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DACs

## Esoteric K-01XD SACD player/USB DAC Review

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By: Constantine Soo | July 2020

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Disc ripping and music streaming are all the rage, and many audiophiles celebrate the riddance of their own CD collections in transition to hard drive storage. After having accumulated over 2 TB of music files from CD ripping over the span of a decade, I advice Dagogo readers to not throw away your CDs so cavalierly. Physical disc playback never cuts out as downloaded music files occasionally do. Consider yourself lucky if you were able to uncover distorted files soon after purchasing it online, for online high-resolution retail sites do not permit re-downloads and you'd have to contact their customer service department for recourse. It happened to me twice now thus far since 2018, and I buy online once or twice a month. You could have corrupted files purchased sometime ago to which you just haven't listened yet.

Some readers may consider the reclamation of spaces from CDs removal around living quarters as significant, and some others may not have a collection so large as to infringe

### Specification:

**Playable disc types:** Super Audio CD, CD (including CD-R and CD-RW)

**Anaog audio outputs**

**XLR/ESL-A, 1 pair (L/R):** Output impedance 114Ω  
Maximum output level: 5.0Vrms (1kHz, 10kHz loaded)

**RCA, 1 pair (L/R):** Output impedance 34Ω  
Maximum output level: 2.5Vrms (1kHz, 10kHz loaded)

**Digital audio outputs**

**XLR, 1:** Output impedance 3Vp-p (110Ω loaded)  
Output signal formats: Linear PCM (AES/EBU)  
44.1kHz, 16-bit (CD)

**RCA, 1:** Output impedanc 0.5Vp-p (75Ω loaded)  
Output signal formats: Linear PCM (IEC60958)  
44.1kHz, 16-bit (CD)

**Digital audio inputs**

**RCA, 1**

**Input signal formats**

Linear PCM: 32k to 192kHz, 16/24-bit (IEC60958)  
DSD: 2.8MHz (DoP)

**OPTICAL 1**

**Input signal formats**

Linear PCM: 32k to 192kHz, 16/24-bit (IEC60958)  
DSD: 2.8MHz (DoP)

upon living spaces. We all have our priorities in terms of use of living space, so I won't be too quick to judge if some of our readers have discarded their entire CD collection. Still, I continue to find a good disc transport indispensable. A good transport that spins discs at a very high level of accuracy, one that also accepts at least 24 bits 192K Hz music files via USB and Toslink makes reviewing less cumbersome, and is unquestionably, positively useful if it decodes 32 bits 384K Hz files via USB, like the Esoteric.



In these days of streaming, when even movies are bought online and streamed into the living room via smart TVs and what not, why would anyone want an SACD player? The answer is one word: Esoteric.

**USB B, 1 (USB 2.0 supported)**  
**Input signal formats**  
**Linear PCM: 44.1k to 384kHz, 16/24/32-bit (IEC60958)**  
**DSD: 2.8MHz, 5.6MHz, 11.2MHz, 22.5MHz**  
**Clock input**  
**BNC, 1: Input impedance 50Ω**  
**Frequencies that can be input (±10ppm): 10MHz**  
**Input level: 0.5 to 1.0Vrms (Sine wave)**  
**External control interface**  
**RS-232C x 1**  
**Trigger: 1 (3.5mm Monaural mini jack)**  
**General**  
**Power supply**  
**Model for Europe: AC 220 to 240V, 50/60Hz**  
**Model for US/Canada: AC 120V, 60Hz**  
**Model for Korea: AC 220V, 60Hz**  
**Model for Hong Kong: AC 230V, 50Hz**  
**Power consumption: 26W**  
**External dimensions (W×H×D): 445 × 162 × 438(mm)**  
**17-<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" × 6-<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" × 17-<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" (including protrusions)**  
**Weight: 31kg / 68-<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> lb**  
**Included accessories:**  
**Power cord set × 1**  
**Remote control (RC-1315) × 1**  
**AAA batteries × 2**  
**Felt pads × 3**  
**Owner's manual × 1**  
**Warranty card × 1**

**Price: \$23,000 USD**

**Esoteric**

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From the website: “ATLAS boasts the highest rigidity and weight in the history of VRDS mechanisms. With its larger new SS400 steel side panels and bridge, the ATLAS is 27% heavier (6.6kg mechanism unit, 13.5kg including base) than the NEO, achieving both exceptional rigidity and impressive tone. It also dampens any and all vibration that might adversely affect audio quality. The turntable is machined from solid duralumin for excellent audio quality, and its spindle features a newly designed thrust bearing system. This friction-free one-point spindle support system ensures smooth, noiseless turntable rotation.

One of the keys to achieving the quietest mechanism in VRDS history is mechanical grounding technology that efficiently dampens vibration. By adopting a wide and low profile for the mechanism’s design, the entire construction now features a low center of gravity. The turntable’s drive system has also been refined and its motor moved to below the turntable from its previous position above the bridge, thus shortening the route for grounding vibration and greatly reducing mechanical noise.

The tray’s form has been designed for the least possible resonance by minimizing hollowing, and boasts exceptionally smooth opening and closing operation with very little play. The use of special vibration-damping elastomer resin also further minimizes tray resonance during music playback.”

Just as the point of the vinyl experience is not about hearing a DSD-recorded facsimile of it but the actual sound via a gem of a cartridge on a masterfully developed turntable and through a fine phono stage, the compact disc and SACD experience via the Esoteric platform is one to cherish. With other players, many of us take the digital output and entrust the signal to an external DAC. With the K-01XD, the transport is its raison d'être. The company's Vibration-Free Rigid Disc-Clamping System has long been the crown jewel of the company and undisputed industry reference; the newest Esoteric drive, the VRDS ATLAS 01, is the new star, the best to date and created to push the envelope of disc playback. Unprecedentedly.

It was never a contest to compare music files ripped by a computer disc drive versus listening to the actual disc on the VRDS-NEO drive of the K-03, it is now even a farther cry what with the K-01XD enforcing the day.

The company's first-generation K-03 has been my reference since 2013. Sure, the K-01 of yore would be superior but the superiority of the K-01XD would be even more remarkable, as two additional generations have gone between the K-03 and the K-01XD, namely the K-01X and K-01XS. Externally, the K-01XD is very similar to the K-03, although the K-03 type remote control unit is no more. While the K-03's much sought-after remote enabled input selection between disc, Coaxial, Optical and USB, access to the same functionalities on the K-01XD is now via the MODE button on the front panel manually. Inadvertently, the K-03 features both variable and fixed analog output and the remote, again, provides for the volume control functionality, useful for direct connection to power amplifiers. The K-01 generations are only equipped with fixed analog outputs.

Per Keith Haas, National Sales Manager of Premium Brands-Onkyo USA Corporation, the distributor for Esoteric in the America's, "While this was technologically possible at the time [of the K-03 in 2009], the factory always highly discouraged this type of application because noise was introduced as the gain was increased."

Of course, now, I have to press the input button on the front panel of the K-01XD to change from disc playback to the Coaxial input for listening to the Aurender N-1000SC caching music server, the functions of which I control through the Aurender App on the Apple mini iPad. But then the cat jumped into my lap. Softly so as not to scare him away while hopefully loud enough for my wife to hear me, "Honey, could you come downstairs? I need you to press a button for me."

Esoteric Grandioso D1X MSD DAC

Grandioso D1X Signal Block Diagram
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The engineers at Esoteric should also be recognized for the creation of the first-ever, in-house digital-to-analog conversion system in the K-01XD. Dubbed the Master Sound Discrete DAC, it was first developed in 2019 for the company's \$50,000 mono DAC, Grandioso D1X. From the company's website:

“[Capable of] 64-bit resolution and overwhelming performance. However, the true essence of this DAC cannot be discussed merely in terms of its specifications. The fundamental goal in the development of the Master Sound Discrete DAC was to achieve an accurate, full-bodied reproduction of all the vibrancy and energy of music. Music is infused with all the passion that a performer brings to a passage, with instantaneous and explosive energy. We wondered if it was possible to use higher-grade parts than integrated chips, as well as more luxurious materials, to create a more powerful DAC that could deliver a superlative analog signal. This idea led us to the discrete DAC. Esoteric's top engineering team painstakingly invested their very pride into realizing this complete, full-bodied sound.

Featuring four DAC *circuits* per channel, their eight circuit elements are arranged in a semi-circle for equidistant signal transmission within each DAC. This total of 32 circuit elements are arranged in two circles that present a luxurious structure with all constituent components, including resistors, logic ICs, and power supplies, separated for all 32 of the circuits. Since each of these 32 circuits utilizes an independent power supply circuit, the music's full burst of energy can be output in its purest form. Furthermore, by selecting the same sort of ultra-high precision resistors used in measuring instruments, the DAC can perform high-speed digital arithmetic processing with greater accuracy.

With a discrete DAC, where component tolerances are directly linked to arithmetic precision, highly advanced quality control is also required for the manufacture of electronic circuit boards. Esoteric's own in-house factory boasts some of the world's leading board mounting technologies, such as soldering performed in an oxygen-free furnace, which is located in a clean room featuring the same level of cleanliness found in a hospital operating room. Technologies cultivated in the production of electronic circuit boards for audio, medical, aerospace, and defense industries support the high production quality of the Master Sound Discrete DAC."

The Esoteric MSD DAC technology is featured in the Grandioso D1X, the \$36,000 Grandioso K1X SACD player, the K-01XD and K-03XD.

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## 5 Responses to *Esoteric K-01XD SACD player/USB DAC Review*

**METALHEAD** July 17, 2020 at 3:44 pm

Totally down with vinyl and although no microphone I do have two turntables.

Esoteric are killer good spinners. Read the reviews and figured a lot of hyperbole and for the price they should be good. After buying one primarily for reliability and as a backup to vinyl I have to say that the reviews were forthright and I ended up scoring a used K01. LOVE IT.

I'm done but congratulations on anyone buying one of these fantastic spinners.

Reply

**Larry**

July 19, 2020 at 9:37 am

Can we get real here! How many audiophiles out there are going to spend this kind of money on a CD player. Can we discuss real world equipment for the majority of audiophiles in this country.

Reply

**topfinadv**

July 25, 2020 at 3:33 pm

I agree it is a ridiculous amount of money. I owned the k-03xs and I bought it at the time when 2 weeks later they released the k-03xd. How about for that money, they allow ur unit to be upgraded instead of making it obsolete. Esoteric are u listening!!!!

Reply

*pete*

July 31, 2020 at 7:10 am

Great review

Reply

*Gerald Higgins*

December 28, 2020 at 5:12 pm

Great review and by far the greatest spinner I have ever owned, including the most expensive products from both the RSR ladder DAC-transport systems costing \$60-85K and the even more expensive SACD/CD/DAC/digital front end. This is only my opinion, but I have owned or do own them all.

Reply

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