



CLiC here

Is it a streamer? Is it a digital preamp? All **Ed Selley** knows is that this latest version of Musical Fidelity's M1 CLiC is really rather clever...

One of the most interesting aspects of the media streamer being a relatively new category is that there are no preconceived ideas about exactly what roles they should undertake. That's why you find such a wide variation in their functionality – Internet radio is a given, multiple digital inputs are fairly common. Some units combine this with a volume control to turn them into a preamp. Only one device has gone a stage further from the 'digital

preamp' and added analogue inputs though, step forward the dinky little Musical Fidelity CLiC.

It is called as a 'Universal Music Controller', which for once is probably a fair description. Built into the neat half-width casework of the M1 series, the CLiC is a 192kHz-capable media streamer with Internet radio, four digital inputs and three analogue ones. It can either be used with a fixed output into a conventional amplifier or via the variable output into a power amp or active loudspeakers.

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Musical Fidelity
M1 CLiC

ORIGIN:
UK/Taiwan

TYPE:
DAC/streamer

WEIGHT:
3.3kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
220x100x300mm

FEATURES:
• colour LCD screen
• 4x RCA phono inputs, 2x RCA coaxial, 1x TOSLINK digital input
• 1 front & 1 rear USB type A socket, 1 USB type 'B' connector

DISTRIBUTOR:
Musical Fidelity

TELEPHONE:
01684 560853

WEBSITE:
musicalfidelity.com

The fitting of two outputs might seem a little curious, but the answer lies in the CLiC's stablemates. The M1 HPA headphone amplifier is a member of the same range, and as I saw in a recent Beautiful Systems piece, is a wonderful preamplifier in its own right. The CLiC could be used as an 'input collator' and output to the HPA or be used direct into a power amplifier – in both cases the M1 PWR being an ideal candidate but not the only one as the CLiC will also attach happily to some of the bigger amps in the company hierarchy as well.

The rear panel is busy but logical enough. The CLiC has wired and wireless connections for networking and Musical Fidelity recommends the use of the Ethernet connection for 192kHz files. A rear USB can accept an iDevice being connected to it (there is a separate USB at the front for connecting USB sticks and



drives) and show the contents on the front menu. The four digital inputs comprise two SP/DIF connections, an optical and a USB-B connection for a computer. The analogue inputs and outputs are all via RCA phonos.

By comparison, the front panel is extremely simple, with only a standby button, headphone socket and the large display. This is relatively unusual in that it is full colour and will show album art as well as artist and title information. The result is visually elegant but means that the CLiC is entirely dependent on remote control to be stopped or muted in a hurry.

There was a deep soundstage between the speakers and fine insight into the detail...

This is a good and bad thing. The supplied remote is absolutely nothing to get excited about and is pretty much a standard Musical Fidelity offering. Controlling the CLiC with it is simple enough but not the most elegant or inspiring process. The good news for iDevice owners is that Musical Fidelity has gone to town on the control app for the CLiC. As well as offering full control of the UPnP and Internet radio sections, it controls volume and allows you to select the analogue and digital inputs as well. In iPad form especially, this is one of the very nicest control apps I've seen and using the CLiC with it is a vastly superior experience.

Fit and finish is good, with the CLiC feeling reasonably substantial and well thought out. The all-metal chassis has miniscule panel gaps and feels reasonably well damped. The display contrast is

reasonable and makes it easy enough to read although the font for artist and album is a bit small. The display can be made to switch off after a period but cannot be dimmed so this is all or nothing.

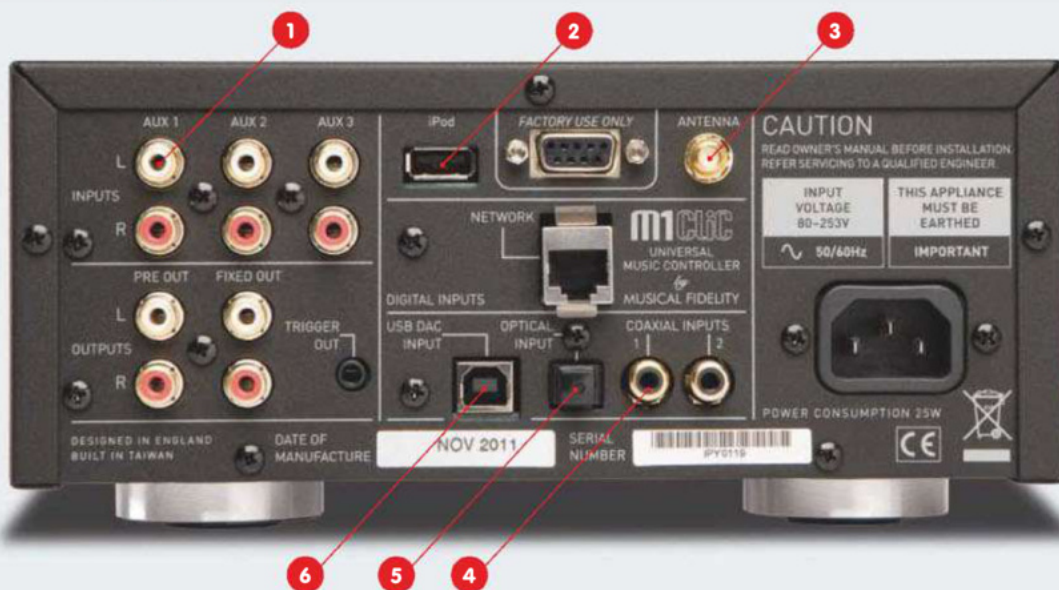
Sound quality

Connected to a Cambridge Audio 851A and a pair of Audio Note AN-Ks, the CLiC was simplicity itself to connect to a network and talking to the various servers on it. Kicking off with the wonderful *Machines of Love and Grace* by Martha Tilston, demonstrated that the CLiC has many behavioural traits in common with the M1 DAC and is none the worse for that. The presentation is impressively natural and free of any digital fingerprint, but has an engaging sense of life and rhythm. If there is a beat to find, the CLiC will latch on to it.

The other impressive area of performance is the bass. The CLiC manages to go impressively deep and has good levels of detail and texture while it does so. There no unnecessary emphasis to this and neither does it seem forced or unnatural but if you return to the CLiC after listening to other devices, you find yourself impressed at the grunt involved. The soundstage helps too – the Musical Fidelity creates a believable and convincing layout of instruments and voices that sympathetically matches the space of the piece from claustrophobic booth to live stadium.

As a high resolution product, the performance with 24-bit recordings is suitably convincing. *The Face of Mount Molehill* by the Neil Cowley Trio is a wonderfully vivid and compelling performance. The piano that underpins many of the tracks is absolutely and unambiguously real. It has a weight and

CONNECTIONS



- 1 RCA line input
- 2 iPod input
- 3 Wi-Fi antenna
- 4 coaxial digital in
- 5 optical digital in
- 6 USB digital input

Q&A

Richard Trotter
Musical Fidelity



ES: Why did Musical Fidelity take the decision to add analogue inputs to the CLiC??

RT: We wanted to create a universal music controller concept and felt it was essential to feature a high performance preamp stage within the product's armoury. With this in mind it was critical for the product to cater for analogue legacy connectivity hence we fitted the 3x stereo analogue inputs.

As a relatively early adopter of the UPnP streamer, does Musical Fidelity feel that customers are adjusting well to the concept?

The message we wanted to get across to the music lover interested in high performance music reproduction, was that streaming audio can be achieved with minimal loss. The CLiC delivers outstanding results while combining the added flexibility of dedicated iPhone and iPad control applications making operation a delight. With the worldwide success of the CLiC we believe that this message has not only been adopted by existing Musical Fidelity customers but also a whole new generation of consumers

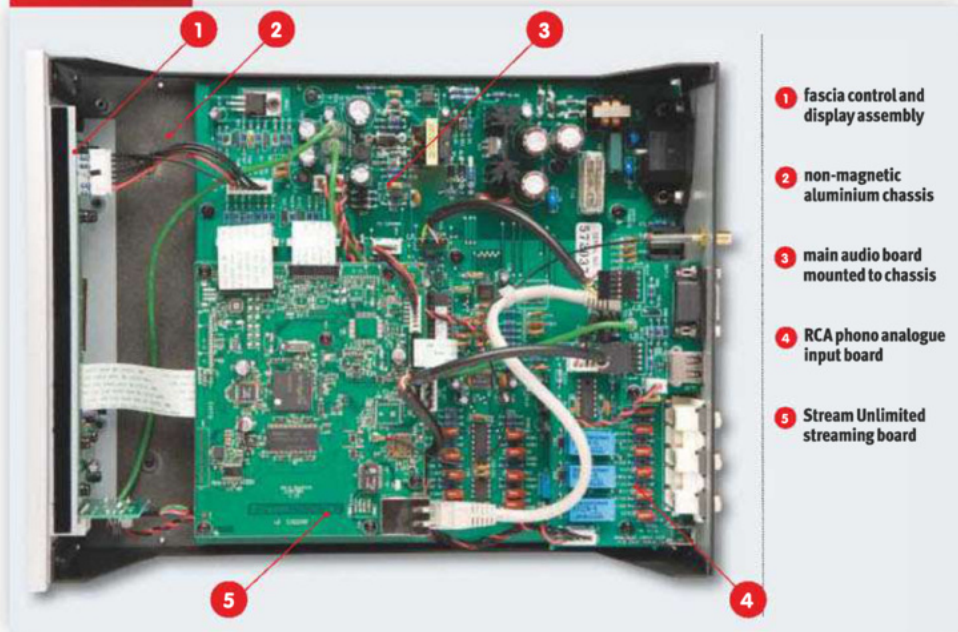
Would you consider a larger model to augment the range?

At present we are very happy with the CLiC as the 'standard bearer' for our entry into the audio streamer market. However, we will continue to see how this market develops and will introduce new products if we feel that they are required.

Does Musical Fidelity think that high resolution audio will come to form a meaningful part of music sales or is it as much as we can hope for that lossless downloads become more freely available?

It would be great to see hi-res audio become available on iTunes. If a music provider such as Apple were to get behind this there would be no doubt that consumers would wake up to hi-res audio downloads in much greater numbers and as such products like the CLiC with its ability to stream 24-bit/192kHz would be in pole position!

IN SIGHT



- 1 fascia control and display assembly
- 2 non-magnetic aluminium chassis
- 3 main audio board mounted to chassis
- 4 RCA phono analogue input board
- 5 Stream Unlimited streaming board



THE RIVALS

SINCE IT WAS LAUNCHED SOME EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO, a number of rival streamers have popped up out of the woodwork, but interestingly there's still really nothing around that does exactly what the CLiC does, so well, and/or so easily.

In operational terms, Pioneer's N-50 is the closest to the CLiC - offering as it does a high quality colour screen which gives a very nice user interface - should you wish to do things the old fashioned way and not have to go off and find your smartphone in order to change the track! It also gives good sound, but you'd hardly put it in the same league as the (admittedly more expensive) Musical Fidelity. The N-50 is clean and open but lacks the tonal warmth and soundstage depth of the CLiC.

Marantz's NA7004 is up there with MuFi in terms of sonics, but feels positively paleolithic from a user point of view; it's wired Ethernet-only and lacks the visual fireworks and flexibility of the luxurious CLiC.

decay to it that is rare (although not impossible) to hear with 16-bit recordings and the effect is superbly natural. The CLiC has sufficient talent with high res that it rather makes you wish there was more of it.

The Internet radio and iPod sections also worked well. The vTuner selected stations in particular are good enough to warrant ditching your DAB, if not necessarily your cherished FM unit. The iPod connection is fast and easy to access but has the same limitation that all USB interfaces have in that it will directly access the 'iPod' section of the device and won't let you use an iPod Touch or iPhone as a method of accessing streaming services on the cheap. You could easily make use of an iPod transport connected to one of the digital inputs to achieve this.

The only real limitation of the CLiC is control, rather than sound, related. As a preamp, the analogue sources connected sound much the same coming out the other end, and the digital inputs have the same impressive musicality that the streaming section does. The problem is with the control of the preamp itself. I would say that the control app is essential as the volume ramping via the remote is slow and has a tendency to overshoot. Even via the control app, there is a sense that the CLiC could benefit from more volume increments, as there were a few occasions where I found myself wishing for a volume point between two selectable levels. This is an area where the M1HPA excels, and the difference is noticeable.

Conclusion

Musical Fidelity's CLiC is a very impressively specified and highly capable device, one that has much to recommend it. As a means of collating your sources, the inclusion of the analogue inputs effectively puts the CLiC in a group of one. As a preamp, the limitations of the digital-only volume with no physical control means that the M1HPA is still probably the most capable member of the family in this regard, but as a means of extending the flexibility of a preamp with limited inputs, this is a fantastic place to start looking. Sonically, the CLiC realises the potential of high resolution audio and manages to sound rather good with CD quality material as well. There is no shortage of competition at the price, but the unique specification and sonic ability of the CLiC means that you would be foolish to ignore it. It's a stonkingly good streamer, no less! ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Clean, open, musical sound; excellent streaming implementation; easy nav via colour screen; features
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** nothing at all at this price!
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** One of the very best value streamers on sale today, this is an essential audition
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL

