

# Music box

In this unassuming mini music streamer, **Ed Selley** finds a flexible network player that takes a different approach to most

**W**hen we talk about network audio players, there's often the assumption that the device in question consists of the network hardware, a control interface and decoding. Components like Auralic's Aries G1 streaming transport (HFC 441) have altered this perception by removing the decoding, allowing you to choose your own. Now, South Korean company SOTM (Soul Of the Music), has upped the ante and removed built-in control software, making the SMS-200 Neo a network interface that will work with DNLA and UPnP protocols that uses a dedicated ARM processor board designed for streaming audio. It contains no audio signal decoding of its own and uses a USB Audio port to output to an add-on USB DAC.

With no matching control app to navigate, connecting it to a network for the first time can be a little disconcerting but by entering <http://sotm-audio.com/my> into a browser, the SOTM's IP address is visible and the screen allows you to select from a number of streamer options including operating as a standard DNLA server, Squeezelite, Minim, Shairport and – perhaps most importantly – Roon (see last month's *Group Test*). Once set to your preferred option, the SMS-200 Neo will respond to that particular control software. Installation

is a little more involved than most network players, and you need to make be sure to save the IP address page once you've located it because the 'find my SOTM' option isn't always a total success, although it facilitates the choice of control to suit your requirements and means that features are stripped back, making the SOTM an attractively priced option.

As a relatively simple network device, there's no form of front display and its small size means it can be easily hidden away out of sight. It is extremely well made and finished, but there's no wireless connectivity so you'll need to have a wired connection available for it to work.

## Sound quality

I initially set the unit up as a standard DNLA server and connect it to Chord Electronics' Mojo headphone amp/DAC (HFC 405) running into a Naim Supernait 2 integrated amplifier and Neat Momentum 4 floorstanding speaker. There are a few different open-source control apps that will work, but I select Linn's Kinsky – which works well. The SOTM renders the music library on a Melco N1A NAS drive (HFC 397) correctly and accessing material from the library is quick and completely stable.

As might be expected, performance is almost entirely governed by the

Mojo DAC, but there are some subtle influences that are introduced by the SMS-200 Neo. Comparing it with the Mojo's dedicated Poly wireless network streamer (HFC 431), it delivers a rendition of Jackson Browne's *Running On Empty* that feels more spacious and three dimensional, possibly due to the SOTM's lower noise floor. The jumble of noises at the start of the title track – which includes shouts from the audience and the general feeling of the band preparing to play – are completely believable and at the price, the SOTM and Mojo DAC pairing makes a tempting home option.

Swapping the Mojo for Chord's more upmarket Hugo 2 headphone amp/DAC (HFC 428) and with the DNLA set for Roon, the SOTM's performance steps up a gear. Roon sees the Hugo 2 as the decoding device – applying preconfigured profile settings to maximise performance as a result – and the SOTM responds immediately to both the Roon Core interface and the iPad app. Again, the sound is largely dictated by the Hugo 2, but there is a sense of order and three dimensionality that goes beyond that of simply connecting my laptop directly to the Chord DAC and running Roon. Air's wonderful *So Light Is Her Footfall* takes on a more effortless and almost liquid quality as a result.

## Conclusion

The SOTM is a niche network audio solution, but it is one that makes more sense in use than it might first appear. It provides a very cost-effective way of turning a USB DAC into a streamer and does so with sufficient quality to be a partner for products that cost considerably more than it does. Using it with Roon as the control endpoint in particular, the SMS-200 Neo is a clever little device and an attractive bargain for those with a bit more experience in networked audio ●

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
SOTM sMS-200 Neo

**ORIGIN**  
South Korea

**TYPE**  
Network audio player

**WEIGHT**  
1.5kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
106 x 48 x 152mm

**FEATURES**  
● Support for up to 32-bit/384kHz PCM and DSD256  
● Ports: Ethernet; 1x USB-A (audio); 2x USB-A (storage)  
● Roon ready

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Elite Audio Ltd.

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## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**

★★★★★

**VALUE FOR MONEY**

★★★★★

**BUILD QUALITY**

★★★★★

**FEATURES**

★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★

**LIKE:** Flexibility; performance; value

**DISLIKE:** Set up is more involved than conventional rivals

**WE SAY:** An effective way of turning a USB DAC into a capable network player