

# PURE PLEASURE



Naim has been consistently driving its streaming platform forward over the last ten years. With a triple hit of ND 5 XS2, NDX 2 and ND 555, the British now present their most mature network players on the market. We have let ourselves be spoiled by the middle one – the NDX 2.

**G**rab a map of England and place a finger on London. Move westwards and turn straight south half-way to Bristol – you can't really miss Salisbury. The small town lies in the center of the South English park landscape and is a gateway to the unique "New Forest" national park. At the northern edge of the city lies the unfathomably ancient hill fortress "Old Sarum", an epicentre of British early history: Stonehenge, the Celtic expansion, Caesar's summer trips to the island, the centuries-long differences between Angles, Saxons and natives as well as the early royal period – all of this took place in

the immediate vicinity, shaping the historic city center, the surrounding countryside and, ultimately, everything we now call England.

Driving to the eastern edge of the village, the historical flair quickly fades away, being replaced by petrol stations, supermarkets and streets that wind around commercial buildings before they suddenly end at faceless rolling gates. The neighborhood could just as well be located in Stuckenborstel near Bremen, Cutricchio at the foot of Vesuvius or in a suburb of Boston.



One of the buildings, however, stands out: the sand-colored brick building, with its cubically austere layout and the implied door arch, doesn't quite fit into its surrounding. Behind its façade there is nevertheless the same hustle and bustle as is prevailing in all the other companies.

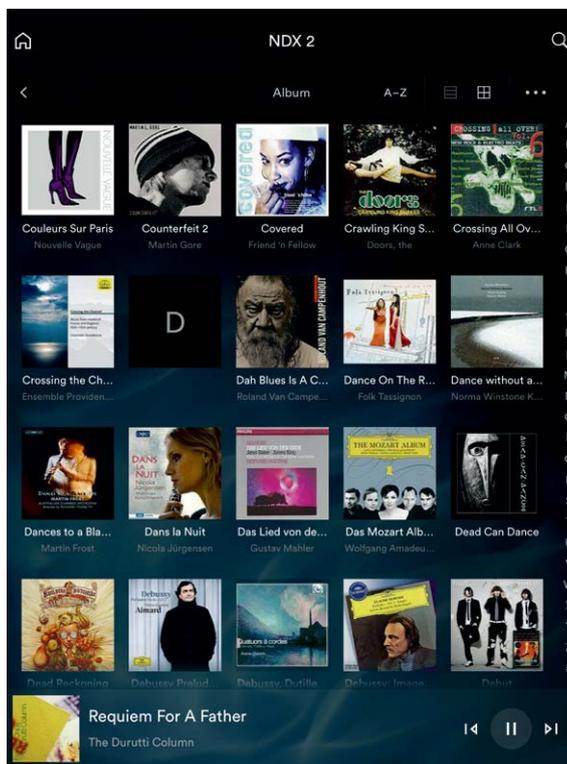
◀ Naim's remote can also operate connected amplifiers. It is, however, not really necessary: the NDX 2's control logic has been tailored to the remote app.

A few years ago Naim allowed us to stroll through these offices with a guest card on our lapels. Our most intense memory is a slight hint of disappointment. Here, in Salisbury, we had expected a stronghold of British tradition and developers with certain “peculiarities”. We expected stereotypes but found the exact opposite: open-plan offices, walls full of production plans and sales tables, team meetings in a matter-of-fact atmosphere ...

Naim is one of the most innovative hi-fi manufacturers and cultivates ways of thinking by which the brand could probably even survive in the Silicon Valley. In these rooms, ideas emerged that deeply anchored streaming in the concept of their product lines. A pioneering achievement by means of which Naim and Linn independently stamped high-end streaming with the label “Made In Britain”.

At a time when virtually all manufacturers, except Sonos of course, were dependent on suppliers such as Stream Unlimited and foreign apps, the developers behind their brick façade began to tinker with hardware whose features were controlled by proprietary software. In the beginning, they used commercially available computer components, and their first-ever HDX operating system was a Linux derivative. Soon after, the first complete in-house developments followed. This process did, of course, involve overcoming countless obstacles and dead ends. When we attended the presentation of the streamer NDS in early 2012, the software developers still had an endless **bug** and to-do list hanging on their office wall.

Last year Naim’s concept finally reached a level that outclasses most of its competitors. Even though it was not launched until twelve months later, the



▲ Sophisticated operation: the Naim app offers an exemplary overview and gets by with a minimum of control elements.

NDX 2 is nothing more than an update on the hardware and software status of the Uniti models, introduced in 2017. Its streaming board and digital features are completely congruent with the top model of the Uniti “Nova” series. Our extensive tests of the small “Atom” (from 2400 Euro, STEREO 10/17) and the Nova (from 5100 Euro, STEREO 12/17) are therefore urgent reading recommendations.

Rather than list all the features for a third time, let’s consider why the world would need something like the NDX 2 in addition to the formidable Unitis. The key, of course, lies in reduction.

**KEYWORD**  
**Bug:** The English word for vermin is a pseudonym for software errors in the IT world. For once, it actually isn’t nerdy programmer slang. Already in the 19th century comparative use of the term is proven.

While Atom, Star and Nova see themselves as complete systems with their integrated amplifiers, the three new network players are dedicated purists for every hi-fi chain.

The smallest model is the ND5 XS2 (around 2800 Euro): 43 centimeters, LAN/WLAN, Bluetooth, DAC inputs, lots of integrated circuits, but no options. At the top of the line is the ND 555, (around 16,000 Euros) whose selected luxury assemblies bring all the finesse that Naim can offer. As usual in the British 500 line, it lacks its own power section, so it must be supplemented by an external power supply. The NDX 2 lies in between the two. It also has discrete circuits and hand-picked components, and its digital section is symmetrical. A power supply is on board, but it can be upgraded. If you operate it “Out Of Box”, a thick plastic plug the size of a shot glass sits on

the booster power access. By the way, you can’t make any horrible mistakes here, as the streamer detects faulty wiring and then refuses to boot with the power button flashing vigorously.

We had the separate power supply XPS DR (around 4900 Euro) available for our test and it was one focus of our hearing comparisons. To put it bluntly; operated with its power booster, the NDX 2 is one of the best streamers we have had in the listening room so far. Its soft, velvety and unbelievably multi-faceted timbres, the sublime fine dynamics and the unagitated, controlled and yet captivating musical nature drew us deep into the music from the very first moment. Like the Uniti Nova before it, the NDX 2 is a convincing all-rounder that finds the right tone for every style. At one moment the



◀ USB, Digital-ins and two alternative analog-outs, including Naim’s superb DIN-tap. Note that the NDX 2 has also been prepared for optimal radio traffic with its three antennas.

## ADVANTAGE FOR CHROMECAST

If you instruct a streaming-app like Qobuz to play music on the NDX 2, it logs into the web service and takes over the entire data transfer, playback and conversion. Unlike Airplay, the mobile phone and tablet are only used as a remote control by Chromecast. This saves power and has sound advantages, because the much superior architecture of the Naim-streaming board is used

driving, almost cheesy-emotional strings in Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody" ("Rhapsodies", Stokowski) beguiled us, while at the next it slammed the pulsating bass drum from Chelsea Wolfe's "Feral Love" ("Pain is Beauty") into the room with grandiose emphasis and wonderful differentiation. The capabilities of Symphonic Line's RG 9 and DALI's Epicon 6 certainly also played an important part in this outstanding performance. Finally it draws Leslie Feist's voice smooth but fine and with precise contours into the center of a huge stage.

After we had removed the power supply from the chain, the streamer sounded only a tiny bit more two-dimensional, spatially a bit more tied up and dynamically at best a touch less sophisticated. The sound difference would hardly be worth mentioning, especially if you consider that the combination with the XPS DR raises the package price to 11,000 Euros and thus almost doubles it. Actually a pleasant result after all: the outstanding streamer has already exceeded our expectations even without its optional power supply! At the same time, you can consider the tempting booster upgrade as a potential expansion and keep saying to yourself: some day ...

## TEST-COMPONENTS

Music sources: Qobuz via FiiO X5 III (Chromecast), Tidal, Audiodata MS II, Melco N1A, Apple iPhone SE (Airplay)

Integrated amplifier: Symphonic Line RG 9HD, T+A PA1000E

Loudspeaker: Canton Smart Vento 9, DALI Epicon 6

Cable: Sets from Audioquest and Van den Hul, Octave 3-P filter

But you should keep in mind – sorry, dear HiFi purists – that a network player is more than just a "sound body". These devices are just as much defined by their functionality and accessibility. There, Naim also plays at the very top. Of course, there are other potent remote solutions. With Roon, which by the way has been integrated, or Auralic's Remote, there are controls that can at least keep up. What we, however, particularly like about the British concept is the homogeneity with which they have woven web streaming into their experience. Tidal and Spotify Connect are natively supported, the former, though, without MQA. When you register an account, your personal favorites appear directly on the home screen. All other services can also be played back via the NDX 2. With Qobuz this worked most smoothly via Chromecast: Google's smart interface allows the playback of high bit music with up to 24/192. Apple fans can use Airplay 2, which is, however, a step below, as this standard works with fixed 24/44. Since recently both standards support cross-brand multiroom.

Like many of the latest streamers, the NDX 2 is also a D/A converter that can feed up to four external sources into its state-of-the-art circuits. In the app you'll find even more connection options, including several analog ones, as the streamer is, for example, capable of controlling preamps and integrated amplifiers from Naim. The source inputs can be named individually, and if you don't have any other hardware from the British company, everything superfluous can simply be hidden. Its biggest advantage is, however, that the app can do all of this with an absolute minimum of controls – so it's practically impossible to get lost in submenus. I want to see the competition do that!

*Carsten Barnbeck*



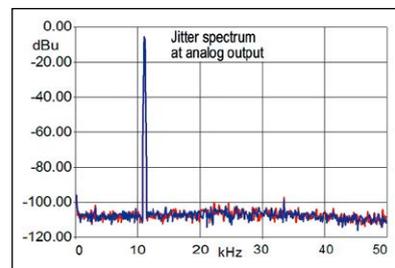
▲ The XPS DR external power supply boosts the spatiality and dynamics of the NDX 2. It is not a must-buy, but to experience the NDX 2 at 100 percent, the investment is crucial.

## NAIM NDX 2

Price: around 6000 €  
 Dimensions: 44 x9 x32 cm (WxHxD)  
 Warranty: 2 years  
 (5 years after registration)  
 Contact: Naim Audio Ltd  
 Phone: +44 (0) 1722 426 600  
 www.naimaudio.com

Already without the booster power supply, Naim's NDX 2 is one of the strongest streamers we've heard. Operation and flexibility are outstanding: all web services are supported via Airplay2 and Chromecast.

### LAB MEASUREMENTS



Signal-to-noise ratio referred to 24 bits	109.3 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio referred to 16 bit	97.2 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio digital zero	110.2 dB
Distortion factor at -9dBFS	0.001 %
Distortion factor at -60dBFS	0.3
Converter linearity at -90dBFS	0.1 dB
Emphasis detection (DAC)	ok
Rectangle	ok
Pulse	ok
Jitter	2.1 ns
Deviation from fs	0.8 ppm
Amplitude of the data stream	503 mV
Power consumption Stby./idle (at)	/17 W

**LAB COMMENTS:** Throughout excellent measurement values; especially the superb noise ratios are eye-catching, but also distortion and linearity are great.

### FEATURES



UPnP-Streamer; reads all sound formats incl. DSD; internal signal processing with 32/384; four S/PDIF inputs (max. 24/192; 2 x USB for external memory (incl. charging current); Chromecast; Airplay2; Bluetooth AptX; Tidal; Spotify Connect; Web-Radio; Roon Ready; optional power supply upgrade; included remote control .

### STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY STREAMER	<b>98%</b>
SOUND QUALITY DAC	<b>97%</b>

### PRICE/PERFORMANCE



**OUTSTANDING**