

## Hegel Music Systems Mohican CD player

by Alan Sircom

**E**ven if it weren't a star player, the Hegel Mohican would get credit for having a delicious name. With a touch of wry Scandinavian humour, Hegel's ultimate CD player is named after that final leader of that part-fictional native American tribe in the title of James Fennimore Cooper's classic 19th Century novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*. Meaning this is the last – and best – CD player Hegel will ever make.

This is something of an about face for Hegel. The company has long been involved with digital audio and its CDP2A Mk 2 and CDP4A disc players are both highly respected and have been unchanged in the Hegel catalogue for many years. And that's part of the problem, or rather 'parts' of the problem. You see, a lot of the traditional high-performance components used in the best CD players of a few years ago are becoming very hard to find. Any product, for example, that relies on the near-legendary Philips CDM Pro series transport mechanisms is relying on a disc-spinning device that has not been in production for several years, and supplies are dwindling. The Mohican is Hegel's response, building a player from first principles, leveraging much of the technology and development that has gone into its current line of DACs and sourcing those last, best CD components.

This is resolutely CD in approach, though. The transport mechanism isn't a computer blu-ray writer press-ganged into CD use. It's not even a computer-based CD device or a CD/SACD player, it's a dedicated audio CD transport mechanism. This is coupled to Hegel's own servo control logic circuits, and a converter, filter, and output stage that bear a striking resemblance to Hegel's top HD30 converter with 32bit AKM DAC chips. But where the HD30 can process everything to DSD, the Mohican cruises in a low gear by playing 16-bit, 44.1kHz files as 16-bit, 44.1kHz files, so where the HD30 had low noise, the Mohican has extremely low phase noise, and even uses Hegel's

patented SoundEngine output stage (which successfully attempts to move the crossover distortion of Class AB out of band without the attendant inefficiency and heat generation of Class A) to drive the transistors that manage the clock crystal, thereby reducing the potential for error in that stage still further. It's also, by 2016 standards, minimalist in the extreme. No upsampling, no digital inputs, no frills, no crazy overclocking, not even magic filters to alter the sound of the player's output. You have the choice of XLR or RCA stereo outputs and a solid 75-ohm BNC connector for digital output, should you be disturbed enough to want to try the Mohican with an off-board DAC.

The layout of the player is classic Hegel; a central mounted transport mechanism atop a medium sized blue LED read-out. Flanking this are two large dials, although in reality they are both three-way control buttons for opening and closing the CD drawer, play, and stop (to the right of the transport/display block) and track forward, track back, and power on (to the left). Play, track navigation (including FF and REW within a track) and a two-step repeat function are included on





the supplied handset (which also controls the volume, source, and mute functions of a Hegel amplifier). Pause is actioned by pressing play while the track is playing. If you access 'repeat', the Mohican shifts from its regular track number and time display to 'RE P tr' (single track repeat) or 'RE P cd' (whole CD repeat) on the front panel LED screen every 10 seconds. As display dimming is a martyr to the cause of minimalism, this blinked away in my peripheral vision for a week or so of running in.

As ever with Hegel equipment, the casework is extremely solid, although the Mohican is not a heavyweight. It sits on three round feet with small hard rubber balls inset into them, and the power connector is set into the middle of the rear panel. The only possible concession to bling is the accessory box that comes with the Mohican, which houses the remote, its batteries, and the power cord. This

is about the same size and looks similar to the box for an iPad mini. Factor in a friendly manual that really doesn't do deep 'informative' because there isn't much on the Mohican that requires 'information', and you have a player that does the right thing; it relies on its sound quality rather than peripheral aspects like a shiny front panel or a bewildering array of functions.

There is a depth and projection to the sound of CD through the Hegel Mohican that struggles to make it past the output stages of most players. 'Leave My Head Alone Brain' from the Wessletoft and Schwarz album *Duo* [Jazzland] is difficult to get right because the combination of piano and electronica sit in a 'treated' acoustic; the piano in a sometimes reverberant space, while the dry backbeat and basslines have never left the confines of the computer. This can sound like bad jazz meets bad house music, but the Mohican instead ties these disparate sounds together to bring out the interplay between instrument sounds perfectly. This is what jazz evolved into and it's exciting!

The Mohican also treads that thin line between being controlled and controlling, giving music played through the CD a natural sense of order, not imposed order. It has that distinctive slightly forward presentation common to Hegel electronics, but not in an imposing way. In fact, if anything, the Mohican's biggest strength is its ability to keep out of the way of the music and let the recording be its own strength or weakness. Bad recordings aren't ▶



▶ given a free pass through the Mohican, but really good recordings on CD are truly sensational.

In fact, the interesting part of the Mohican's performance is just how much it challenges the need for high-resolution audio. That is fast becoming almost heresy among audiophiles, to the point where people even consider CD a low-fi format. Hegel's Mohican begs to differ, and can demonstrate just how good CD really can sound. There's a sense of cohesiveness and coherence to the sound of CD played through the Mohican, something that all too often gets lost in all the impressive detail and soundstaging properties of high-res. The Mohican has impressive detail and soundstaging, too, but it's not the kind of product that accents these (or any) parts of the performance. It's just a fundamentally honest sounding player.

There seems to be something of a Scandinavian theme emerging here, with like-minded brands making damn good, minimalist products that don't make you reach for the off-switch. In a financially unbalanced way, I found this source component sang along with the Aavic amplifier elsewhere in this issue far more than it has any right to. In a more sensible way, it's perfect for one of Hegel's integrated designs. In fact, the Mohican, the H160, a pair of Audiovector SR1 Avantgarde Arete standmount loudspeakers (and some Nordost cables) is one of those magic synergy systems that you can comfortably sit in front of for hours of extremely contented listening.

Lack of display control aside, the only downside to the Mohican I can see is I promised those shelves given over to CDs were going to be cleared and most of those discs put in the attic, and the Mohican is the kind of product that would make me renege on the deal. This will result in a high-frequency whine emanating from the wife's upper regions.

It would be in Hegel's interests to gently push those still playing CD to a file-based solution and point them in the direction of DACs like the HD30. Instead, the company has been both brutally honest with itself and shown just how much more can be squeezed out of the shiny polycarbonate disc. I guess there will be those who point to the Mohican's lack of SACD replay as a blot in its copybook, but I've only heard a handful of SACD players that really do a good job playing Red Book CD, and of those that are still in production, all of them cost considerably more than the Mohican. It seems, if you want to hear the best in CD, then only a dedicated CD-only player will do!

What I like about the Hegel Mohican CD player above all else is it doesn't care about its place in the audio chain of command; it just gets on with playing music. If it cared about its place, this would be a £15,000 player. OK, it would be a £15,000 player with a means whereby the display could be turned off, but if that's the sacrifices you need to make to get CD replay this good at this price, then so be it. To twist and paraphrase the last paragraph of *The Last of the Mohicans*, 'the time of the Red Book has come again!' Very highly recommended. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Red Book CD player

**Analogue outputs:** 1× unbalanced fixed RCA, 1× unbalanced fixed XLR (in pseudo-balanced output)

**Digital output:** 1× BNC 75ohm connection (S/PDIF)

**Frequency Response:** 0Hz-50kHz

**Distortion:** Less than 0.0015%

**Available in:** Black or Silver

**Dimensions (H×W×D):** 8×43×29cm

**Weight:** 10kg (shipping weight)

**Price:** £3,900

**Manufactured by:** Hegel Audio Systems

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