

TEAC VRDS-701 dual monaural USB/DAC CD player/pre-amp/headphone amplifier, CG-10M-X Master Clock Generator, AP-701B stereo power amplifier Review

By: Doug Schroeder | June 2025



TEAC VRDS-701

I am watching four needles dance against a Mountain Dew (or is it Mellow Yellow; audiophiles might be divided) hued illuminated background, and I am happy. McIntosh this is not, and that's a good thing. The blue meters of the venerated company are ubiquitous but, like Harley Davidson, are getting long in the tooth. This is fresh, brisk, a beautiful return to classic HiFi with a twist. In the place of a stack of separates sits a heavily loaded front end source and a couple of powerful and lithe Class D amps. Welcome back, TEAC!

TEAC? They're still around? Maybe I have been too long in the rarified air of the Western upper-end HiFi atmosphere. I do not recall seeing TEAC (their upper end line, Esoteric, is ubiquitous) at the shows I have attended over the past several years. Maybe they have been present, and I was unobservant, in which case TEAC might say welcome back, Doug!

When I was getting rolling as a young two-channel enthusiast, Japanese HiFi set the pace. Through the years there has been a lot of carnage, with Nakamichi, Sansui, Akai, Aiwa, Sony, JVC, NEC, Sanyo, Kenwood, and Pioneer all fading. The land of the rising sun used to be the standard for the high end, but they lost it and Western products emerged victorious. But maybe it's not over; some like TEAC, Onkyo and Marantz, remain and are pushing hard to make a comeback. In this review I discover that TEAC is giving the audiophile a lot more technological firepower and very refined sound for a lot less money than most Western HiFi products.



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There is a retrospective on TEAC's website in which the company's name is revealed, Tokyo Electro-Acoustic Company. It has some impressive feats, including the world's first slow motion video recorder, used for the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. In 1977, the Star Wars character R2-D2's voice was recorded on a TEAC reel-to-reel tape deck. Bruce Springsteen used a TEAC multi-track cassette tape recorder in 1982 to record his album "Nebraska". These people know what they are doing, and it shows in the degree of quality infused in the 70th anniversary 700 Series. TEAC has survived the kiln of the Western audiophile community and has come out refined. The degree of refinement is shown in the VRDS-701, CG-10M-X, and the AP-701, which I will discuss in this review.

TEAC is not given to attaching enchanting names to its products but still uses lab-grade identifications. I speculate that precision of nomenclature is considered rigorous in Japan, and when you have hundreds of products it might be a challenge to be endlessly creative. You cannot accuse TEAC of not telling you what you are getting when you buy their products. Case in point, the anchor component for the system under review is the VRDS-701 Dual Monaural USB/DAC CD Player/Pre-Amp/Headphone Amplifier. "VRDS" stands for Vibration-Free Rigid Disc-Clamping System, derived from the transport which has received notoriety with the company's higher end Esoteric line. Esoteric is respected as a serious HiFi company. I recall hearing their products several times and they have chops; no slouch products are they! High end fans could do a lot worse than moving to Esoteric gear.

I had not relied upon a TEAC component for forty years, dating back to my V-330 Tape Deck from 1984-85! TEAC will not like this, but the Nakamichi CR-1A I bought and still own smoked it. Now, Nakamichi has been reduced to a shell of its former self, making sound bars (one ironically called the Dragon, the name originally associated with their premier cassette deck) and gimmicky multicolored party speakers. Long term, the victory has gone to TEAC. I wonder what would happen if I compared the current TEAC AD-850-SE Cassette Deck/CD Player to my still minty CR-1A? I'm not going there because I am not returning to cassette tapes. I already relented from my slip up of a couple years ago, when I was given a like new Realistic LAB-400 Turntable and original cartridge from my in-laws. I wanted to see if the vinyl gene was still active inside me, so I bought a preamp and tried a return to vinyl. Nope, not happening. The entry level sound quality was not moving me emotionally or intellectually. I was not going to spend \$10K MSRP for a good vinyl rig and many more thousands for media. I can get a prodigious pair of speakers of another genre for that kind of money (spoiler alert; see my review of the Colibri C2 High Performance Compact Loudspeaker). My son was given the LAB-400 and other components to make a reasonable starter HiFi.

It would've been interesting to make some tapes using the Analog Output of the VRDS-701, but my tape making days are behind me. I do not feel like scouring the world for tapes, then working my butt off trying to make them CD quality. I used to spend hours futzing with Dolby A, B, and C, running comparisons with recording and playback using different settings. If I recall, my favorite combo was to record in Dolby C and play back with no Dolby. Those were the days! Seeing the dancing needles on the amplifiers' meters brings back such sweet memories!

Into the technical jungle

For a Western audiophile who has operated from the received wisdom that a component with less functions means superior sound, working with a Japanese component is an exercise in function overload. The VRDS-701 gives you copious functionality if nothing else! I love the options to contour the



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system because it means many opportunities to find the One, the glorious combination of settings that connects to the spirit with a wide range of music. It's all good, if the sound quality is acceptable. I find the 700 Series' components' sound to be quite acceptable. More about that in a bit.

I stopped recounting every feature in components in my reviews years ago; a flick of the fingers brings the curious reader the teacusa.com website, where they can peruse the VRDS-701's *two dozen* selectable settings under *five menus* (UNIT, ANALOG, DSP, DAC, and PLAYER)! Thoughtful features such as CD playback in Shuffle/Random or Program settings, Auto Power Save (automatic shut down after half hour), and Power On Play (plays a CD upon startup) are nice conveniences. Important to the critical listener are the DAC options (DELTA SIGMA Fs, PCM DELTA SIGMA, and DSD LPF), and the DSP options (UPCONVERT, CLOCK CD, CLOCK USB, CLOCK COAXIAL, CLOCK OPTICAL, COAXIAL OUT, and OPTICAL OUT). The unit is *highly* configurable!

Some operations are confusing if the Owner's Manual is followed to the letter. The Clock function, meaning external clock, according to the flow chart in the Owner's Manual, seems to require linking the clock to the Input in the DSP Setting menu. But there is nothing of the sort in that menu. I stepped through the menus and functions to conclude that the choice of Input (USB, Coaxial, or Optical) is not part of these 24 menus, but is independently selected with the remote or face of the unit. I was looking in the menu for "Clock" to link it to each source, but the source controls the use of the clock, and it shows up automatically. Such confusion could be cleared up by TEAC in a revision to the Owner's Manual. It's not uncommon for a Manual to be updated, and when there are so many features and options, I'm not surprised there is some confusion.



A full function remote control is included. It is monotonously consistent, with rows of identical round buttons and no illumination for nighttime listening. Even after using the remote for weeks, I still must seek the Play button for CDs. It is a trade-off; a simpler full function remote would indicate fewer performance options. Some companies offer the owner a second, stripped down remote with the essential functions (and don't forget illumination), and that would be a good idea in this instance.

It may sound like I am irritated, but I am content. The learning curve is not so steep as to pose unresolvable problems. With patience, the patterns of the VRDS-701 reveal themselves. A person who wants one switch and maybe a choice of A or B will be overwhelmed by the myriad functions. But anyone who wants to dial in a premium result that fits like a glove with their set of cables and speakers should not be put off by the extra decision making. The bulk of the selections are required for establishing and optimizing the system. Once that is done, the choices are minimal. I experience more feature selection activity due to my system building projects, but if yours remains stable for periods of



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time, then you are essentially selecting the Input, and only if you switch cables from RCA to XLR or vice versa, you need to switch the Analog Output. The other option is if you elect to use the VRDS-701's internal DAC, in which case you would turn Off the Digital Input and turn On the Digital Output. It's basic at that point. If you set something up and get no sound, you likely didn't select the right Digital or Analog setting.

I have a higher threshold for extra settings than most because I want to finely tune the sound for each system and speaker. The TEAC gear is superb in achieving that goal, and I detect no diminishment in sound quality consequently. The fidelity to the signal seems extreme for this level of componentry.

Can I have that also?

When I contacted the ever-helpful Jaclyn Ingis who owns her own PR firm, Jaclyn Ingis PR & Communications, and represents audio manufacturers including TAD, IsoAcoustics, and Advance Paris, I requested the VRDS-701 and the CG-10M-X Oven Clock. I love saying that! How fabulous to use an *oven clock* to cook up love in audible form! I felt the love last night when I played David Benoit's "Freedom at Midnight", a disc that I had stopped using, along with dozens of other oldies from the 80's and 90's because CD players or transports with DACs were not eliciting the beauty I wanted from them. The quality of the streaming music had risen steadily over the years, but the CD playback had not been improved. I had given up playing discs, thinking that they would never sound as I wished.

Hope returned when I started playing more current (if you can call CDs current; maybe you can over a 4-decade period) discs through the VRDS-701 and oven clock, and they sounded good! When I popped Benoit's disc into the player, I wasn't expecting the world. After all, even previous \$10K disk players and outboard DACs had not made the music seem freshly recorded, not according to today's standards. What a pleasant surprise when it sounded right, as it should! The experience was so moving, so gentle to the soul that I listened straight through the disc, even to tracks that I formerly skipped! Something was going very well with the TEAC setup.

I was elated that I asked for the oven clock and a pair of the AP-701B Amplifiers. Thank you to Jaclyn for going above and beyond to get the pair of amps! Most reviewers are content to work with one amp, even if it has a Bi-amp or Mono function. I consider that half a review. The first thing I wonder when I see a switchable amp is, how would a pair of them sound? The answer is, usually a lot better than a solo amp! I do not recall any stereo/mono switchable amplifier that has not sounded superior in Bi-amp (Mono) mode. It is especially important to consider a switchable amp's performance if the goal is the best performance and or one is driving less efficient speakers.

Aesthetically appealing

TEAC is to be commended for their robust, triple boxed packaging with thick foam inserts protecting the components. One box suffered a drop, but the tri-box packaging acted like crumple zones in a car and the component occupant emerged unscathed.

Buyers are given two choices, a standard shade of brushed silver or black. The VRDS-701 has petite non-functional fins akin to a heat sink. Wisely, they are beveled at the ends, unlike some amplifiers with sharp edges protruding like knives waiting to injure the owner. Is a set of sharp-edged amp fins



CG-10M-X

supposed to enhance the sound? Manufacturers need to get a clue in this age. The black is reminiscent of black out for cars; everything is black. The printing indicating functions on both the silver and black is so small as to be unreadable for older audiophiles. It's good that seemingly all functions are accessible from the unit, but you may have to memorize them. Otherwise, keep a flashlight or the Owner's Manual handy.

The casework is top notch, solid but not overly heavy, with superb fit and finish. The components appear as though they would weigh 50% more, but they are pleasantly balanced between feeling solid and not feeling like an anchor. Dials and buttons work smoothly and are not loose, and the rear is tight and clean with solid posts. Some plastic switches appear, such as the one to select between Stereo and Bi-Amp (Mono) on the AP-701B. But these are not high use switches and should not pose a problem in wearing out. I have seen such switches on high end gear.

This is the first time I am using a 12v trigger to control amps, and I like it. It's a welcome feature because as a 60-something listener who still hauls 200+ pound speakers around, I want to preserve my spine by not bending over and wearing it out by flipping the Power toggle switch. I jest, but I do like the old-style toggle switches. Like the meters, they are classically HiFi.

An anomaly presented itself regarding the 12v trigger, namely that a static shock will trigger the amps to turn on. If I turned on the clock first, then the static discharge would cause the amps to turn on as well. They immediately turned back off because the VRDS-701 had not yet been turned on. The oddest happening was that if I touched the metal accent of the Wharfedale Opus 2M2 Speaker, the TEAC amp associated with that channel would turn on! In comparison, the Legacy Audio i.V4 Ultra's 12v trigger never resulted in the amp turning on apart from powering up the VRDS-701. I suspect that TEAC may be using a particular grounding process in the AP-701 that makes it sound better but susceptible to static electricity. If you experience static electricity, be sure to discharge it prior to approaching the TEAC components.

The oven clock is a half-size component with an aesthetic departure; the handles on the front are less squarish, making them seem a bit out of place. Not that the handles are serious, given that the VRDS-



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701 and the AP-701 offer no means for rack mounting. The handles are diminutive, as I have smaller hands for a 6'5" man, and I can only fit three fingers into them. A guy with a meatier hand couldn't begin to use such handles. What good are they? They are secure and suitable for carrying components, which are of modest weight. This is another nod to the heritage of HiFi, and it's pleasant. It distinguishes the TEAC kit from thousands of mundane looking components.

Perhaps handles are the new HiFi aesthetic. The stunningly erudite Colibri C2 compact loudspeakers have pronounced handles incorporated into their cabinet. It makes picking up the speaker and moving it about with the stand attached convenient. Next, perhaps, we'll see a streamer with rack mounting handles. I'm joking!



The VRDS-701 has its back connections organized well, with the Bi-Amp (Mono) connections clearly indicated. The CG-10M-X is practically foolproof, given that it has an IEC connector and four female BNC connections. It can support four devices for re-clocking to 10MHz (the digital source must be able to accommodate a 10MHz signal). A digital cable with male BNC terminations on both ends is required, and in the case of AudioQuest, which when I requested a couple different digital cables sent the cables with RCA terminations and four BNC to RCA adapters. Oh well, I can't blame them much, as it's a lot easier to slap an adapter on than to manufacture low quantity BNC cables. When AudioQuest told me they could manufacture any kind of cable, that's not what I had in mind. Still, more importantly, this design allowed me to compare different brands of adapters and alternative digital links. Yes, such things do make a difference. I learned years ago that Cardas makes a robust BNC/RCA adapter, and yes, it is a step up sonically from the Audioquest adapter.

The CG-10M-X is the only component I have used with a legit warm up period. Don't waste our life on things like warm up of components. I have explored such things with solid state and tube equipment, one new and stone cold and the other broken in and warmed up, and in direct comparison, break in and warm up do not pass my Law of Efficacy. But the oven clock does, as far as I can tell. The true test would be to compare two of them, one from a cold start and the other warm. I don't have the gear to do so, but over the 10 minutes that is claimed by the Owner's Manual to cause change in sound, it seemed to improve noticeably. That is perception, not demonstration.

What was demonstrated is the efficacy of using the master clock. The VRDS-701 can switch in a matter of moments from the dual internal clocks to the outboard master clock. The improvement brought by the outboard clock is refinement, and it is well worth the money especially as the refinement of the speaker system rises. I would not be without it in use with the VRDS-701. It is an affordable way to juice



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the performance of not only the integral CD player, but also streamers like the Bricasti M5 or the PS Audio AirLens, both of which I bought following their reviews. It is worth a great deal to me to have a strong upgrade on streaming quality from the master clock.

The AP-701B Amplifier, like the others, is sharp looking, with that yummy dual meter and the otherworldly yellow hue. There is a mesmerizing effect seeing the pair of amps stacked – they generate little warmth – and their four needles bouncing. But watch out; the thin rubber discs that the owner puts onto the footers of all these components leave a difficult to remove residue on other components' tops, and that after only a few days. My solution was to use some scrap pieces of leather placed under the footers. Another option would be a piece of fabric under each footer. TEAC will want to investigate the residue issue. One sure way to piss off an audiophile is for a footer to mar the top of another component.

The illumination of the amp's meters can be low, high, or off, and likewise, the owner has two options for meter sensitivity or can turn them off. XLR and RCA inputs are selected by another petite toggle switch. I presume the signal circuitry has been optimized with forced selection of the type of input. The power rating is 170wpc into 8 Ohms and 260wpc into 4 Ohms. The Class D module is NCore by Hypex Electronics B.V. This is my first review of a Hypex module Class D amp, and in comparison to ICEPower module Class D amps, I'm impressed with the detail retrieval. I am finding that with Class D amplification, a power rating of at least 200wpc into 4 Ohms is usually plenty to drive even speakers which are of 4 Ohm nominal impedance.

Did I kill it?

Something went wrong when I tried to reconfigure the first VRDS-701. Yes, I had to report a problem, which it seems might have occurred when I tried to make too many connections and use the unit in an unusual fashion. There is irony in this, because recently I wrote my PS Audio Stellar Strata Mk2 review about using twin integrated amplifiers in an unusual horizontal bi-amp configuration. That too, I will discuss down below. I had never jimmied a component from hooking up cables and trying to use its functions, but it happened with the VRDS-701.

Likely, it was due to my attempting to use the Digital Input and Digital Output together as well as the RCA and XLR outputs. These are selectable with the unit, and it appears the owner can only use *either* RCA or XLR output, and *either* Digital Input or Digital Output. I was trying to use them all! I saw no warning in the Owner's Manual about such configurations and I have successfully done so with other gear in the past. It was a shock to me when I attempted to play a CD, and the unit started to make unbecoming mechanical sounds like the transport was having a seizure! It was noisy from that moment on. Occasionally, it would fail to read a disc. In humiliation, I told Jaclyn that I broke the unit. It may have just acted up, but not likely. I reported in depth so that TEAC's engineers can benefit in both discovery of what triggered the damage and in updating the Owner's Manual to make clear what settings and functions must be avoided.

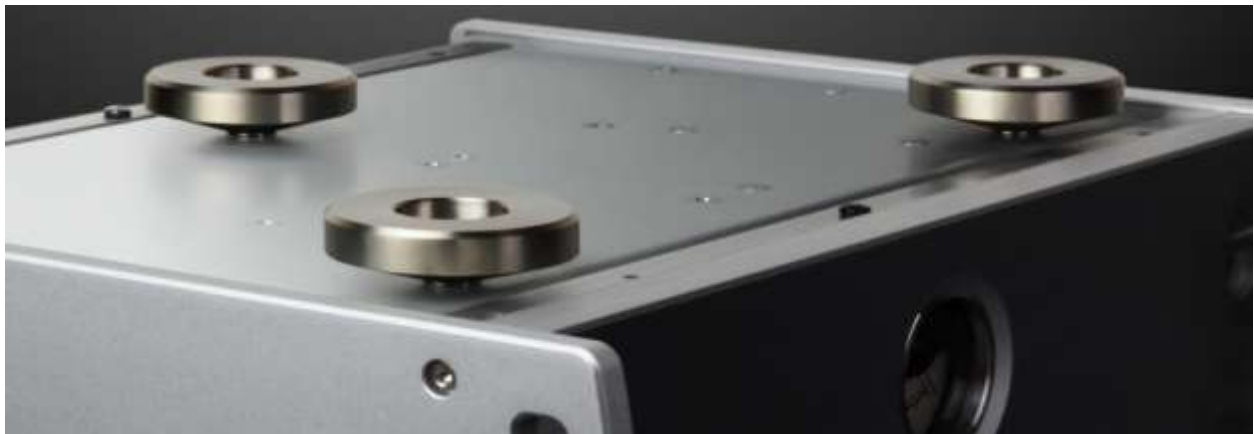
This kind of thing would likely not happen to you. My curiosity in the matter was to try using my streamer's digital coaxial output, run it through the VRDS-701's Digital Input, have the signal synchronized by the CG-10M-X's clock, then spit it back out the 701's Digital Output and on to the amplification. I busted it. Should the RCA and XLR cables have been removed and the outputs turned

Off? Was it a sin to try using the Digital Input, oven clock, and Digital Output simultaneously? I'll let the brainiacs at TEAC work that out. For now, my advice is, try not to be too smart for your own good! Use either the Digital Input or the Digital Output, then make your choice and hook up either XLR or RCA cables.

I have a bit of a gripe about the use of *either* XLR or RCA outputs. I can count on one finger the components which have called for killing one output while using the other, the VRDS-701. Everyone offers both RCA and XLR outputs hot, so what's up with this design? I suspect TEAC considers it to achieve better sound. TEAC put options for everything else under the sun into the unit, so my guess is that shutting off one output benefits the operative output.

My gripe about it is that I make unusual system configurations which depend upon use of both sets of outputs simultaneously. I typically send RCA outputs to the Perlisten D212s Subwoofers and the XLR outputs to the amps driving the mains. What am I supposed to do when I can use only one type of output? That requires drastic action, which is not unusual for me. I pull out either my XLR Y-cables or my RCA Y-cables, depending upon which I require, and split the signal emanating from the VRDS-701! A guy's gotta do what he's gotta do! It works perfectly, as expected. I'll make TEAC cringe worse. I send a 3m run to the subwoofers, and a 2m run to the amp(s). If I am using four channels, as with the Legacy Audio i.V4 Ultra, then I must use one more Y-cable at the amp to create the additional two channels of low-level signal for amplification! None of this futzing with the equipment caused any impairment.

Now TEAC can learn why I chose this equipment for review. It was not because of nostalgia, nor having heard it at a show or dealer. It was to explore another facet of my discovery of an unusual system configuration, that being use of two stereo integrated amplifiers having a topology of DAC/preamp (tube or SS)/Class D output. The pair of integrated amps is set up in a horizontal bi-amp configuration. I have demonstrated superior performance with two sets of such integrated amps, the Heaven 11 Billie Amp Mk2 (tube preamp stage) and the PS Audio Stellar Strata Mk2 (solid state preamp stage). These both have outperformed *all* the traditionally configured sets of separates from \$50-70K over 17 years of reviewing!



Does the TEAC gear stand a chance against this formidable topology and configuration? I wanted to try reversing the system configuration while retaining use of an integrated DAC and a class D amplifier. The VRDS-701 with the AP-701 fits the template of a highly integrated component at the front end versus



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the back end. What would happen if the topology was source (outboard streamer)/CD/DAC/preamp – the VRDS-701 has selectable Variable Volume output – in association with a simple back end, Class D power amplifier(s). It turns out that this, too, is a smashing success!

I have used the VRDS-701 with the Legacy i.V4 Ultra as well as the AP-701B, so the system topology, particularly the VRDS-701, works very well with other amps, too. The TEAC setup also outperformed all previous systems with separates from \$50-70K over 17 years of reviewing. The larger outcome is that the combination of highly integrated component which includes a DAC and preamplification, and which relies upon class D amplification is exceptionally efficacious!

The TEAC system, in this case used with the Bricasti M5 or PS Audio AirLens, is an astoundingly capable set that shows front end loaded integrated components can be formidable. I conjectured in the PS Audio Stellar Strata review that to achieve the notable results required both a particular topology of component and an unusual system configuration featuring a highly integrated component. The unusual system configuration with the integrated amps is doubling them and wiring the speakers in a horizontal bi-amp mode. The unusual configuration for the TEAC gear is opting for two of the AP-701B and running them Bi-Amp (Mono).



AP-701



The level of sound quality attained by both systems is arrestingly high-level. They are performing far beyond equipment two to three times their cost, and that is not exaggeration but demonstration. It seems the tide has turned regarding integrated components. Whereas for the past several decades, it was typical that separates always provided a superior experience, now with the likes of the VRDS-701 or



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the dual integrated amplifier systems, it is possible to assemble a system with a highly integrated component that outperforms many sets of costlier separate components.

During the formalities of setting up the review, Jaclyn had mentioned the favorable response the VRDS-701 was garnishing. She was correct; it is proving to be a formidable front-end component. Let's proceed to discuss the benefits and performance of the TEAC system.

Advantage: integrated source, DAC, preamp

The audiophile who wishes to obtain an unusually high-end result no longer has to rely upon several streams of trickle-down technology. TEAC discusses the technologies employed in the VRDS-701, and to the experienced audiophile, it is evident that advancements in transports, DACs, and preamplification (analog and digital attenuation) have been taking place over the years. I shared in the PS Audio Stellar Strata Mk2 review how three important technological advancements were pulled together in that integrated amplifier. Both TEAC and PS Audio advanced their DAC and attenuation, with the CD transport being the unique feature benefitting from TEAC's work.

Anyone who has a CD collection and has been using an old transport and DAC needs to strongly consider upgrading to the VRDS-701. It is a breath of fresh air for my CD collection! Along with the CG-10M-X, my older music is presenting a terrific amount of detail and nuance that had escaped previous CD sources. It is difficult to attribute the benefit only to the transport because the DAC is integrated. What I can say with certainty, is that my use of an older high end CD player such as the Ayon Audio CD-5 or DACs such as the Benchmark Audio DAC3 and AHB2 Amplifiers did not reach this level of refinement. In the case of the Ayon, it is now pushing 15 years old, and the Benchmark components rely more upon the standard system building configuration. In the intervening years, highly integrated components have leapfrogged them. As advancements in DACs, attenuation, and class D amps have come, the older paradigm is weakening. CD playback with the VRDS-701 follows suit with the typical advancements in sources, with layers or veils being pulled back to reveal a clearer picture.

The ethereal moment came with the insertion of the Colibri C2 High Performance Compact Loudspeaker into the system. I cannot express enough how pleased I am at discovery of this horn hybrid speaker! It is everything I thought I did not want; it's shorter, has limited low end response, and is a horn speaker. However, as a budget offering of Avantgarde Acoustics, a world leader in horn speaker systems, it has exceptional build and sound quality, blends terrifically well with my Perlisten D212s Subwoofers, and is holistically superior to the larger floor standing speakers I own. The VRDS-701 and CG-10M-X, in conjunction with the novel twin Stellar Strata Mk2 configuration, are bringing copious amounts of refinement to this exquisite little horn hybrid.

Another wild aspect of this system is that I have daisy-chained DACs! For both the CD playback and the streaming from the Bricasti M5, I am sending the VRDS-701's clock-enhanced output to the Digital Input of the integrated amps. The first moments I heard it, I was stunned at the sweeping improvement in resolution, depth of the sound field, and fullness and solidity of images. I had not previously done much comparison of linked DACs – I recall I had tried it with the Exogal Comet and other DACs, but never with this profound a result. I plan on exploring that result and comparing it repeatedly with either the TEAC or the PS Audio's DACs to assess whether it is a method worth adopting. At this time, the combo of these affordable components sounds ridiculously upscale.

The importance of cabling

As I recently had a get-together of some local audiophiles at my home, I was explaining the system configuration with the VRDS-701 and the CG-10M-X Master Clock. I commented that the big advantage of AudioQuest sending typical digital coaxial (SPDIF) cables which required BNC adapters is that it allowed for swapping the cables for comparison, a build-your-own digital cable option. Immediately, one of the most technically knowledgeable men in our group began to interrupt and argue with me about it. He insisted that since the data is digital, the cable for the clock would have no impact on the sound. He is a big fan of double-blind testing, which I consider an impediment to building better systems.



What can I say? He's wrong. Swapping out the digital coax cables in an efficient manner, i.e. two to three minutes, easily passes my Law of Efficacy in terms of clear, easily distinguishable and repeatable changes. The changes are not unlike that provided by changing a component. I discovered that AudioQuest's DBS (Dielectric Bias System) incorporated into the higher end models of their cables was associated with better sound quality. Whether it was the DBS battery pack or the upgraded build of the



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cable, I do not know, but the upper end digital cables in association with the TEAC gear transmitted significantly more informational and tonal richness from the components.

No one knows whether any given analog interconnect might outperform a dedicated digital cable. I have compared the Iconoclast RCA Generation 2 RCA and XLR Interconnects to several dedicated digital links over the years, and typically, the Iconoclast interconnect has outperformed them! I no longer hold slavish adherence to the notion that one must use only a cable with the proper nomenclature to get the best results. In this instance, a single Silent Source The Music Reference Interconnect (2m) acting as the digital link between the VRDS-701 and the CG-10M-X was clearly more upscale than any other digital link in that location. Similarly, the AudioQuest Firebird DBS was best (the AudioQuest Cinnamon Digital Cable was runner up) when placed between the Bricasti M5's coaxial digital output and the VRDS-701's Digital Input. When I switched these around, the music relatively fell apart. Do not overlook the necessity of trying all possible iterations of cable placement, even for digital links!

Like rolling discrete opamps

Several years ago, I entered a period of exploration of rolling discrete opamps into components. The components which benefitted from that activity were various DACs produced by Eastern Electric and the Kinki Studio EX-M1 (and the newer model EX-M1+) Integrated Amplifier. Starting with mass-produced chip opamps, I worked my way up to some of the finest discrete opamps. Between brands and models of single and dual opamps I had so many that I created a chart to track the combinations. I tried dozens of iterations of them in the electronics, and each combination yielded a distinct sonic signature. The experimentation allowed me to customize the sound to such a degree that when I was done, I had no desire to change the components but considered them ideal for my system building purposes. It was tedious in some respects, but working through the permutations of opamps made those components quite valuable to me.

The VRDS-701's extensive menu system strikes me as similar to the cache of discrete opamps. The permutations of settings are nearly as vast as the combinations of discrete opamps, but they are more convenient. It's a lot easier to punch a button than pull and replace opamps and if one is misplaced or oriented incorrectly, the component will be damaged. One of the primary reasons I like the VRDS-701 is that once the period of exploration of all the settings is done and an optimized performance found, it tends to be the optimal combination for my ears. When I put a new component into the system and commence revisiting the settings of the VRDS-701, I usually revert to the combination I have been using. Eventually, I concluded that I have found the best combination of settings for me and unless something seems lacking, I leave the settings alone.

As I was looking for a better CD transport, the VRDS system from the Esoteric line found in this more affordable component prompted me to arrange for this review. I am pleased that I did, because I have been introduced to a very nuanced level of CD playback. I also discovered that TEAC's integrated DAC and preamp treats streaming very well, and found in the VRDS-701 an integrated source that will allow me to build a considerable number of systems with alternative configurations. The high degree of functionality and flexibility of the VRDS-701 and the pleasing way the CG-10M-X cooks the signal make these two a considerable source, regardless of price. I was stunned by the unexpectedly upscale result I obtained when I daisy-chained DACs, and I want to keep exploring that option. For these reasons, I am making them my new digital source for CD, file playback, and streaming.



<https://www.dagogo.com/teac-vrds-701-dual-monaural-usb-dac-cd-player-pre-amp-headphone-amplifier-cg-10m-x-master-clock-generator-ap-701b-stereo-power-amplifier-review/>

On the AP-701, it is a charming amplifier, and I recommend it to leverage the capacity of the VRDS-701 and CG-10M-X. Putting myself into the shoes of the earnest but fiscally limited listener, in terms of capacity to lift a pair of speaker's performance, the TEAC components are compelling. I do not often applaud the performance of a one brand system, but TEAC deserves recognition for the level of sound quality offered for affordable separates.

Revisiting TEAC components after all these years has been delightful! I was pleasantly surprised by the sound quality being obtained at their price point. At \$14K for the setup used in the review, which provides the owner with an entire system of electronics sans streamer and speakers, it is a serious setup that does not skimp on sound quality. Audiophiles with limited funds and an insatiable appetite for good sound would be treated well with this system.

Associated Components:

Digital Sources: Bricasti M5 Network Player, PS Audio AirLens, TEAC VRDS-701 Dual Monaural USB/DAC CD Player/Pre-Amp/Headphone Amplifier and TEAC CG-10M-X Master Clock Generator

Streaming Music Service: Tidal premium; Qobuz

Interface: ROON; Audrivana

DAC: (Placeholder) Eastern Electric Minimax with discrete opamps rolled in

Preamp: (Placeholder) Cambridge Audio Azur 840E

Amps: Legacy Audio i.V4 Ultra

Integrated: Heaven 11 Billie Amp Mk2 (two units used in horizontal bi-amp configuration); PS Audio Stellar Strata Mk2 (two units used in horizontal bi-amp configuration)

Speakers: Legacy Audio DSW Clarity Edition; Kings Audio King III electrostatic speakers; Pure Audio Project Trio15 10" Coaxial version; Kings Audio King Tower omnidirectional; Aspen Acoustics Grand Aspen; Wharfedale Opus 2-M2 Monitors

Subwoofers: Perlisten D212s Subwoofers

IC's: Iconoclast RCA and XLR Generation 2 with Ultra-Pure Ohno Continuous Cast Copper conductors

Speaker Cables: Iconoclast Series 2 TPC Speaker Cable; Iconoclast Series 2 SPTPC Speaker Cable

Digital Cables: AudioQuest Digital Coaxial Carbon 1.5m; AudioQuest Digital Coaxial Coffee 1.5m; Iconoclast RCA or XLR 2m Interconnect used as digital link; Audioquest

USB: AudioQuest Cinnamon USB 1.5m; Audioquest Coffee USB 1.5m; Clarity Cable Supernatural 1m



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Power Cables: Iconoclast BAV Power Cord; Clarity Cable Vortex; Snake River Audio Signature Series

Power Conditioning: Wireworld Matrix Power Cord Extender; Tice Audio Solo