**NAD Classic Series C 565BEE CD Player**  
**Price: \$799 USD.**  
**Warranty: Two years parts and labor.**

NAD Electronics International  
633 Granite Court  
Pickering, Ontario L1W 3K1  
Canada

Phone: (905) 831-6555

Website: [www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com)