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HiFiBLOG
by sempre-audio.com

Review - Juin 2024 **MANTAX - As You Like It...**

When Métronome Technologie introduced Kalista's DreamPlay X, it was already clear that, in keeping with Kalista's tradition, a perfectly matched partner was still missing – one designed for all those HiFi enthusiasts who refuse to make any compromises and rely on true specialists for every task. And it is precisely this specialist, leaving no wish unfulfilled, that now stands ready with Kalista's Mantax.

In Brief

There are products that stand virtually without competition, playing in a class of their own — such as Kalista's Mantax from the French specialist Métronome Technologie, part of Kalista's DreamPlay Collection, as demonstrated in the in-depth review by sempre-audio.at.

Métronome Technologie has long been recognized as a true specialist in digital solutions and as a HiFi manufacturer that makes no compromises, especially with its Kalista brand products. Here, absolutely everything is subordinated to a single goal: designing an outstanding system. This commitment extends from the sound itself right through to the design. Kalista's DreamPlay X can

rightly be considered a prime example of what this philosophy means in practice.

With DreamPlay X, a reference-class CD and SACD transport is already available. What it has been missing to deliver truly perfect results is a matching D/A converter operating at the very highest level — and this is now provided with Mantax.

DreamPlay X or DreamPlay XC

Interestingly, Métronome Technologie offers not just one but two solutions built around Kalista's DreamPlay X. DreamPlay X itself, as already mentioned, is a CD and SACD transport, dedicated to reading audio data from optical discs in the most accurate way possible and passing it on to an external specialist for D/A conversion. This is where, as previously noted, Mantax comes into play.

But there is also DreamPlay XC, which the company proudly introduced as a 4-in-1 system. It is not only capable of playing CDs and SACDs, but also integrates a DAC, a preamplifier, and even a streaming option. In other words, it is a highly

integrated solution capable of fulfilling a wide range of tasks.

Métronome Technologie readily admits that this solution is already perfect for many customers, as it is a system that sets an exceptionally high standard in terms of quality. Indeed, Kalista's DreamPlay XC has already demonstrated its class in a detailed review on sempre-audio.at, proving itself to be a top-tier choice for anyone who decides on this system.

But as the saying goes, there is always room for improvement; no solution exists where skilled engineers cannot find another small adjustment to make, another fine detail to refine, in order to extract just a little more and raise the bar even higher.

And that is exactly what Métronome Technologie has done with the development of the new Kalista's Mantax. As mentioned, it was designed above all to pair with the in-house Kalista DreamPlay X, though certainly not limited to that. Naturally, Mantax is conceived to serve as an outstanding partner for any digital source, unlocking its full sonic potential at the highest level of quality.

«It is always a great challenge to design and manufacture such exceptional products. Mantax could not be developed within the same timeframe as DreamPlay X, but I am convinced that it was worth the wait! Outstanding craftsmanship and remarkable adjustment options – this is what I

wanted to offer to the audiophile world.»
Jean Marie Clauzel, Owner and Designer of Métronome Technologie

The Kalista DreamPlay Collection – A Look Back at Its History

The Kalista DreamPlay Collection has a long tradition at Métronome Technologie. From the very beginning, the focus has been on solutions that deliver the highest standards of technical performance, but just as importantly, also embody outstanding craftsmanship, the use of the finest materials, and an exclusive – even exquisite – design.

It is precisely this unique design that continues to impress those already familiar with the entire product portfolio of the French company. After all, when it comes to the Métronome Technologie brand itself, the design philosophy tends to be more pragmatic – certainly more understated than the bold and distinctive aesthetic of Kalista.

Métronome Technologie itself describes its product range as exceptional, aimed at discerning audiophiles, with each system in the collection regarded as the quintessence of sound and refined aesthetics.

The Kalista DreamPlay Collection, for example, offered a solution with Kalista's DreamPlay CD that, from a purely technical standpoint, represented the best of its time for CD audio playback. At the same time, it

featured an outstanding design concept, regarded as a work of art and a prime example of industrial design at the highest level.

Since DreamPlay CD was a pure CD transport, it naturally required DreamPlay DAC. According to the manufacturer, this DAC was developed to extract the very best from optical discs when used in combination with the transport.

In addition, DreamPlay One represented the first so-called integrated





player in the lineup, aimed at users who preferred a single solution for CD audio playback, as described by Métronome Technologie.

It is clear, then, that from the very beginning the concept behind the Kalista DreamPlay Collection was designed to offer both highly flexible, integrated solutions as well as dedicated specialists optimized for a single task. Today, this vision is represented by DreamPlay X in combination with Mantax, or by DreamPlay XC.

Mantax – The Perfect Partner for DreamPlay X

Despite DreamPlay XC being an integrated system, it was essential to also offer the option of a pure transport plus an external DAC, Jean Marie Clauzel explicitly stated in an interview with *sempre-audio.at*. Many of the company’s customers particularly appreciate this separation, and there is no equivalent product on the market. Owners of a Kalista’s DreamPlay X wanted a D/A converter that could match their extraordinary SACD/CD transport in every respect — not only in terms of technical performance but also in design, which is just as crucial.

The Unique Design Line of the Kalista DreamPlay Collection

The latest generation of the Kalista DreamPlay Collection remains fully committed to the tradition of the product line. While it does not break with previously established concepts, it skillfully refines them, introducing a modern look.

Products in the Kalista DreamPlay Collection have always relied on a combination of transparent acrylic and metal in various forms. In the current generation, acrylic plays a particularly prominent

role. While aluminum forms the structural base of the chassis, the transparent acrylic dominates visually, both on the front and from above, giving DreamPlay X and Mantax a graceful, exceptionally appealing appearance.

Of course, the stainless steel feet should not be overlooked. They are elegantly integrated into the triangular chassis design, which avoids straight lines in favor of flowing, curved forms.

It should also be noted that the aluminum is generally finished either in black anodized or left in its natural state. The standard versions are thus Black Pearl and Diamond Silver. Métronome Technologie emphasizes, however, that customer requests can be accommodated, allowing for different design variants to be realized at an additional cost.

The combination of different materials, as described above, offers not only exceptional aesthetics but also benefits in terms of sound. Each material has different damping properties, and combining them is therefore ideal, with acrylic in particular providing the most advantages.

Simple in Principle, but Not an Intuitive User Concept

Mantax features a circular display on its front panel — a 3-inch screen with a resolution of 432 x 432 pixels. This display serves as the central control element, and a remote control is, of course, included in the package.

In principle, operation is straightforward, but in practice the interface is not always logically structured, and it is not always immediately clear how to access certain functions and settings.

24 Different Sound Profiles

We didn’t title this review “As You Like It” by chance — the reason lies in the versatility offered by Mantax. The manufacturer itself speaks of 24 different sound profiles that can be selected with this solution. This ensures that every taste is perfectly catered to, with Métronome Technologie, free from any dogma, remaining open to all technically feasible options.

DACs from ESS Technology Inc. and Asahi Kasei Microdevices Corporation

One outstanding feature of Mantax is that it employs two different DACs from different manufacturers. The first option comes from the specialist ESS Technology Inc., while the second variant is provided by Asahi Kasei Microdevices Corporation.

Although both manufacturers naturally claim that their solutions guarantee nothing less than perfect signal conversion, faithfully reproducing the original studio production, any audiophile knows that there is no single “perfect” solution. Every signal processing chain carries the developer’s signature, and the same applies to D/A converters. Mantax demonstrates this impressively by integrating two different DACs from renowned manufacturers. Each DAC must be carefully incorporated according to its unique circuit design in order to achieve truly optimal results.

The two DACs are not the only very pragmatic approach Métronome Technologie takes to accommodate the diverse tastes of HiFi enthusiasts in the most neutral and versatile way.

For the developers, it goes without saying that users should have the option to apply a wide variety of filters during signal conversion. Listing and describing them all in detail would go beyond the scope here, but it is worth noting that extensive experimentation is encouraged — including with upsampling, which is, of course, also possible.

Solid-State or Tube?

The same applies to the analog output stage, where two “worlds” are available: solid-state and tube, offered in parallel. This ensures that users have every possible option to tailor the signal processing to different content and personal taste, while always maintaining the highest level of performance — fully living up to Mantax name.

Everything You Want...

Kalista’s Mantax also demonstrates remarkable flexibility in terms of connectivity. It features both optical and coaxial S/PDIF inputs, along with AES/EBU and a USB port for direct connection to a PC or Mac. Perhaps the most important interface, however, is the I²S port, implemented via BNC.

Using this I²S connection, audio data can be transmitted in 32-bit/384 kHz Linear PCM as well as native DSD up to DSD256. This interface is therefore the preferred choice when, as mentioned several times, Mantax is used as the playback

partner for the DreamPlay X CD and SACD transport.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the USB port can also receive audio data in Linear PCM up to 32-bit/384 kHz as well as native DSD up to DSD256, whereas the AES/EBU input supports 32-bit/384 kHz PCM but only DSD up to DSD128 via DoP (DSD over PCM).

The coaxial S/PDIF input also supports 32-bit/384 kHz PCM but is likewise limited to DSD128 via DoP. The optical S/PDIF input allows up to 32-bit/192 kHz PCM and DSD64, again using DoP.

Analog signals leave Mantax either unbalanced via a pair of RCA connectors or balanced via a pair of XLR connectors.



It is also worth noting that the rear panel shows that there is no internal power supply. Instead, a proprietary Power DAC is provided, with a cable leading to the external power supply.

External Power Supply – Kalista Elektra

The Kalista Elektra is the power supply, the external PSU for DreamPlay X, DreamPlay XC, and Mantax. At Métronome Technologie and Kalista, it has always been considered an essential component.

According to Jean Marie Clauzel, owner and chief designer of Métronome and Kalista, the power supply in high-end HiFi systems must receive the utmost attention. Indeed, it is remarkable the level of effort the company dedicates to this, particularly with the Kalista DreamPlay Collection and, by extension, Mantax. One can confidently say that this represents the most sophisticated power supply the company has ever developed.

It is also noteworthy that the Kalista Elektra is now offered not only in a vertical configuration but also

provides customers the option of a horizontal version as an alternative.

Made in France...

Métronome Technologie proudly emphasizes that it continues to manufacture as much as possible in-house while relying on local partners wherever feasible. Circuit boards, for example, are hand-assembled directly at Métronome Technologie, and the assembly of the chassis also takes place at the company's facility in southern France.

The production of metal and acrylic components requires a modern machine park to achieve the highest quality standards. For this, the company naturally relies on specialized craftsmen, all of whom are also sourced from the local region.

Key Specifications and Optional Accessories

Finally, it should be mentioned that Mantax itself measures 445 x 125 x 42 mm and weighs a substantial 17 kg. As described, this does not include the power supply, as the Kalista Elektra adds another 22 kg with dimensions of 160 x 440 x 430 mm.

An especially interesting aspect of the Kalista DreamPlay Collection is that Métronome Technologie offers the Kalista Silent Base, ensuring optimal decoupling while perfectly complementing the series' design.

This also applies to another intriguing option for free-standing placement: the Kalista Tripod.



From Practical Experience

We had the opportunity to test Mantax together with DreamPlay XC in the ideal setting of a finely tuned listening room, using an outstanding HiFi system, at the Austrian distributor Audio Exclusive GmbH in Wels. Alongside Franz Johann Votruba,

International Sales Director of Métronome Technologie, and Kurt Wögerer from Audio Exclusive GmbH, the author of these lines enjoyed another very exciting day in this Upper Austrian city.

Once again, Kurt Wögerer kindly provided a top-tier HiFi chain for this test. In addition to the two Kalista components, pre- and power amplifiers from Canor spol. s.r.o. and loudspeaker systems from Technics were used. Cables from Nordost and Audioplan, as well as a Stromtank power unit, completed the setup.

Attentive readers will have noticed that we chose DreamPlay XC rather than DreamPlay X. This had the advantage of allowing a direct comparison between its built-in DAC and the external Mantax, while also benefiting from the XC's streaming client.

And we'll address the most pressing question upfront: is it worth opting for separate products — and thus Mantax — instead of the all-in-one solution? The answer is yes. Anyone who hears the systems in direct comparison will inevitably conclude that, if the budget allows, using the two separate solutions is the best choice.

To be perfectly clear, as is often the case: the better is the enemy of the good, as the saying goes. DreamPlay XC, as a 4-in-1 system with an integrated DAC, is already an outstanding solution that performs brilliantly. Anyone who owns this system has a truly remarkable product.

However, there is always room for a little more — and that is exactly what Mantax delivers, particularly in terms of the ability to interact with the signal processing so flexibly and shape it according to one's own preferences.

It should also be clarified that this is not about “tone control,” where one simply boosts treble, bass, or activates a loudness function at will. Instead, it is about subtle nuances, which — and this is indeed remarkable — can make a genuinely decisive difference in the listening experience.

There Is No Right or Wrong...

Kalista's Mantax settles one thing once and for all: the endless debates that often arise in certain circles — debates that are ultimately pointless. This DAC, or that one, this filter, that filter, upsampling or not, tube or transistor — there are so many possibilities, each with its own advantages and drawbacks, that none can be considered wrong, and none can be considered the absolute “only correct” choice.

As is only natural in such an emotional hobby as HiFi, it ultimately comes down entirely to personal taste.

What makes it truly special is that Métronome Technologie gives the HiFi enthusiast with Mantax all these possibilities — allowing them to explore freely and experiment almost without limits.

And that is exactly what we — Kurt Wögerer, Franz Johann Votruba, and the author of these lines — enthusiastically did for a full day at Audio Exclusive GmbH in Wels.

It was immensely exciting to select different configurations depending on the music. Interestingly, typical audiophile recordings did not benefit as much from the various options, whereas albums that are musically engaging but of more modest recording quality really allowed the DAC's flexibility to shine.

It is particularly worthwhile to experiment with different filters and, if desired, upsampling when recordings are too harsh or grating, as is sometimes the case with certain albums from the 1980s. Such recordings can be quite fatiguing — even irritating — on high-end audiophile HiFi systems, since components of the highest level mercilessly reveal any shortcomings.

Of course, Mantax cannot perform miracles, but it is remarkable how much can be achieved — and in many cases improved — through subtle adjustments.

One more insight from this top-tier system was also clear: cables can indeed play a crucial role in the overall sound quality. And no, we are not talking about cables from different manufacturers, nor about “cable sound” — but simply the different methods of signal transmission between components.

It is precisely high-end solutions like Kalista's Mantax that mercilessly reveal any weaknesses in a system.

During our test, we primarily used I²S for signal transmission. When we experimentally switched to AES/EBU, then to coaxial S/PDIF, and finally to optical S/PDIF, it quickly became clear why Métronome Technologie explicitly recommends always relying on I²S.

The soundstage collapsed almost like a house of cards when we switched from I²S to the optical



S/PDIF interface. Admittedly, that may sound a bit dramatic, but that was exactly the impression of everyone present at the time. The coaxial S/PDIF interface was slightly better, and AES/EBU only marginally worse.

These differences were in some cases even more noticeable than the effects of the various filters, which surprised everyone, but ultimately highlighted how crucial it is — especially with reference-level solutions — to pay attention to such details in order to achieve optimal results and fully exploit the potential of a high-end HiFi system.

In Conclusion...

We were already impressed with the Kalista DreamPlay XC, so it was hard to imagine that Métronome Technologie could raise the bar even higher. Yet they proved us wrong. The Kalista MantaX Reference DAC fully lives up to its name and can truly be regarded as a reference in terms of precision, clarity, and detail, while its outstanding flexibility in signal processing sparks the listener's playful experimentation.

The only minor criticism is that this playful potential is somewhat limited by the inconsistent and at times slightly illogical user interface, which could benefit from refinement.

There is no doubt about the outstanding design, which in our humble opinion ranks among the very best that the high-end HiFi sector has to offer.

Of course, given the price point and the impeccable reputation of Métronome Technologie, one can certainly expect this level of excellence. Once again, the French company fully lives up to its renown as a specialist in digital solutions.

With Mantax, the ideal solution is therefore at hand

to create an almost perfect HiFi chain in combination with DreamPlay X.

Pricing and Availability

The new Kalista MantaX Reference DAC is already available through specialist retailers. The DAC comes in two standard finishes: Diamond Silver and Black Pearl. The recommended retail price is €59,000.

As mentioned earlier, additional custom finishes are also available upon request for an extra charge.

Our Verdict

Once again, Métronome Technologie proves why it is rightly regarded as a leading digital specialist. With the Kalista solutions, the company refuses to compromise — whether in delivering outstanding technology and a meticulously engineered design for the best possible sound quality, or in creating a unique, flawless aesthetic.

This solution also demonstrates a freedom from dogma: it offers an exceptionally flexible concept, giving the user full choice over the DAC and the

- All relevant connectivity options, foremost I²S for native DSD signal transmission
- Exceptional design
- Flawless craftsmanship, Made in France

Negative Point

- User interface could be somewhat more intuitive

Test Environment

- Kalista DreamPlay XC
- Preamp and power amp from Canor
- Speaker system from Technics
- Cables from Nordost and Audioplan
- Samsung tablet with TIDAL



output stage. Mantax therefore earns top marks in this review and comes highly recommended.

Positive Highlights

- Outstanding sound quality with exceptional precision in timing and detail reproduction
- Choice of ESS or AKM DAC
- Versatile filter options and support for upsampling
- Choice of Solid-State or Tube output stage
- External power supply

