

## Rega Jupiter 2000 CD Player

Roy Gregory

**H**ow about I recommend to you a CD player that, compared to the competition, offers limited dynamic range and lower overall levels of information? It's also disturbingly manual to use, demanding of a top shelf space and looks like none of the competition, either—but hey, it's a Rega, and we all know how difficult it is to break the habits of a lifetime.

What's more, taking all that into account, I'm still going to suggest that you take this player seriously. Why? Because it makes sense—makes sense of the music that is. And also because the Jupiter possesses that rarest of qualities, musical authority. That's generally the sole preserve of far more expensive machines, but contrary to popular perception, the quality does not stem from their greater musical weight or superior dynamic range. Instead, it derives from their ability to present the different elements in a musical performance with their interrelationships intact (the right bit in the right place at the right time). This might sound simple, but it's both vital to understanding and enjoying recorded music, and something that CD has struggled with since day one. It's also something that even basic analog systems seem to have little or no trouble with and, lest we forget, Rega represents one of the last redoubts of analog obstinance.

Rega supremo Roy Gandy's almost bloody-minded insistence on doing things differently is well documented and best represented by his RB300 pick-up arm, a design whose



lateral approach to its engineering completely altered the view and potential of budget record replay, so dominating the market that the competition simply gave up. In its own way, the original Planet CD player, with its cleverly realized top-loading transport and die-cast chassis was just as radical, offering a cost-effective version of the mechanical integrity found in top flight machines. It's just that with so many other CD players available, it tended to get lost in the crowd. The Planet's achievements were developed on the digital side by the Jupiter and Io two-box combination, and now, finally, both models have been superseded by a second generation in the shape of the 2000 series players.

By now, you sharper knives in the drawer will have recognized that the Jupiter 2000, a single-box player, replaces a two-box predecessor. Indeed, one of the main changes is away from the cast casework of the earlier electronics to a roomier, extruded aluminium construction. The original Jupiter was never intended to be a two-box player; it was just that Rega couldn't fit the extra hardware and power supplies inside the chassis of the Planet. That reluctance was well founded, and while the two-box machine handily outperformed its sibling, it was also critically dependent on the quality of its digital

interconnect, only achieving its best performance with a wire that cost as much as either of the two boxes.

One thing that hasn't changed is the unique user interface. The Jupiter 2000 retains a re-engineered version of the top-loading transport with its cantilevered lid. It also retains its predecessor's minimal controls: play, stop and skip represented by small, unlabeled buttons on the front panel. It's a combination that can be daunting to the uninitiated (it managed to freeze one Wadia/Levinson-owning visitor), but once you get your head round it, then you begin to appreciate that it's actually a perfect extension of Rega's Bauhaus approach to musical reproduction. You'll find this mirrored in the sound. The 2000 models include a remote as standard, for all those who suffer from control withdrawal, and are prepared to accept compromised sound quality in return for the belief that they are in charge.

In the same way that the Jupiter's physical structure spends money on the things that matter to performance, embodied in the rigid, high-quality casework that contrasts so markedly with the plastic front trim, musically it starts with the basics. Which is exactly where most basic machines leave off. After all, we've got a pretty good idea of how to maximize information retrieval from

CD systems. It's making sense of that information that presents a problem, which is why so many players bombard us with a welter of unrelated and disjointed musical detail. The constant struggle to interpret the garbled message is ultimately what makes them so fatiguing to listen to.

The Rega players are the complete opposite, concentrating on the form and structure of the music to the exclusion of more obviously hi-fi attributes. While it might make them less immediately impressive, listen longer and you'll find them engaging, satisfying and relaxing. What the Jupiter offers that the cheaper Planet does not is the same musical integrity but with greater finesse. For the serious listener, this makes it a much better bet.

As I suggested earlier, the Jupiter's superior mechanical construction and top-loading transport mimic far more costly designs. Inside, the parallels continue, with complex, multiple, independent power supplies for each section and channel. It's not that Rega here neglects the digital hardware, indeed it goes so far as to employ a proprietary 24-bit chipset. Rather it sets out to ensure that hardware's conditions of operation, a consideration that extends to the soft, polymer feet that support the case-work and help to isolate the electronic innards from the outside world.

Listen to something big and complex, and you'll begin to appreciate what I'm on about. Reference Recordings' Rachmaninoff Symphonic Dances [RR-96CD] is a perfect example. The Jupiter loses some of the soundstage's volume and the impressive dynamics don't get to scale their full range. However, the succeeding dynamic steps that create that famous opening section are perfectly scaled and naturally paced, meaning that while other players might go louder, the Jupiter delivers far more of the musical tension. When it does let go, everything arrives at once, resulting in much greater musical impact.


Really complicated electronic/acoustic mixes like Nils Petter Molvaer's Khme [ECM1560] are presented in an intelligible and suitably impressive fashion, particularly the staccato drum patterns, so often reduced to a tumble of unrelated thuds. The Rega gives them shape, pitch, and precise spacing. It's a trick I normally associate only with far more expensive machines. And don't get the impression that the Jupiter responds just to fireworks. Temporal and rhythmic integrity are just as vital to, and in some ways more impressively demonstrated with, the simplicity of a violin sonata.

Just as those drum patterns are given shape and sense by the Rega's ability to reconstitute the overall musical structure, the same applies to individual instrumental lines. Whether the trumpet belongs to Molvaer or Miles, the direction and pace, the pitch and emphasis that build each melodic line, are wonderfully explicit. Even more so, for reasons that I can't begin to explain, with mono recordings (Steamin' With the Miles Davis Quintet [ICJ-60128]). Listen to the Jupiter and you'll know it's doing things differently, without necessarily being able to put your finger on exactly what. Listen to a mono disk and you'll pick it up much quicker; and once you've recognized it, you'll hear it in everything you listen to. Miles' trumpet, even more Red Garland's piano lines are laid out unerringly, making the development and improvisation much, much easier to follow; and easier to enjoy.

Of course, the same applies to multiple lines that interlock. Just listen to the glorious anarchy that opens "Salt Peanuts." Philly Joe Jones and Garland interlock effortlessly, Coltrane provides the punctuation to Miles' extended opening flight, before taking off himself. This ability to keep things sorted, even when the going gets extraordinarily tough, is what separates the Rega's rooted approach to the music from

its competition. It's an approach that repays the long-term listener. It also handicaps the player in a quick A/B comparison. But take the time to listen and the superiority of its musical message will become more and more apparent, to the point where you might well wonder whether some of the alternatives are even attempting to do the same job.

By concentrating on the fundamental elements that separate music from noise Rega have chosen to sacrifice some of the more obvious aspects of CD reproduction. There is also an overall loss of transparency and micro-dynamic resolution, leading to a slightly bleached tonal palette and a fine overall grain within the acoustic space. I find these failings preferable to the disorganized superclarity that so many companies seem to pursue. The Jupiter might deliver less quantity overall, but more of the message arrives intact. Its music will speak to you rather than pinning you to the chair. Listen and I think you'll find it a persuasive approach. It brings a whole new meaning to the notion "less is more," a popular refrain in the world of hi-fi, and yet another way in which this player makes sense out of chaos.

Which is just one more way that this player makes sense. 

#### SPECS

Type: Single-box CD Player  
 DACs: 2 x 24-bit IC40 Delta Sigma  
 Outputs: One pair analog, one pair Digital (RCA), one pair Optical (Tos-link)  
 Output Level: 2.0V  
 Dimensions: 435 x 100 x 270 mm

#### IMPORTER INFORMATION

Lauerman Audio Imports  
 108 E. Jackson Ave.  
 Knoxville, Tennessee 37915  
 Phone: (865) 521-6464  
 realhifi@aol.com  
 www.rega.co.uk  
 Price: \$1,895