

## VITUS SCD-025 CD PLAYER/DAC

by Chris Thomas

I have been an admirer of Vitus Audio equipment ever since I heard the original SS-010 Class-A integrated amplifier about eight years ago. There was something so complete and finely balanced about the musical performance of that hefty little gem. Vitus amplifiers have the power to reach deep into the music and show it to you in such a natural and unstrained way that I have heard few amplification systems at any price that are so effortlessly revealing and relaxing to listen to. For me at least, Vitus Audio leaves any tension to the music itself.

So, after a few attempts at grabbing one of the company's digital products had failed, I was determined that the new SCD-025 would end up sitting atop the domestic Stillpoints ESS rack at some point... and that is exactly where it has been for the past several weeks. It could be thought of as the matching CD player/DAC companion to Vitus' 25-watt 025 integrated, but the latest digital offering from the design pen of Hans Ole Vitus would grace just about any system you care to name because its message is music, pure and simple.

Although its forerunner, the SCD-010 attracted many admirers for its 'analogue' sound, it was typically Vitus to start the new player/DAC with a clean sheet. This was initially driven by the imperative to include a USB interface and, like many other players that have been released over the past couple of years, the SCD-025 is probably best thought of as a DAC with a CD transport built in. Fortunately for music lovers it was not possible to just drop a USB input into the platform of the SCD-010, so a completely new machine was conceived. The new model is modular in design, which of course means that any major future developments in



► the digital domain can be easily incorporated without having to replace the complete unit. Considering the fact that there is some real impetus and musical promise in this area at the moment, this is a very good thing indeed.

The SCD-025 is part of the Signature group of products and displays all the hallmarks of being a Vitus. Its superb, slightly over-the-top industrial build quality and design has been made enormously heavy through the use of chunky aluminium casework and a mighty UI transformer at its heart. This component is a two-man lift. With a transformer this massive and Hans Ole's dedication to power supply design it is hardly surprising that the SCD-025 has four completely independent ones. The drive and the digital audio section get one each and there is a further pair for the analogue output stage that itself has been vastly improved as it has been lifted straight from one of the more expensive preamplifiers. The transport started life as a Phillips CD Pro 2LF but has been stripped down and essentially undergone a radical transformation by being completely rebuilt from its component parts to Vitus' specification. It sits beneath a sliding door and uses a lightweight puck to hold the disc in place.

Hans Ole told me that he decided to push the digital side of the design to the extreme. He favours the Anagram Technologies DSP-based module that achieves a sample rate of 384kHz rather than the more common 192kHz, and the greater the sampling rate, the wider the bandwidth. This can also be programmed as new digital standards become available, making the SCD-025 eminently expandable in the future. The choice of the matching master clock module that fully supports their sample rate conversion modules was easy, but apparently rather expensive. As far as the digital electronics go, the company's design aim for a lifetime-product seems ambitious but pretty well founded to me.

Before listening, it is important to understand and appreciate the performance

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curve of the SCD-025 as it runs in from new or musically realigns itself after a cold boot up. This is one of those machines, like Vitus amplifiers, that reveal its musical message in small doses before pulling all the threads together to come into full bloom some time later. Make a hasty decision at your peril and at your cost, because this is a digital player that is designed to do the music thing really well, but it takes its time about it.

Like some other machines that utilise Phillips transports the Vitus does not initially seem to major on sheer etched information retrieval. In fact, for the first few days it sounded very, very pleasant indeed, but I found it to be bordering on the soft, particularly at high frequencies where it seemed rather rolled-off. It was easy to listen to for sure, but I felt that in fronting the combination of the Berning Pre One preamplifier, Berning Quadrature Z power amplifiers and the Quad electrostatics, the system had slipped into comfort mode. The player felt as if it wasn't really driving the amplifier's inputs or asking enough questions of the system. It was all very nice though, and up to a point nice is OK. If I had a pipe and slippers, I would have felt right at home.

After about four days I put on my smoking jacket and cravat, sat for a listening session and had a rather exciting surprise. Who really knows what happens inside certain audio components or the human brain when it comes to music, but the whole gain structure of the player changed completely from those early hours and the music felt very different. Now there was drive and it had bought its friend speed to the party. Add about 100% extra note shape and articulation and here I was with a whole new experience. Oh my, how that system had improved and it would go on doing so, at a reduced rate, for about three weeks. Was it the transport, the digital circuitry or was it wholly or partially me? The message should be writ large as with most components. Never make a judgement until several days have passed, especially when you are spending this amount of money. ►



of musicians joined in and their soundscape extended far, far back and way outside of the confinement of the speaker's positioning. The lyrical articulation cut deep now where earlier it was a bit like wallpaper and the various acoustics were marvellously laid out, leaving the relevance of the way the album had been made just so much more complete and understandable. But what struck me the most was the way the Vitus showed me the emotional power of the woman as her lyrics cut deeper and deeper. There is an ambiguity about her music, but she holds so much back. The song and the way she sings it is just what she shows us, above the water.

If I had been enjoying the remarkable Vitus through the Quad electrostats, things took an even more interesting turn when I installed a pair of Avalon Transcendent loudspeakers. The Quads had been endlessly interesting and very 'sweet', but the new additions allowed the SCD-025 the scope to perform on a much higher dynamic musical plane altogether. When music sounds as interesting and compelling as this I am so much happier than sitting in front of a system played at crashing volume that costs as much as a house, but has no subtlety or intimacy at all.

The Vitus is totally sympathetic to the music and like the delicious dCS Vivaldi system, breathes new life into those old CDs from the 1980's and 1990's that have slipped to the bottom of the pile. I was astonished at what it did for John McLaughlin's on his *Mediterranean Concerto* [Sony]. This is a 24-year-old DDD recording of John doing a Rodrigo-type exploration of the Spanish guitar with full orchestra. It's a difficult perspective to record and I had never really 'got' it until it resurfaced during my time with the Vitus. It had always sounded rather uncomfortable to me. The Vitus, with its superb tonal balance, simply peeled back the years, banished the rather thin digital sound, and kicked life, energy, weight, and colour into it. What it did for the perspectives and the relationship of the

▶ Whatever had happened, it was delicious and the music and myself were the winners. Where before I had listened through the prism of the Vitus' running-in period, now I was getting much more involved as the SCD-025 just opened up with this river, no make that a torrent, of rhythmic movement and dynamics. The softness had gone and been replaced by precision and expression and musicianship. I had been on a bit of a Melody Gardot kick for a couple of weeks, but in a very personally indulgent way as I was working with a friend on some arrangements for a recording project that she was involved in. For inspiration I began to explore her music and particularly the production aspect that I found fascinating.

I had played her album *My One And Only Thrill* [Verve] a few days earlier, but it had drifted past my consciousness. The on-going interest I had in the beauty of her musical arrangements and how they had been so delicately flavoured and judged just never connected. Using the system as a tool for musical education is something that I know not everybody does or even gets. But, I have always loved this aspect of high-end audio and can become transfixed for days by a string section, a guitar solo or even a four-note phrase. As the Vitus got into its stride and expanded its possibilities, I began to appreciate just how open and musically free it was becoming. The sheer levels of communication were wonderful and powerful. Listening to the same album I found that now there was purpose, intent, and delicacy to everything she was doing. The framing and phrasing of her vocals and her use of vibrato had become just a part of the whole and the supporting cast

▶ guitar to the orchestra was beguiling. It has exceptional resolution, tremendous shaping, and is as precise as you would ever want. But, like every Vitus product I have heard, it never, ever shreds the music or offers you a performance that is lost in the digital glare of high definition, or that sounds even remotely ‘academic’. Its control of the tempo and the rhythmic elements that ebb and flow within is brimming with movement and life and puts me in mind of that other exceptional single box player/DAC, the Burmester 089. Those that think that a player that shows you the fourth beat of the bar has good timing will find themselves lost in the sheer audacity with which the Vitus will debunk this crude theory. Just the enjoyment as it reveals musical polyrhythms and their relationships to each other is beautiful and insightful. It has

a beauty all of its own whether you are using it as a CD player or employing the DAC section as I did with the Aurender W20 hard disk streamer, which worked wonderfully with it.

The Vitus is a device that stands as an antidote to some of the latest crop of ultra high definition digital. So much of that stuff just drifts past me, as it’s so often drained of natural colour and with no sense of communication whatsoever. The Vitus sits squarely on the other side of the fence, offering certainly high – but not hyper– definition. I suspect we are caught up in a numbers’ game here; good audio should be about the quality of the sound, not simply the size of the file, but until someone hears just what good CD is capable of on a player like the Vitus SCD-025, they may well be set on a mistaken course of thinking ‘higher resolution’ means ‘better sound’.

The Vitus Audio SCD-025 is endlessly detailed of course and has a speed and delivery of transients that is superb, but it also has a certain lightness of being, supported by a feeling of ever-shifting musical landscapes that moves the whole picture continuously and just pulls you in. It is multi-tiered in every possible way and has no predetermined view of what the music might ask it to do. As a music lover I have to applaud what Hans Ole and his team are achieving. I imagine that he thinks about music in very much the same way as I do. As a pure piece of audio design the SCD-025 is beautifully put together, but the way that is so naturally brings digital music to life--whether from a CD or another digital source--is profoundly engaging. It is quite simply the best single-box CD player/DAC that I have heard to date. Not exactly cheap, but brilliant. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** DAC with CD transport.

**Transport:** Phillips CDPro2LF –heavily modified by Vitus Audio.

**Digital Inputs:** 1xRCA, 1 x XLR, 1 x USB.

**Analogue Outputs:** 1 pair RCA, 1 pair XLR.

**DAC:** Anagram Tech AD11955.

**Masterclock:** Anagram Tech Timelock.

**Sample rate/resolution:** 384KHz/24bit

**Output Volume:** Yes, switchable through onboard menu.

**Internal cabling:** Vitus Andromeda.

**Dimensions:** 130x435x430 mm (HxWxD)

**Weight:** 26Kg.

**Available finishes:** Silver or black.

**Price:** £16,500.

**Manufacturer:** AVA Group A/S  
Vitus Audio.

**URL:** [www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

**UK Distributor:** Kog Audio

**URL:** [www.kogaudio.com](http://www.kogaudio.com)

**Tel:** +44(0)24 7722 0650

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