Aurender X100L Media Server

By Michael Lavorgna • Posted: Aug 28, 2014

Device Type: Media Server
Input: Ethernet, USB
Output: USB
Storage Capacity: 6TB
Dimensions: 215 x 83 x 355 mm
Weight: 7.5 kg
Availability: direct and through Authorized Dealers
Price: $3,499.00
Website: www.aurender.com

Served

The Aurender X100L is the relatively new baby brother of the previously reviewed S10 (see review http://www.audiostream.com/content/aurender-s10-music-playback-and-storage-solution). Like its brethren, the X100L is a purpose built music server while upping the ante on the S10s 2TB of storage to a whopping 6TB of total storage (2x 3TB). That's enough for most largish libraries but if you require even more storage Aurender has informed me that they're coming out with an 8TB ($3699) and 12TB version ($3899)! If you need less, there's also the X100S ($2,999) with 1TB of storage.

The fanless Aurender also includes a 120GB SSD (Solid State Drive) which is where your music actually plays from. You see, the Aurender stores your music on its internal Western Digital hard disk drives then when you load up a song or album to play, it gets cached on the SSD while the HDDs spin down and eventually stop. According to Aurender this "...completely eliminates jitter, latency and noise resulting from spinning hard drives and compact disks."

The hard drives are also physically isolated from the rest of the X100L's body to minimize their vibration and noise from traveling and infesting the audio signal. While you can see there is some care given to isolating the various functional parts, the X100L does not go to the same aluminum wrapped extremes as the S10.

Inputs include Ethernet and 2x USB while outputs consist of a single USB socket to connect to your DAC. Aurender claims the lone USB output "is designed to deliver an exceptionally transparent audio signal free of noise and is shielded from outside electronic interference." Overall, I found the X100L to be exceptionally well made, concomitant with its price.

There are two ways to get your music from wherever it currently lives onto the Aurender's internal hard drives; via your network or USB. I opted for the latter and just plugged my backup USB drive into the Aurender's USB 2.0 port and the X100L went about copying its contents automatically. This process ran overnight as I chose to copy my entire AIFF library which consists of approximately 12,000 songs. Since the structure of this library is Artist/Album, everything showed up in the Aurender's "ETC" folder. If you have your music categorized and stored in genre folders, the Aurender can match this layout. I find genre's as useful as nicknames for finding nanny goats blindfolded.

I had to restart the X100L once my library had completely copied over before the Artist Name showed up on the AMOLED screen which lives on the unit's' face. This display also includes the track name, sample rate and attached DAC. There's also an on/off button and on the opposite side of the

screen four playback buttons. I used the free Aurender app for the iPad for playback exclusively. I also used this app to connect to one of NAS devices that houses all of my DSD files since the X100L handles DSD playback (single and double rate) while also supporting AIFF, ALAC, FLAC, WAV, M4A, APE, and "others". Gapless playback is also supported. If you are interested in all of the available options for the X100L app, check out the online guide http://www.aurender.com/x100-guide.html.

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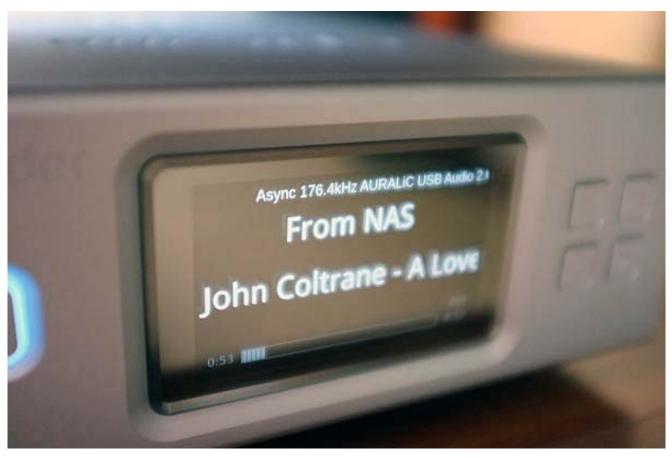
I asked my contact at Aurender to describe the main differences between the S10 and X100L:

The following were not used in the X100, but were used in the S10.

1. Audio board with SPDIF Output (COAX, Optical, AES/EBU), clocking, and PLL system
2. Linear power supply

In the S10, [there are] two 3.7" OLED displays. In the X100, there is 1 3.3" OLED display. The aluminum chassis is much smaller and there are fewer partitions inside.

The X100 has a dedicated USB audio class 2.0 port with circuitry that cleans the power to the USB audio port so that it does not affect the sound quality from the USB port. The S10 does not have this. The W20 has the same circuitry for the USB audio port. In the S10 and X100, the USB data ports are powered by the SMPS.

The Aurender handles DSD via DoP so the AMOLED readout reads "176.4" even though the file being sent is DSD

The Aurender app for the iPad remains a pleasure to use and since I went into some detail in my S10 review of its ins and outs, I'll just cover the basics here. The Aurender app is Playlist based, and you can view your record collection by Song, Artist, Album, Genre, Composer, Conductor, or Folder. You can also filter these results by Genre, DSD, 16/24-bit, and Favorites. I preferred Album and Artist view, in that order, for playing back my music as I typically listen to an album's worth of music at a time. I'm not a song kinda guy. To play music, just hold your finger on the selection and a window pops up with various playback options including "Play Now", "Play Random", "Replace Queue", "Add to Next", and "Add to End". You can create and save Playlists or just play on the fly. There's a search feature that only works with locally stored content.

I found the Aurender app to be lightning fast, without any bugs that I could find, and again generally just a pleasure to use. An A+ in my book.

The X100L Test Drive

After loading up nearly 1,000 albums, I went about playing. The first thing that struck me was the noise floor which sounded lower than I'm used to. There was a notable clarity to the music being played through the X100L that suggested an absence of self-noise. Violins rang out true, solo cello resounded from a believable and solid space, while its sounds trailed off into the quiet naturally.

There was also a smooth naturalness to the music, an anti-digitalness if you will, making it easy to fall into my tunes.

If all of this sounds a lot like my review of the Aurender S10, it should because they do. Although it has been a while, I would give the S10 the upper hand in delivering even greater clarity and ease, getting out of the way of the music even more than the X100L. But compared to my MacBook Pro, the X100L took things in more of a natural and resolved direction. It was simply easier to fall into the music.

In terms of acoustic autopsy, the various aspects of the frequency range were all handled with the same natural ease. Bass was tight and tuneful, there was a nice amount of timbral richness, and upper frequencies remained sweet and clear, never etched. Again, the music made through the Aurender X100L was easy to listen to and easy to like. There was also plenty of resolution, something digital can do well, sometimes too well. One test for this balance I like to use is acoustic Delta blues. Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt, etc. if a system can handle this subtle music without dissecting the life out of it, we're all good and the Aurender X100L delivering John Hurt's blues with all of its kind smooth delicacy in tact.

Big boisterous music was also well served and the Penderecki Violin and Horn Concertos in DSD from Channel Classics was gut wrenching, their huge dynamic swings swung convincingly. Boris' latest *Noise* was also big and chunky and delightful. Compared to my MacBook Pro, there was more drama, more distinction between soft and loud and a seemingly firmer grip on moment-to-moment musical events.

Delivered

The Aurender X100L incorporates many of the features and performance of its bigger and more expensive brother the S10. While you don't get the S10's last word in resolution and flow, you do get an additional 4TB of storage and a server that handily outperforms a Mac laptop. The associated iPad app is full-featured and easy to use making music playback pretty much pure pleasure.