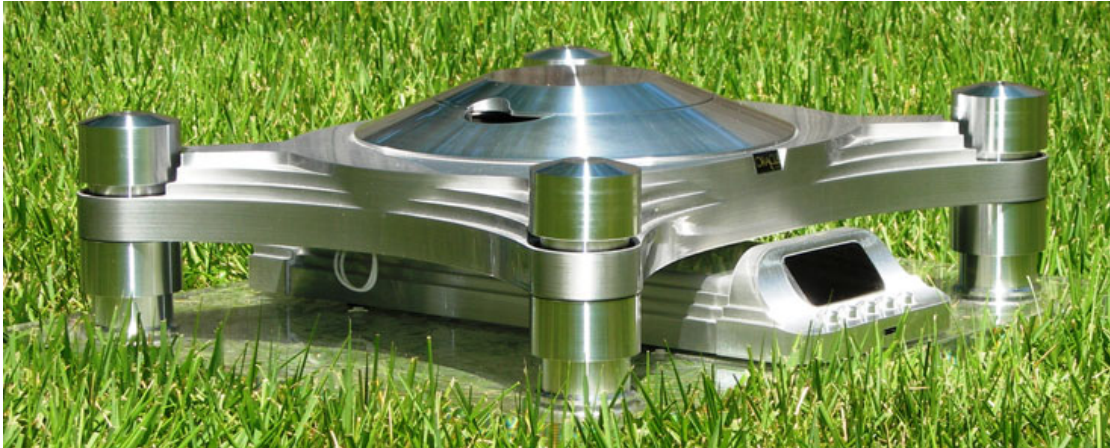


## The Oracle CD 2500: A Prophecy

Ed Momkus

August, 2006



### Specifications:

**Type:** CD player/transport

**Resolution:** 24 Bits

**Mechanism:** Philips CDPPro

**D to A Converter:** Crystal CS4390, 24-bit/96kHz Delta-Sigma

**Oversampling:** 128x

Signal to Noise Ratio: 115dB

Dynamic Range: 106dB

Outputs: RCA-Analog (1 pair, Cardas Rhodium plated RCA), BNC-digital

### Manufacturer:

Oracle Audio Technologies

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Sherbrooke, Quebec, J1N 2P3

Canada

Tel: 819-864-0480

Fax: 819-864-9641

URL: [www.oracle-audio.com](http://www.oracle-audio.com)

Email: [info@oracle-audio.com](mailto:info@oracle-audio.com)

Load Impedance: 5k $\Omega$  min., 50k $\Omega$  max. (Analog), 75 $\Omega$  (Digital)

Output Impedance: < 100 $\Omega$  (Analog), 75 $\Omega$  (Digital)

Output Level: 2.4 Volts (Analog), 0.5 Volts, Peak to Peak @75 $\Omega$  load (Digital)

**MSRP:** \$9,380

You youngsters out there may think that Oracle is the name of a database management system, and the name of the company that owns and sells it. You older (and, I hope, wiser) folks know that an "oracle" is an entity that is a source of wise counsel or prophecy, usually supernatural in nature. In Greek mythology, prophesies or advice often came from the gods, as spoken through another object or life-form. In classical Greece, the pre-eminent oracle operated at the temple of Apollo at Delpi, and was named Pythia -ever hear anyone comment that someone made a "pithy" statement? This oracle exerted

considerable influence throughout Hellenic culture, and the Greeks consulted her prior to all major undertakings.

Of course, you audiophiles know that Oracle is a Canadian maker of high end audio components, including the Delphi turntable, the Temple phono stage, and a range of fabulously-designed and revealing amps and digital front ends. One of components is the Oracle CD 2500 CD player, the subject of this review.

## PREPARE TO CONSULT THE ORACLE

Before I start on the “meat” of the review – the part that describes the CD 2500’s musical qualities – a few “appetizers” are in order.

The first “appetizer” is that the Oracle CD 2500 is one of the most stunning pieces of audio art that I have seen. One look at the picture will convince you. It looks even better on my component stand than it looks in its promo glamour shots. I say this even though I personally don’t care much about a component’s appearance. However, there is no way that this CD player will not rank a 9.0 or better in even the most critical significant-other’s eyes.



The second “appetizer” about the Oracle CD 2500 is that to call it a “CD player” is simply inaccurate.

The term “CD player” conjures up visions of a one-box unit that incorporates a transport and DAC. The CD 2500 is more like DAC and transport separates that are united by a common platform, with the power supply for both housed in an entirely different enclosure.

The third “appetizer” is something about my preferences and my system. You, as the reader, need to know that I am a committed redbook digital aficionado. The front-end of my main system is all-digital. It’s not that I don’t like exotic turntables with high-quality tonearms and cartridges and world-class turntable amps. In fact, I love them! It’s just that in 1984 they didn’t make (and I couldn’t have afforded) the kind of out-of-this-world-performance turntables that are available today. I had a very nice Bang & Olufsen turntable, but fell for the “perfect sound forever” hype that has taken another 15 years to approach reality.

I sold all my LPs and bought a CD player that I was happy with for several months before its flaws starting becoming more and more apparent. I bought a second and third CD player, noting in each one differences that weren’t supposed to exist between players that were “merely” reading 0’s and 1’s.

As a result, I have owned over a dozen different CD players, and extensively demo’d (in my own system) a dozen others. Included in this batch were the Levinson 39S, the Cary 306/200, the Electrocompaniet EC-1 and several custom-modded DVD players, as well as EAD transports and DACs. My current front-end is an Esoteric P-70/D-70 combo, connected by three Transparent Reference AES/EBU digital cables mounted on a Target VW-2 wall-mounted dual turntable shelf, and powered by way of a dedicated outlet connected by Silent Source PCs run through a Walker Velocitor. The D-70’s output is transmitted via Silent Source Silver Signature interconnects directly to the Electrocompaniet Nemo monoblocks. Volume is controlled at the amps’ input by Electronic Visionary Systems Ultimate Nude Attenuators and the amps are fed by Zcable Cyclones that draw power from 2 separate dedicated 20 amp outlets. The Nemos drive B&W 800D’s via Transparent Ultra MM Bicable.

This setup should give you a hint about the kind of music I like to listen to and how loudly I play it. I regularly listen to a wide variety of music, with 60% being rock n’ roll, 15% blues, 15% small jazz combos and 10% classical. The Silent Source and Zcable components I use are so versatile that they provide body and tonality for delicate solo voices, violins and pianos, but I won’t buy a component if: a) it doesn’t

make rock come alive at realistic concert levels; b) it's bass isn't superb for all kinds of music; c) it doesn't make vocals palpable and, d) it isn't dead quiet.

## THE ORACLE APPEARS



The CD2500 looks just like the CD 2000 CD Turntable, but is equipped with a DAC and analog outputs. In addition, the CD 2500 only has one digital output (BNC), while the CD 2000 is equipped with BNC, AES/EBU and optical outputs. You lose the AES/EBU and optical digital outputs to make room for the single-ended analog outputs.

The drive mechanism is housed in a suspension system, and the control mechanism is located in a separate housing affixed under the drive unit. The two pieces are both attached to an acrylic platform and are connected electrically by 3 wires. The CD 2500's suspension system will do any engineer proud. It attempts to address vibrations and level balance directly. (The presence of the suspension system dissuaded me from trying any cones or pucks, but you might find them beneficial.)

The power supply for both units is housed in an entirely separate box and connected via a 15 pin DC cord that attaches to the back of the control housing. I am a great believer in separate power supplies. Every product that I have tried that separates the power supply from the other circuitry has sounded better than its one-box siblings.

The CD 2500 is a top-loading player. All you do is remove the aluminum cover and the magnetic disc clamp, insert the disc, replace the clamp and cover, and start playing. Removing a CD is equally simple: remove the aluminum cover and pull out the magnetic clamp. The disc will come out with the magnetic clamp, and you disengage it from the clamp after lifting them both out. This simplicity of operation nonetheless feels exotic when compared to how most CD players are loaded.



The CD 2500 did not take any effort to set up.

The one I received did not require any calibration and was ready to go. I first played it for several days by running the output directly into my amps (my normal way of listening). I also played it through the fabulous Sphinx Project Eight Reference Preamp (see [review](#) in Issue June 2006 of Dagogo).

Of course, when auditioning any audio product, you listen for the usual audiophile qualities, such as pace, rhythm and timing, dynamics, soundstaging, deep bass and grain-free treble. However, experience and knowledgeable audiophiles have taught me to especially listen for four things when auditioning a digital front end: 1) digital glare; 2) overall perspective, 3) soundstage transparency and 4) sense of space.

They correctly observed that digital components are often weak in their ability to avoid glare and convey these qualities.

I selected a variety of music to reflect these qualities. I won't list all of the music, but the following were a few of the selections: *Hell Freezes Over*, Eagles (XRCD); *Best of Mambo*, Perez Prado (XRCD); *LA Woman*, Doors (HDCD); *Love Scenes*, Diana Krall; *Yola*, Eleanor McEvoy; *Cosmic Thing*, B-52's; *Naked*, Talking Heads; *The Best That I Could Do*, John Mellencamp (HDCD). Every piece of music that was played on the Oracle 2500 was also played on my P-70/D-70 combo for comparison.

## THE ORACLE SPEAKS



This is a great player. "Duh!" you say, "It better be at \$9,380!" Sorry, but I've heard some very expensive players that were very good, but definitely not great. This is a great player that will sound great in any high-end system. It does everything well: soundstage, sense of space, bass, midrange, absence of glare, balanced top to bottom tonality and pace, rhythm and timing. It is one of those players whose price matches its performance (and you're buying a piece of art to boot).

The Oracle 2500 is especially a good fit if you thrive on detail. It will enable you to hear individual notes in complex passages without destroying the overall "gestalt" of the music being played. The live portions of *Hell Freezes Over*, the tunes on *Best of Mambo* and "(Nothing But) Flowers" on *Naked* all illustrate the benefits of the detail that the Oracle 2500 produces. You are aware of details that were formerly in the background, but without being annoyed by them.

The bass performance of the 2500 is excellent. The detail I referred to above extends to bass notes and resolves the bass line so that it is readily separated from the sounds of the kick drum. The electric bass on *LA Woman* veritably growls and the acoustic bass in *Love Scenes* is lively, yet full. Likewise, the soundstage covered the entire 26 foot width of my listening room with the Perez Prado Orchestra filling it completely.

Fast-paced music sounded fast-paced and got my toes tapping. Intimate recordings felt personal and live, as though the performers were in the room.

So how does it compare directly to my reference, the \$16,000 (not counting \$4300 of digital cables to connect the two) Esoteric P-70/D-70? I have spent 18 months tweaking out the P-70/D-70 to suit my personal tastes, so comparing the Oracle 2500 to that combo is brutally unfair, but for readers who want

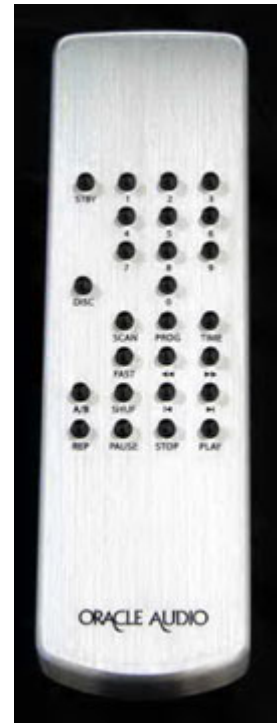
to know the minute differences between sophisticated high-end players, there are four things I note in comparing the two front-ends.

First, the Oracle 2500 seems to have a bit more depth than the P-70/D-70, which actually has very good soundstage depth for a digital component. This benefited larger scale music. Symphonic pieces and big bands had more depth to the back wall.

Second, the Oracle 2500's bass did not reach quite as deeply and had a less weight. This did not surprise me, since the Esoteric combo produces absolutely world class bass, and I have not heard any front-end with better bass anywhere. Don't mistake me – if you hear the Oracle 2500 on its own you will swear that it has wonderful bass. It's only after you hear the P-70/D-70 do you realize what edge-of-the-art bass performance really is.

Third, there were a small number of recordings on which the Oracle 2500's detail resulted in some slightly excessive sibilance. This was only evident on intimately-miked vocals, but you could hear the difference when the music was played on the P-70/D-70. I found that the sibilance was ameliorated when I played the Oracle 2500 through the Sphinx preamp.

Fourth, the P-70/D-70 produces huge amounts of detail, but the CD 2500 is an even more detailed (and somewhat "airy") player. If combined with extremely detailed speakers and/or silver cables, it may on some recordings feel more detailed than how live performances actually sound in person. Not bright or etched – just more detailed than real life. I found that adding a preamp or changing to cables that have a full-bodied sound corrected this sensation on those recordings. Since the vast majority of audiophiles use preamps, this should not be an issue.

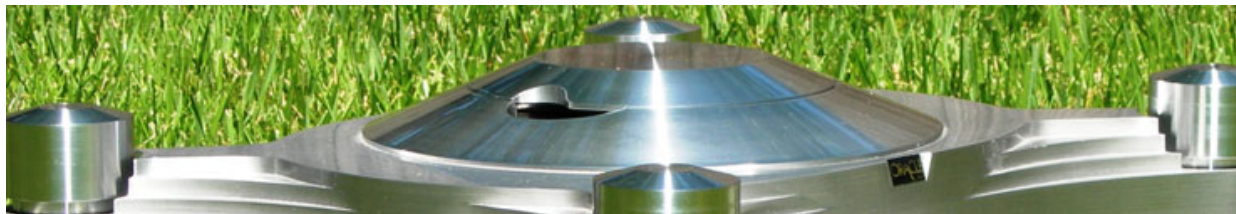


OK – so these are picky things, but if I didn't point them out, you would accuse me of always giving good reviews and failing to be sufficiently critical. Just remember that we're dealing with an elite class of CD player here.

### THE PROPHECY FULFILLED

If you had prophesized that I would really like Oracle's CD 2500 CD player, you (like the Oracle in Delphi) would have been right. I predict that you also will love what the Oracle CD 2500 does. In addition to being very musically satisfying, you get a piece of great audio engineering that doubles as sculpture.

Find a great place to display it, because every visitor will want to know what it is. They will be attracted by its stunning appearance. They will then become fascinated by the exotic mechanical suspension combined with the simple remove-the-cover operation. Finally, they will ask you to please play something. When they do, I predict that they will become entranced by the music it produces.



### MANUFACTURE REP'S COMMENTS:

First, I would like to thank you, Constantine, for requesting the Oracle CD2500 for a review subject. Second, I'd like to thank Ed Momkus for providing an accurate, detailed description of the CD2500. Third, I like to applaud Dagogo for the quality audio medium that the audiophile public needs.



As a rep, I run into many instances where I demo the Oracle Audio Technologies product line to dealers. As we all know, Oracle has been producing reference turntables since 1979, which is where most folks remember the Oracle name. And time & again, as I present the CD turntables, the remarks are that Oracle continues to make the most beautiful and sonically detailed players on the market. My best description of detail is in photographic terms, as in revealing the shadow detail and exposing the highlights of a fine photograph.

Again, thanks ya'll for the wonderful review.

Rusty Taub  
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US Representative for Oracle Audio Technologies