Subject: Onix XCD-88
Posted by FredT on Fri, 15 Jul 2005 00:36:55 GMT
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Has anyone else bought one? It seemed like such a good deal at $299 that I ordered one. I took some picts of the inside and compared then to the Music Hall CD-25 which is supposed to be the same rebranded Shandling player. See for yourself at the link below. I understand there are some upgrades, like replacing the op amps, that make a difference. There's an article on the Parts Connexion's CD-25 upgrade at http://www.6moons.com/audioreviews/musichall/cd25.2.html
Onix XCD-88

Subject: Re: Onix XCD-88
Posted by Wayne Parham on Fri, 15 Jul 2005 07:19:09 GMT
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Cool! Can't wait to hear it! How do you like it? I may have to try one out too.

Subject: Re: Onix XCD-88
Posted by FredT on Fri, 15 Jul 2005 10:30:02 GMT
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The fit and finish are very good. I plan to leave it on repeat for a week or so before I form any conclusions about how it sounds, but I believe I already know the answer: With the development of better DAC chips combined with the economies of Chinese production today's $500 CD player sounds better than the $500 players that were offered five or more years ago. I would be surprised if it didn't better my Marantz CD-67SE. On top of that, AV123 is offering this $500 player for $299.I will be especially interested in hearing how it compares to the current crop of non-oversampling DAC's such as the Scott Nixon tube DAC, the dAck! DAC, and Audio Mirror DAC. These inexpensive DAC's are the topic of the Houston Audio Society's August meeting, where we will compare all three to the DSD and PCM analog outputs of a Sony SCD-XA9000ES SACD player.I believe I will bring the Onix along, and if the other members will tolerate a lowly $299 player, compare it to the external DAC's, with some experienced listeners evaluating the differences. I'll post the results here.

Subject: Re: Onix XCD-88
Posted by Wayne Parham on Fri, 15 Jul 2005 11:16:19 GMT
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I'd love to be there and I'm anxious to hear what everyone has to say.

Subject: So Far It's Thumbs Down
Posted by FredT on Sat, 16 Jul 2005 17:12:23 GMT
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The Onix has now been on repeat for two days, so it should be on its way to being broken in. The bottom line is at this point I prefer the $48 Toshiba 3950 with the infamous John Swenson mod. The Onix soundstage is more forward and less three-dimensional, and the tonal character sounds a bit less delicate to my ears. With the Toshiba, on any CD where there's a solo instrument placed off center, that instrument sounds more like it's suspended at a specific depth within a background of quiet. With the Onix the instrument is less specifically located on the left-to-right plane, and even less so in the front to back plane. This is true even with an HDCD like the Reference Recordings' John Rutter Requium CD (the Onix has HDCD capability; the Toshiba doesn't).

Subject: Re: So Far It's Thumbs Down
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sun, 17 Jul 2005 08:34:40 GMT
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Gotcha. Thanks for the update.

Subject: Re: So Far It's Thumbs Down
Posted by FredT on Sun, 17 Jul 2005 11:25:45 GMT
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At this point I would have to describe the Onix as "uninvolving". I've swapped it out with the modded Toshiba several times, and each time I find myself drawn into the music with the Toshiba and distracted by the Onix's two dimensional presentation. For those who are unfamiliar with the Toshiba mod, it taps into the circuit immediately after the DAC (removing the filter and analog stage op amps from the signal path) and reroutes the signal to a pair of RCA's through high quality capacitors. The Onix came with an OPA2134 set, which is considered good and offers the quality that's typcially heard in "budget" (under $3,000) players. I've ordered a set of the more expensive OPA627s, which would be used in only the most expensive players. These are single opa chips so they require an adapter board which I also ordered. Somebody on another forum did this upgrade and said that the sound stage become more focused and the instruments got more separation.In the meantime the Onix sounds very good as a transport for the external Scott Nixon DAC.

Subject: Patience Is Not My Greatest Virtue
Posted by FredT on Wed, 20 Jul 2005 20:05:05 GMT
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After a few more days of running full time the Onix player has progressed from uninvolving to invloving. What I mean by that is when I sit to listen I'm no longer tempted to remove the Onix and replace it with the modded Toshiba or the Scott Nixon DAC. It's still not quite equal to the Scott Nixon but for $299 it's a helluva deal, and I haven't upgraded the Op Amps yet. So if you have $1,000 to spend on a CD player you can do better, but if you've been thinking of upgrading from a mass market player and your budget is limited you should consider the Onix as a definite step up.

Subject: Re: Patience Is Not My Greatest Virtue
Posted by Wayne Parham on Thu, 21 Jul 2005 12:14:32 GMT
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I'm anxious to hear one sometime, Fred. Thanks for taking the time to evaluate and write about it.

Subject: OP Amp Upgrade
Posted by FredT on Fri, 22 Jul 2005 22:41:23 GMT
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The upgrade OPA627 op amps arrived yesterday and the adapters arrived today. The stock op amps are two channel chips while the 627's are single channel, so you have to get an adapter for each channel. The Parts Connexion sells the 627's installed in adapter boards for $50 ea, or you can buy a set of five 627's from USA Caps on Ebay for $24.99 and order two adapter boards from Cimmaron Technologies for $3 each. If there ever was a no-brainer this is it.Five for $25 sounds like cheap parts to me, but this kind of op amp would only be used in the better players, typically in the $3K range and above, so they are a significant improvement over the stock ones. It took about five minutes of warmup to begin to hear the difference. I'll leave it on repeat all night, but already there's an improvement in the separation of instruments, L to R and F to B, within the soundstage. With the op amp upgrade this has become a seriously good CD player which I would recommend without reservation to anyone considering an upgrade from a mass market player or from an older mid fi player.

Subject: Re: OP Amp Upgrade
Posted by Wayne Parham on Fri, 22 Jul 2005 22:58:20 GMT
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There is a wide variation in opamp prices and performance levels, especially in terms of S/N, distortion and drift. But as you've noted, the most expensive parts are still pretty cheap. It adds up when you're doing thousands though, so that's why the low cost players use parts that cost pennies instead of dollars.

Subject: Re: OP Amp Upgrade - OT
Posted by FredT on Sat, 23 Jul 2005 11:03:27 GMT
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Yep, if you're diy'ing you can build a component for the cost of its parts plus some sweat equity, but if you're building to sell to others through mainstream retail channels the final price will be at least five times or more the cost of the parts. All that extra money is necessary to cover office and plant overhead, labor costs (benefits, soc sec, unemployment ins, workers comp), product liabilty insurance, taxes, advertising, distribution costs, and of course the retailer's markup. Many are horrified by the amout of markup for high end audio components, but it's more understandable to someone who has owned a business that sells relatively low volumes of a premium product.And now, back on topic: When I first played the Onix with the stock op amps the center image dominated the sound. Sounds from the right and left of center were subdued and lacked any front-to-back placement. The ambient sounds that give clues to location were almost entirely absent. With the upgrade op amps, after one night of playing on repeat, I'm finding the center image is subdued and the sound is tilted toward the right and left. But this time I'm going to hold off from judging the sound until the thing has had at least 50 more hours of breakin time. This is the first time I have bought a new source component and listened carefully to the soundstage imaging, and it's amazing how it changes with breakin time.The stock op amps are not soldered, just plugged into sockets on the player's main circuit board. The upgrade op amps are soldered to their adapter boards, but the adapter boards just plug into the same sockets on the circuit board. Proper orientation on the adapter boards and the player's circuit board is indicated on each board and on the op amps. Since it's just plug-in change, I believe I reinstall the stock op amps after the new ones have broken in and do a comparison. I'll post my findings.If anyone is intersested, the op amps are from USA Caps' Ebay store at
http://stores.ebay.com/USA-Caps-Inc_Op-Amps_W0QQcolZ2QQdirZ1QQftidZ1QQtZkmThe adpters are part number 021001 at
http://cimarrontechnology.com/index.asp?PageAction=VIEWCATS&Category=5

Subject: Re: OP Amp Upgrade
Posted by GarMan on Sun, 24 Jul 2005 01:34:54 GMT
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Thanks for the heads-up on the OPA627 Fred. I'd always thought the Burr Brown OPA2134 was a highend opamp. Many kits suggest using the 2134 as an upgrade. The phono stage I build

using these sound very good to me. But I'd definately experiment with the OPA627 this Fall when I start my active crossover project.Gar.

Subject: OPA2134 Is A High End Op Amp
Posted by FredT on Sun, 24 Jul 2005 12:02:09 GMT
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I'm only repeating what I have read here, but the 2134 used in the Music Hall and the 2604 used in the Onix are very good OPA's. The 627 is more highly regarded but is quite a bit more expensive. As far as I am aware the 627 is used only on the more expensive players like the $5,000 Shanling SCD-T300. None of these really are expensive parts, but the $5 price of the 627, combined with the fact that you need four of them versus only two of the others, would be considered high by a manufacturer. We are able to buy a player for $300-$600 only because the most expensive parts in it seldom cost them more than a few cents wholesale.

Subject: Re: Onix XCD-88
Posted by Shane on Tue, 30 Aug 2005 15:43:53 GMT
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So what do you think of the player now that you've had the upgrade chips in for a while?
