



Translation :

When choosing a wife, you should not judge by appearance but pay attention to the connotation. The same is true for equipment. Don't be negligent because of the unsightly appearance or the Brand you haven't heard of. You may miss a rare good product, such as this Sonnet Morpheus. The DAC and Hermes Streamer look very simple, only a little more beautiful than the earthen guns and they are not too big in size and weight. The contents are designed by a senior European Digital master. It is an uncompromisingly balanced R2R ladder DAC and by no means comparable to those that generally use large-scale mass-produced DAC chips. Listening to them gave me a gain like discovering a new world. When I took over Morpheus from the agent Mr. Wu, honestly, I had never heard of Sonnet. It is a normal bent steel case and the shape is very ordinary. It is hard to think of it a product from Europe. The only thing that can prove its value is the price, which is more than six digits.

However, Mr. Wu next mentioned a keyword that caught my interest-Metrum. He told me that Sonnet is a new Brand created by Cees Ruijtenberg, the founder of Metrum Acoustics. Metrum Acoustics has always been known for its R2R ladder DACs and the DAC technology carried by Sonnet comes from Metrum Acoustics, which is also R2R. Although I haven't heard Metrum's sound, I checked on the Internet that the Metrum flagship device is priced at more than five or six thousand Euros, which is considered to be a mid-to-high-end model. From this, it can be inferred that this Morpheus should not be a waiter.

Cees Ruijtenberg is not only the founder of Metrum Acoustics but also the main designer of this unique technology. According to the information I found on the Internet, Cees sold Metrum Acoustics in 2018. The new owner mismanaged and the company was declared bankrupt in 2019. But Cees bought back ownership in July 2020. At present, the Metrum Acoustics Brand and its intellectual property rights have returned to Cees. Morpheus is the most important product from Cees since Sonnet was established. It inherits the core technology of Metrum Acoustics, based on R2R ladders but the original technology was improved. The first-generation products are also more advanced designs.

When you open the Morpheus case, you can see four standing circuit boards on the left side of the box, that is, Sonnet's latest SDA-2 modules. Each SDA-2 module is an R2R ladder DAC with an excellent 24bit specification.

Each channel is equipped with two SDA-2 modules to achieve a fully balanced circuit layout. In fact, it is very difficult and expensive for an R2R ladder DAC to achieve 24bit but Sonnet uses a special design. On the surface of the SDA-2 module, there is a 24bit R2R ladder DAC but internally the 24bit is divided into two groups of 12bit. These two groups of 12bit are respectively used as two 16bit R2R resistor arrays, controlled by FPGA and then in the Analog field, the two signals are combined. Through this design, Morpheus' signal-to-noise ratio reaches an amazing figure of -155 dB, channel separation is 120 dB and the specifications are extremely excellent.

Linear with fine volume control. The biggest advantage is the direct output voltage after conversion, that is, the Analog signal strength changes. Unlike the Delta-Sigma DAC, the Analog signal must be low-pass filtered to restore the Analog signal, so there is one less variable that affects sound quality. Of course, Morpheus also has this advantage. Not only that, it also changes the output voltage of the DAC by adjusting the reference voltage, so that Morpheus will not cause any loss of digital information when adjusting the volume, nor will it attenuate Analog signals. The dynamic range is wide, it is very linear and it can also take into account a fine adjustment range (a total of 60 steps, 1 dB per step, from -60 dB to 0 dB), which can be said to be a very ideal way to adjust the volume. Morpheus has a lossless signal volume control, which is lossless in both Digital and Analog domains. Therefore, Sonnet highly recommends connecting Morpheus directly to a Power Amp, skipping the influence of a Preamp stage. The volume of Morpheus can be switched between fixed and variable volume mode. When fixed is selected, the volume level can be customized to facilitate matching a Preamp stage, with different sensitivity or gain to avoid overdrive.

The more you look, the more you like it. Although Morpheus looks simple and elegant, it is not amazing but after watching it for a long time, I think this shape is quite attractive, showing a good appearance in an understated way. The front panel turned out from a whole aluminum block CNC. After processing, the panel is available in black and silver and white. There is a small monochrome screen in the center of the Morpheus fascia, which can display the source position and volume. To the left side of the screen is the volume knob and right side is the source switch and power button. Although the screen brightness cannot be adjusted, it can be set to automatically turn off after operation. For example, when I audition, I always use a fixed volume mode. Basically, the screen has no effect. I set it to automatically turn off the screen in 30 seconds. In addition, Morpheus also comes standard with an aluminum remote control, which can control the volume and switch the source.

Morpheus provides a variety of Digital input interfaces, including Optical, RCA Coaxial, AES/EBU, USB and I2S (RJ45 interface). But USB and I2S share the same hole on the back panel, so you can only choose one of the two at the time of purchase. To decide. What is the I2S input for ? Stream to your own Hermes. Hermes has output interfaces such as Optical, RCA coaxial, AES/EBU, I2S... and no USB output. If you want to use Hermes as a Source, you can choose I2S input for Morpheus. Morpheus is not so strong in terms of supporting formats and sampling rates. It only supports up to 384 kHz PCM via USB and does not support DSD. If you need to listen to MQA, Morpheus also provides an optional MQA module, which can be installed on the internal board to hard-decode MQA audio. The Analog output section provides one set each for XLR (4 Vrms) and RCA (2 Vrms).

The plug-in design is absolutely simple enough. Then look at the Hermes Streamer. Hermes is specially designed for network streaming. It must be used with a DAC. Its input is a network cable. The output interface is not only RJ45 I2S but also Optical, RCA Coaxial and AES/EBU but no USB. It seems that Hermes is a model specially designed for Morpheus. According to Sonnet, I2S is the best way to transmit Digital Audio over a short distance but the "short" mentioned here is not short at all, it is 30 meters ! Sonnet said that you can connect Hermes and Morpheus through a standard UTP cable, which is an unshielded network cable, within 30 meters. The signal will not be attenuated and will not be disturbed but RCA Coaxial or AES/EBU cannot be stretched this far.

Hermes is set to Roon Player (End point) when it leaves the factory. You must be a Roon member and have a Roon Core to use Hermes. What if there is no Roon ? No problem, Hermes can also be set to Volumio or Audirvana Player by replacing the SD card on the back. It turns out that there is an SD card slot on the back of Hermes. A card has been inserted into it when it leaves the factory. The Roon system software has been written into the card. Therefore, after Hermes is turned on, it is a Roon player. You can prepare an SD card by yourself, by downloading Volumio or Audirvana system software from the Sonnet website, save the software to the SD card and then insert the card into Hermes. After booting, the Volumio or Audirvana player will be created. Incidentally, the highest sampling rate Hermes can support is not very high. RCA coaxial and I2S are only up to 192 kHz, and DSD cannot be broadcast. However, this will not cause a problem in actual use because Hermes is Roon certified and For Roon Ready devices that have been tested, Roon will convert the file format to a format that Hermes can support during playback, so there will never be a situation where there will be no sound or unacceptable format when using it.

R2R Ladder DAC is really different. The audition process takes place at my home. The Morpheus submitted by the agency this time has been replaced with a USB input module and it was also sent with Hermes. This gave me two ways to listen ; First, use a computer or music server as the source and connect to Morpheus via a USB cable. Second, use Hermes as the signal source and connect Morpheus with Optical or RCA Coaxial cable. Although this Hermes can only run Roon, I have been using Roon and my NAS is the Roon Core, so I can listen to the second method.

Let me try the first way. The computer is connected to Morpheus via USB. Only the Windows system needs a driver install. My computer is a Linux system, so I can play when I connect to Morpheus. I set Morpheus to a fixed volume, the volume is set at the maximum, the equipment used are EC 4.8 Preamplifier, NuPrime Evolution One Amplifier, Aurum Cantus Grand Harmony Speakers and the reference DAC is the Audiobyte Black Dragon that I have used for many years. Morpheus shows a completely different sound direction from the Black Dragon.

Comparing the black dragon appears to be open, majestic and has a larger sense of scale.

The voices are flat and open in the sound field, while Morpheus is more saturated, the sound image is embossed and solid. Excellent sense, precise positioning, clear levels and good 3D space. This reminds me when I wrote the MSB Discrete DAC review, I also heard the same characteristics. Do all R2R Ladder DACs exhibit such sound characteristics ? I'm not sure, after all, I've only heard two R2R Ladder DACs, Morpheus is the second but I'm sure that I like this kind of sound, it's natural, real, specific, powerful and very warm, full and quite Analogous.

Excellent solidity without losing natural texture. Next I will organize the sound features and advantages of Morpheus into several main points, which are easier to read. First of all, Morpheus's sound solidity is very good, quality and density are excellent. This is true for any frequency band. Its sound has good warmth, so other equipment or wires on the back end do not need to be deliberately adjusted or changed. There is a great and natural density. The point is that it is not heavy or unambiguous but full of rich detail.

For example, when listening to a cello with Morpheus, you will hear a very rich and sweet nasal sound, which is the resonance from the body of the cello. Violin is equally sweet. Another example is the "The Dali CD Vol. 4" test film track 8 "Verano Porteno", played by the Zemtsov Viola Quartet. I really feel that there are four violas, the thickness of the sound, the size of the shape, liquid tone texture... etc ; it sounds different to me than before. It's not tight and it's not sharp or harsh at all but it used to sound like a violin - the resonance and moistness is not so rich. Secondly, Morpheus can express clear and rich timbre/textures, which allows me to clearly hear more of their characteristics with human voices or musical instruments, making the sense of listening more attractive.

When I first listened to Morpheus, I felt that its tone was dry and darker, rather than shiny and clean but after listening to it, I found that it has a strong expressive power on textures and texture of tones, like bowstrings. The stickiness of friction, the tightness of bass plucking, the crispness of steel string guitar plucking, the graininess of piano touches, the short pop of stepping on the bass drum, the fine texture of cymbals and the impact of brass unison... etc. The timbre difference between different instruments or the singing characteristics of different singers can be easily distinguished by Morpheus. It is fun to listen to. Of course, this also means that Morpheus has very good analytical power. Its timbre tends to belong to sensible and neutral type, with a sense of realism, rather than fine polishing or crafting.

If you like gorgeous and exquisite timbre, dazzling luster, or smooth and shiny surface textures, Morpheus is not for you. It is not this kind but it can be adjusted or added with back-end equipment, wires or accessories and satisfactory results should be obtained. The sound-field and space are very three-dimensional. This should also be one of the innate advantages of R2R Ladder DAC. What are the benefits of such features ? The sense of entity, the degree of separation, the sense of positioning, the layering of the sound field, the appearance of the sound field, etc., they can be experienced in detail.

The Speakers have a super stage feel, which is definitely the favorite of sound field enthusiasts. Playing the "Friday Night in San Francisco" that I haven't heard for a long time, this is a live recording of a concert performed by three guitar masters - Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia. Through the replay of Morpheus, I have heard this recording anew ! The shapes of the three pianos are very similar, with clear scale and scope and their relative positions and relationships are clearly exposed without any confusion. In addition, I heard the shape, depth, and reverberation of the space, all clearly expressed. This feeling is difficult to express accurately in words but to put it simply, I think it is a clear sense of staging !

Another example is the famous Audiophile Vivaldi "Four Seasons" Violin Concerto, co-produced by the Marca Musicians Ensemble and violinist Giuliano Carmignola. This is also a record I have heard countless times but Morpheus made me hear it for the first time. The Audio and soundscape outlines each stringed instrument and are both very convex and distinct. The scope, shape and depth of the space are very specific, making the sound like an entity in the space, whether it is the separation, positioning, front and back levels, or the depiction of the string lines. The relative proportions of the body... etc., are all well expressed. On the other hand, because the texture is denser and the image formation is better, the sound becomes more cohesive and the intensity is more vivid, so it sounds more lively.

The low frequency performance of Morpheus is even more impressive. If you feel that the low frequency shape, grain and lines of your System are not clear enough and the level is not clear enough, Morpheus should be your salvation. The time I spent with Morpheus was not short. During the audition process, I listened to various types of music and recordings of various periods. I found that whether the low frequency is grainy, linear, sliced, or large in scale, Morpheus does everything. It can be clearly displayed, making the System feel like a big leap forward and the low frequency downward extension is also relaxed and natural, unobtrusive. It can be seen that the source signal is like this originally, Morpheus just restores it, restores it better than others and the low frequency is natural. It is good. It's worth it !

In the previous auditions, I used a desktop computer to connect Morpheus via USB. Then I changed the source to Hermes streaming to make a "pair". Since Hermes does not provide a USB output and the I2S input of this Morpheus has been replaced with a USB interface, only Optical, RCA or AES/EBU connection can be used between the two. I chose to use Optical. Don't think that "only" using Optical is a kind of compromise. In fact, it sounds better than if I connect Morpheus with my computer via USB, which surprised me a lot. What's a nice comparison ? Simply put, the sound of a computer is relatively Hi-Fi, which is quite powerful at first glance. The low frequency

has a larger shape, a sense of volume and weight. The audio and image contours of each frequency band are clear and the separation is good but overall it is a little restrained.

In contrast, the sound of Hermes with Morpheus is more natural, smooth, realistic, direct, light, lively and more musically alive. I like the sound of Morpheus with a computer but I prefer Morpheus + Hermes's direct face-to-face feeling with music. I'm not sure that this difference is due to the difference of interface or Hermes' own advantages but what is certain is that it loves to play music. The sound that people will love is really clever tuning. Returning to the price, if you talk about the appearance, workmanship, size, weight and function of Morpheus and Hermes, their prices are not cheap but if you are talking about the price, you may find it difficult to find a rival at the same or even higher price.

Worth a try.