

Rega Apollo

Rega Apollo CD player. \$1500

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Just in case you haven't discovered it yet, here's a small warning about Google Earth. Don't. It's completely compulsive, the procrastinators ruin. Frankly, it's a miracle that I'm getting anything done at all these days.

Google Earth is an Internet-based tool that gives you access to satellite and aerial photography of practically anywhere on the planet. So you can zoom in to peer digitally into people's back yards; like a nosey neighbour from the other side of the planet.

And I can tell you that our old neighbours in London haven't tidied their garden in at least 10 years.

It's all about detail. And detail is the opiate of the information age.

A little detail that's been missing

With the new Rega Apollo CD player, detail junkies everywhere can get a musical fix to match their mapping fix. And that marks a real departure for the British manufacturer.

Traditionally, Rega CD players have eschewed raw detail in favour of a subtler, and some claim emotional or musical approach.

Billed as a replacement for the five year-old Planet CD player, the Apollo is priced at \$1500 and, outwardly at least, appears fairly similar. Inside, however, it's completely new: a new CD transport, new DAC and crucially, completely new operating software.

It's this new software that Rega credits with much of the Apollo's performance. Well, that and the 32 bit CPU. And the extra 20Mb of memory that it all runs in. And the new Sigma Delta DAC. And... oh, details-schmetails... what's it like?

God is in the details

As you'll have gathered, the Apollo is detailed. Lavishly, gloriously detailed, with every breath of every voice picked out perfectly. Every buzz of finger over string, every rattle and every hum all in its proper place. But it's detail that completes rather than distracts from the overall picture, adding layers of ma-



were rocking, and not in a bad way.

terial to discover.

Google Earth lets you enjoy a satellite view, taking in the beauty of the South Island then focusing on the baroque detail of a finely-wrought fjord. In a different musical genre (Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* - DG4474412) the Apollo gives you Zarathustra's voice in all its aching magnificence, then lets you discover every constituent instrument, sound and reverberation. God is man, how very Nietzschean.

From 2001 to ancient Egypt

Thankfully, the classic Rega attributes of timing and pace have a firm grasp on the whole picture, keeping all those details in line. With the Stuttgart State Opera performance of *Akhnaten* (Sony/CBS CB783), the Apollo revealed Philip Glass's carefully layered construction of synopated strings, horns and voices. Where lesser players allow the horns to dominate, destroying the subtle interplay of rhythms, the Apollo separated the elements, creating space for each group of instruments.

Bass, the final frontier

Changing pace to an almost ridiculous degree, Fat Boy Slim's *Palookaville* reveals just how much work the big-beat DJ puts into his music. With the Apollo it becomes quite apparent where he's taken samples directly from vinyl (*North West Three*) and where he's dressing something up (*Don't Let The Man Get You Down*). But the real story with modern music is the Apollo's tight control over bass. It was almost as if I had inadvertently attached new speakers. Where my KEFs usually sound slightly soft in the bass, with the Apollo in control they took on not only a new purpose but also a whole new musicality. They

Some details aren't so good

Actually using the Apollo is a slightly mixed experience. Somewhat irritatingly, the remote control won't operate any other Rega components (and the old Rega remote doesn't support all the Apollo's functions). An irritating detail.

Of more concern is overall build quality that, like the Planet, is only adequate. The front panel is distinctly flimsy plastic and panel is fixed with screws that are a different colour from older Rega components, so the new CD player won't match the Brio or Mira amps. A hint of new amps to come, perhaps, but another detail I didn't like.

The new CD transport also left me cold. As with the Planet, it's a top-loader, but instead of lid-mounted puck to hold the CD in place, there are three, spring loaded ball-bearings in the hub. If this sounds familiar, it probably is. It's exactly the same disc retention system found in the CD-ROM drive of many laptop computers. Yes, Rega has used a CD-ROM mechanism, for the perfectly sound reason that it's the only type available these days. But I'm not at all convinced by the one they've chosen. It just doesn't feel like it belongs in a \$1500 CD player.

On the plus side, the CD-ROM mechanism combined with the new operating software means Rega has been able to build MP3 compatibility into the Apollo.

One last detail

Niggles aside, the Apollo is a fabulous CD player. At \$1500, it's staggering value for money and if I were a Rega dealer with stocks of the \$3000 Jupiter, I'd be quite worried. Yes the Apollo is similar to the Planet. But it's a Planet with new software to give you more detail than ever. Google Planet, anyone?—*Matthew Masters*

