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German Hi-Fi Press Review of the Burmester 151

4/17/15 12:06 PM



Germany's Finest Music Server

This article is a translation of an i-fidelity.net article written by Stephan Schmid on March 31, 2015. The full article, in German, can be seen here: <http://www.i-fidelity.net/testberichte/high-end/burmester-musiccenter-151/>.

My relationship with Burmester components has always been somewhat wavering. My high-end socialisation started around the time I began studying in the mid-80s; I had a job in an in-house listening studio in Berlin. In that studio, Burmester devices weren't exactly the epitome of popularity. And later, in a different hi-fi store, we did have the Burmester brand in our product range but I much rather preferred buying components of American or Japanese provenance. In the late 90s, I once again came into contact with those chrome-fronted devices – But even that time I couldn't feel any love at second sight.

And today? Within only one year I'm testing my second Burmester component in my living room. The little 101 amplifier had lastingly amazed me with its sound capabilities – and now I have the pleasure of testing the Musiccenter 151, the “little” brother of the 111. Will this device manage to amaze me as well? Or was the 101 just the passing phase of my positive relationship with Burmester?

The 151 sports the same safebox-like case as the 101 and its siblings: Thoroughly screwed-on aluminium plates and profiles of considerable material thickness, as well as the obligatory chromium-plated front panel that is actually growing on me thanks to the included haptically perfect remote, with which I can control the basic functions without defacing the glossy front panel with greasy fingers.

Hiding behind the drive slot there's a TEAC drive that likes to complain about hard work, i.e. emit small noises. Contrary to many competitors who in such cases like to dismiss it as an anomaly, the Burmester technician discusses it openly and with honesty. The drive had been optimised primarily for the ripping process, in which the audio blocks of the CD are read repeatedly, which means that the drive has to keep repositioning itself – which is just not possible without making any sound. I really do prefer unambiguous technical information to sententious marketing talk. It serves to strengthen my trust in a hi-fi device significantly. Also, the noises are only audible

rather close to the 151, and only when CDs are being read.



After that it's silent as the grave. Which actually surprises me even more. Burmester utilises an SSD for the operating system and two 2TB HDDs responsible for a RAID system as well as saving music. On pressing play I had expected mechanical noises from the hard drives – but I couldn't hear a thing. The Burmester crew seems to have done immaculate work on the hard drive bearings. I couldn't help but wonder though, why they hadn't used SSDs for this as well – The costs surely weren't the issue here. And once again I got an honest response: In the 151 they used 2.5 inch hard drives due to space limitations. SSDs of this format were only available on the market up to 1 TB. Openly discussed, and without any voodoo. If 1 TB of storage space is enough for you, you can of course order the 151 with SSD drives as well.



The Burmester 151 saves the music it rips from the CD in the FLAC file format, and processes the data at 24 bits / 192 kilohertz. It is also able to process most other digital formats at this resolution, including high-res materials from the internet.

In terms of connectors I have nothing to criticise either. The 151 can be connected to the home network exclusively by Ethernet/LAN connection. What I find interesting is the possibility to create an own network, to connect to the tablet or to an NAS without

having a home network. In this case, you have to do without internet radio reception though. Thanks to one optical and one electrical digital input, the Burmester can also be used as a high-end converter for other digital sources. Data can be fed to the 151 through a total of five USB ports, of which one is situated on the front. The output to the rest of the system is done by RCA, or XLR jacks.



The display in my hands

The most apparent victim of the “shrinkage treatment,” when compared to the 111, is the display. On the 151 the spatial and pecuniary limitations allow for nothing more than a dot matrix display. Optically, I must say that I find this solution a lot more pleasant, because it's subtler. The display makes it possible to control the 151 directly. I, however, have elected to control it through an iPad app – certainly the more ideal way of controlling the Musiccenter.

I have to spare a word on the topic of controlling an internet enabled hi-fi device though. I am entirely averse to any kind of computer or similar device that requires more than pushing the power button before you can work with it. That is why all of the devices in my home, from the computer, notebook, tablet, and mobile phone, all come from the same friendly Californian manufacturer – they only do plug & play.

Many hi-fi devices have been known to drive me half mad as I attempt to integrate them into my home network. Even my own music server manages to put me in a fit of raving madness from time to time. I usually don't calm down until everything works as intended again. As for Burmester: unbox it, plug in the Ethernet cable, turn it on, choose the network, enter the security password, and voilà – within a mere five minutes it was streaming the first internet radio station in my living room – that's how it should be!

But there's more. If you type the URL of the Burmester 151 into a web browser on your computer, it proceeds to open up a control interface for the device. Here you can quickly and intuitively adjust all settings, and you get a plethora of information such as the hard drives' memory situation or their current temperature. Although, for controlling the 151 I definitely recommend the very well made Burmester app – very intuitive and easy to use. You can quickly and without any complication create playlists and browse the web for radio stations. Even the depiction of the record covers is quite appealing.

Optimal file transfer

Ripping CDs is extremely easy as well: Put the CD into the slot, and on the tablet you decide whether the CD should be played or ripped. For the latter, there are two possibilities: “fast” and “accurate.” Additionally, the estimated duration of the ripping process is immediately displayed. The accurate mode is appropriate for old disks or those you've used in your car, or for those that you want to really thoroughly rip. In my opinion you can save everything without any loss – more so with well-maintained CDs, of course – onto the hard drive using the fast mode, which takes only half the time.

On the bottom line it was just a pleasure how the 151 integrated itself into my system, and how it let me control it. With a component like this, you can immediately enjoy the music.

Before the enjoyment can commence, though, there's still the connection of the Musiccenter to the system of course. The included Burmester power cable is of high quality and thus fits the device very well – the buyer of a 151 won't have to worry that this cable could become a bottleneck for the sound. Even so, I have connected it with an HMS Energia SL/OV, as all the devices in my system get their power through this cable and I want to keep the levels balanced on all devices.



On the output side it's possible to connect the Burmester to the amplifier via RCA or XLR cables. My preamplifier doesn't have an XLR input, and I can't find any XLR cables in my possession either – but there are two RCA-XLR adaptors in my accessory box with which I can marry an RCA cable to an XLR output. That allowed me to connect the XLR and RCA outputs to the preamplifier with identical cables – And much to my surprise, the XLR output sounded somewhat more clear and airy after adjusting the levels. I have to admit though, that this “testing phase” didn't even remotely look like work. Very rarely did I manage the time in my week so well that I had most of it left to actually listen to music. Other hobbies just had to play the second fiddle while the Burmester was present.



What happens on the radio?

When I don't happen to be intently listening to music, I do enjoy having my favourite radio station playing in the background: JazzRadio 106.8, a Berlin-based private station that can be received at Lake Constance only via internet. Due to its low resolution of 128 kbit/s is not suitable for anything more than listening on the side, or so I had thought. High-res enjoyment definitely isn't possible here, but the airiness that the Musiccenter 151 employed to play the music, as well as the feel and the spatial precision of the performance did manage to impress me. You can actually remain in your listening chair and enjoy the music. In fact, I had to get up and actually look if the radio station wasn't streaming in higher resolution all of a sudden.

The weeks that I was able to spend with the 151 always followed the same pattern: In the evening, after work, I grabbed a glass of good red wine as well as the iPad and dropped into my listening chair. Rarely have I spent so much time consistently listening to music. It wasn't even for the sake of testing and dealing with the device anymore, it

was purely for the sake of the music. I just listened through my ripped tracks, album by album, from beginning to end. No selective skipping from title to title in order to detect strengths and weaknesses of the 151, no, it was just about enjoying the music.



An excellent device made by two gifted creators: Head of development Stefan Größler (left) and Dieter Burmester work together very closely. A combination that promises know-how and experience second to none, as the 151 impressively certifies.

Surely you expect me to give you an in-depth description of how the 151 sounds now. I have to admit, however, that I have trouble categorising the quality. The Burmester simply conveys the music on an entirely new level, which is remarkable. For Dieter Burmester, sound must build up from a warm and stable foundation of bass. The 151 manages that single-handedly, but it has capabilities that very few devices have mastered like this. A warm, stable and heavy bass foundation is one thing, but reproducing that bass at the same time in such a vibrant and leisurely manner – that is a nearly impossible balancing act. But the 151 manages even that without even breaking a sweat.



A glorious performance and setting out

In the theme song from “The Magnificent Seven” (Elmer Bernstein on “Round Up” - Erich Kunzel & Cincinnati Pop Orchestra), the timpani dictates the foundation and drive of the music. As I listen, take up a monolithic presence in the room and they start banging relentlessly, all the while with the impression that you can virtually see the membranes vibrate in front of your eye. That is great cinema. The bass drum is the driving element of “Speedway At Nazareth” by Mark Knopfler (on “Sailing To Philadelphia”), a really earthy and dirty piece. And it’s conveyed by the 151 leisurely and easily as well. It manages to flood the room with music and effortlessly grant each instrument its respective place and aura without drowning anything out, despite the voluminous bass. This effortlessness that the 151 displays can be witnessed throughout the entire range of frequencies; and in my opinion, is the most remarkable characteristic of this device.

This also works exemplary with FLIM & the BB’s “Big Notes,” a project from the 80s that attempted to simulate and distort instrument with a computer. It resulted in brilliant worlds of sound. With “Funhouse,” I witnessed sound experiences exploding from the nothingness of an endless room – Never have I heard this “song” in a manner so separated from all earthly existence that the Burmester 151 delivered.

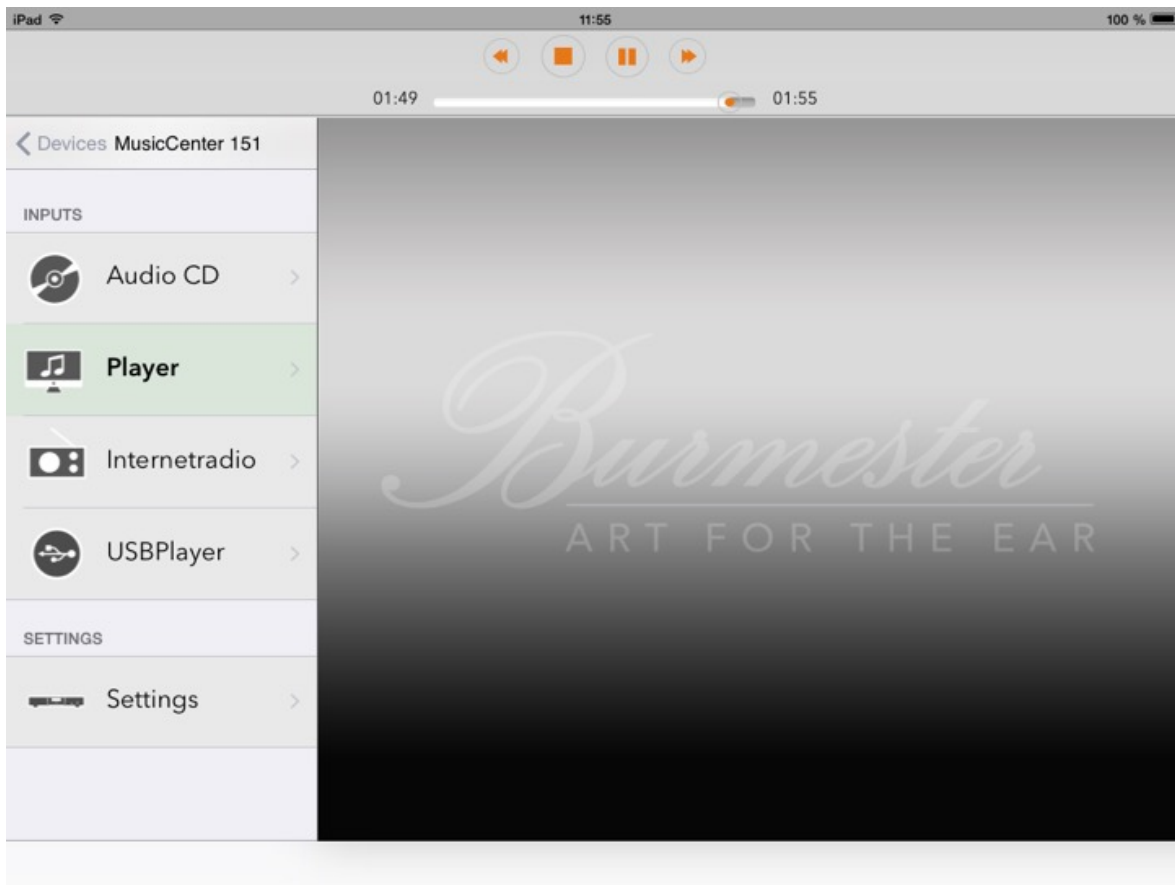
More than anything else, it can actually convey the feelings and emotions that seeped into the recording upon creation, and draw the listener into the spell of the music.

Be it vocals (my favourites are Paolo Conte, Eva Cassidy, Kate Bush, Gregory Porter etc.), piano solos (Keith Jarrett, George Winston, or Dyck Hyman), or well made experimental (Haindling) – the music always had the right intonation through the 151. It conveys the music and excludes itself from the total events entirely. More than anything else, it can actually convey the feelings and emotions that seeped into the recording upon creation, and draw the listener into the spell of the music. An example:

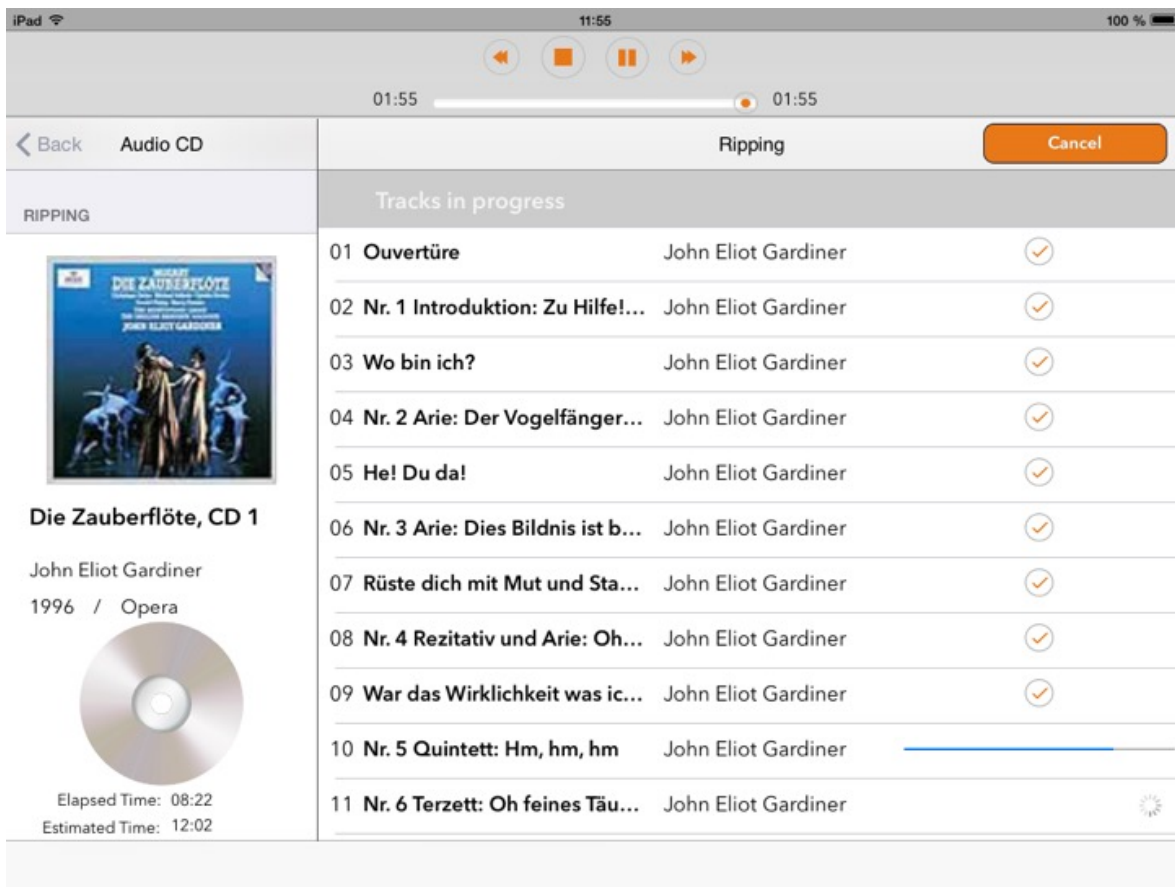
In 2000, Paquito D’Rivera and some similar minded people around Kristjan Järvis’ Absolute Ensemble gave a performance on Swiss Television, that luckily enough was

put on record (“Habanera”) for future generations. You can hear how much fun the guys and girls are having making music. The 151 manages to convey the almost organic passion with which the “Variatons On I Got Rhythm A Cuban Adventure” is played with such perfection that you imagine yourself standing right in the live performance – simply ingenious.

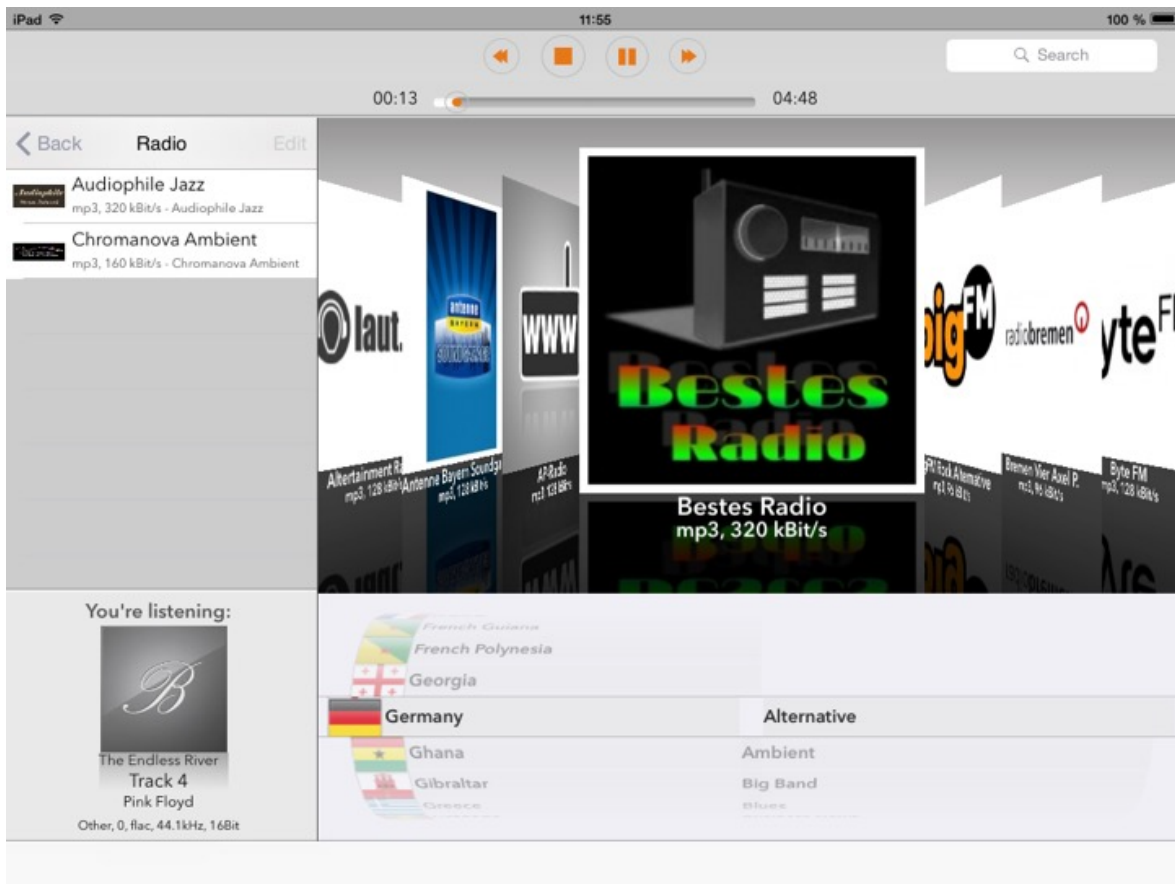
Menu navigation



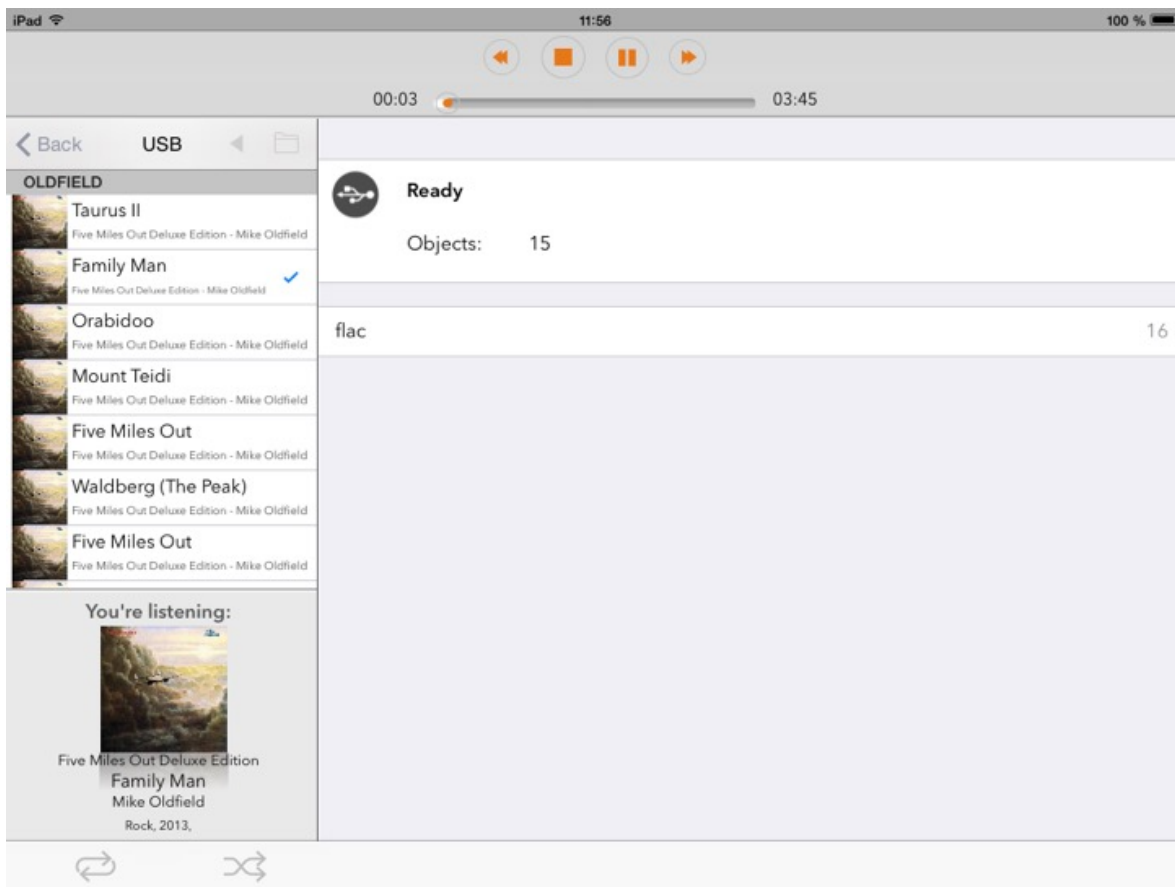
The menu of the Burmester 151 is very intuitive, which makes controlling this complex machine incredibly easy.



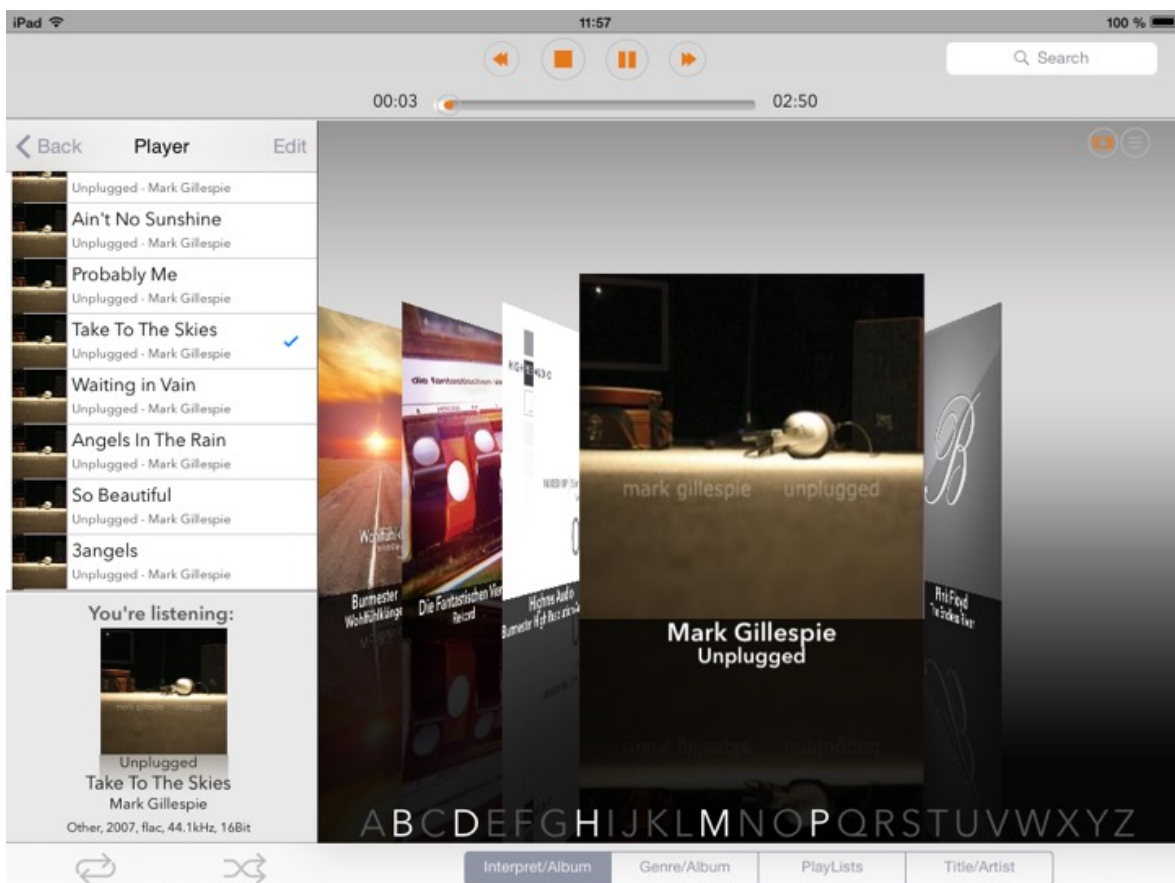
Ripping works in two modes: Fast for CDs in good condition, and slow for CDs in bad condition.



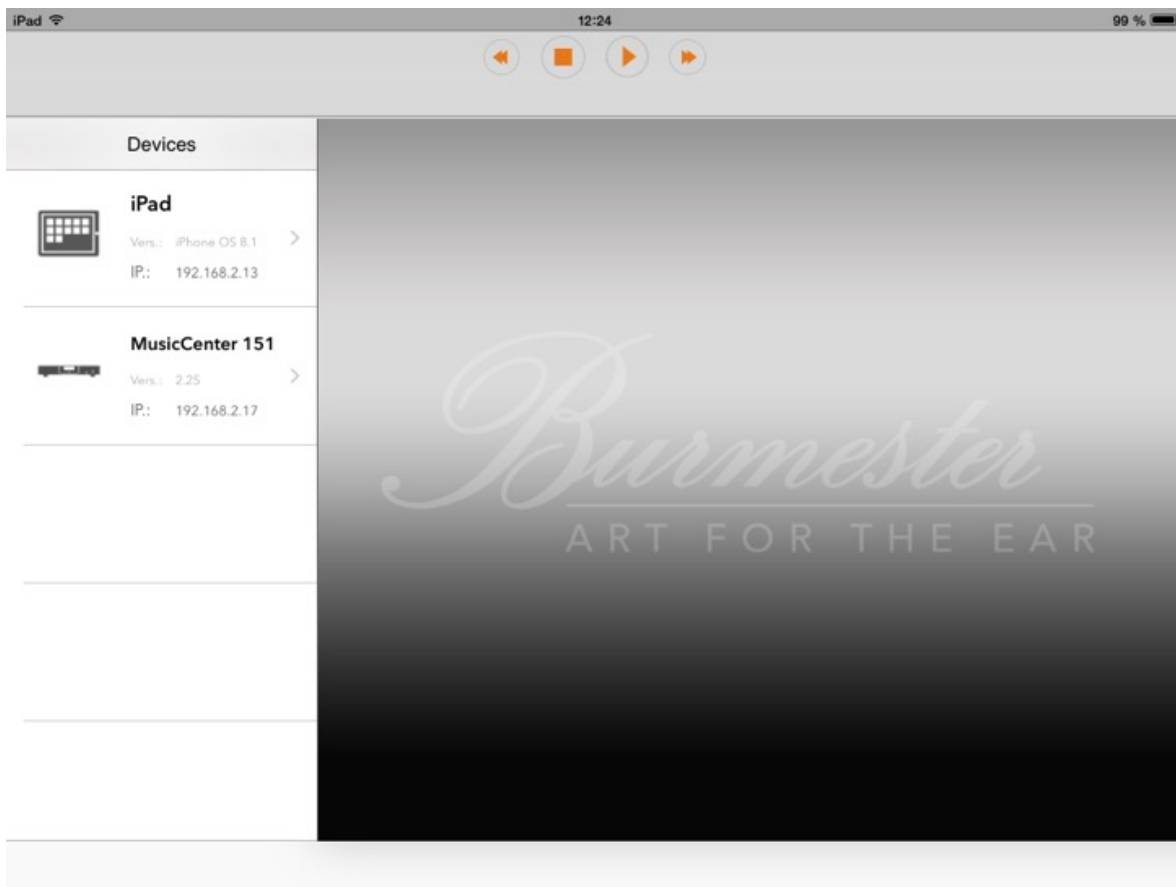
Music that the Burmester gets from the internet sounds incredibly good considering the medium, even if the data rate ends at 320 kilobits.



The USB port of the Burmester works both ways, which means that you can plug in the thumb drive however and it'll still fit. After plugging it in, the stored albums appear. One click on the iPad does the trick and it's ready to play.



The search feature works well, too. You type in capital letters and it immediately jumps to the correct area.



If you go to "Devices", the iPad also displays the assigned IP addresses.



After putting in a CD, the 151 asks whether it should save it, or eject. The CD can also just be listened to, which, however, is not recommendable sound-wise.




◦ All information such as artist, title, album, etc. that you can have about a sound medium, the 151 gets from the Burmester server in Berlin.

iPad 12:45 97%


04:55 25:32

Back Audio CD Finalize

RIPPING



Die Zauberflöte, CD 2
John Eliot Gardiner
1996 / Opera



Elapsed Time: 20:10
Estimated Time: 00:27

Processing Audio Files please wait
Processing tracks: 1

01	Was für eine schreckliche...	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02	Nr. 11 Duett: Bewahret euc...	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
03	He! Die Lichter her!	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
04	Nr. 12 Quintett: Wie? Wie?...	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
05	Du bist standhaft geblieben	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
06	Nr. 13 Arie: Alles Jührt der...	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07	Mutter!	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
08	Nr. 14 Arie: Der Hölle Rach...	John Eliot Gardiner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

After that, the ripping process begins.

iPad 16:43 95%

02:25 06:17

Back Settings Audio Profiles

IS THE 151 CONNECTED TO A POWER AMPLIFIER?

Power 151 with LOW output.

Info 151 with MEDIUM output.

Copyright / About 151 with HIGH output power.

Usage 151 with VERY HIGH output power.

Display IS THE 151 CONNECTED TO ANOTHER PREAMPLIFIER?

Messages 151 with LOW output power.

Online Services 151 with MEDIUM output power.

Audio Profiles 151 with HIGH output power.

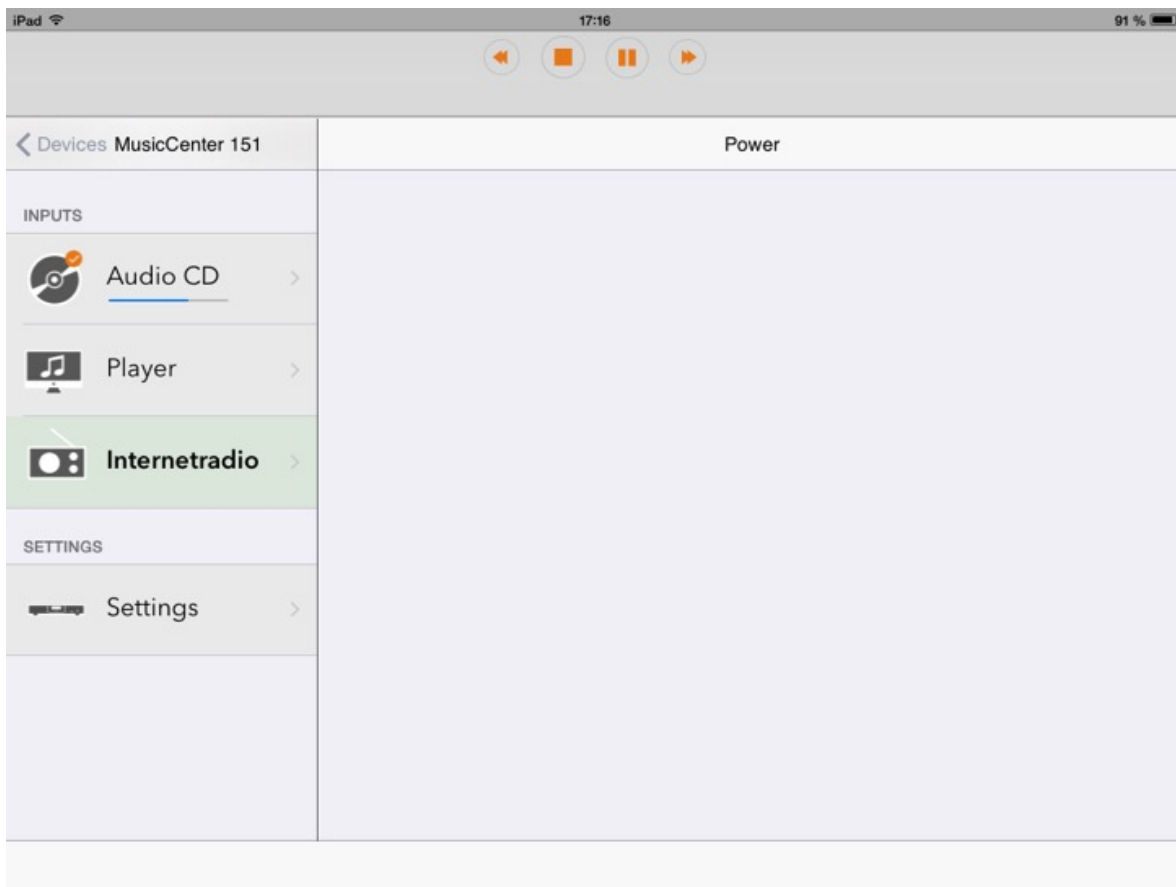
151 with VERY HIGH output power.

FIX OUTPUT. (NO VOLUME FUNCTION AND NO VOLUME CORRECTION)

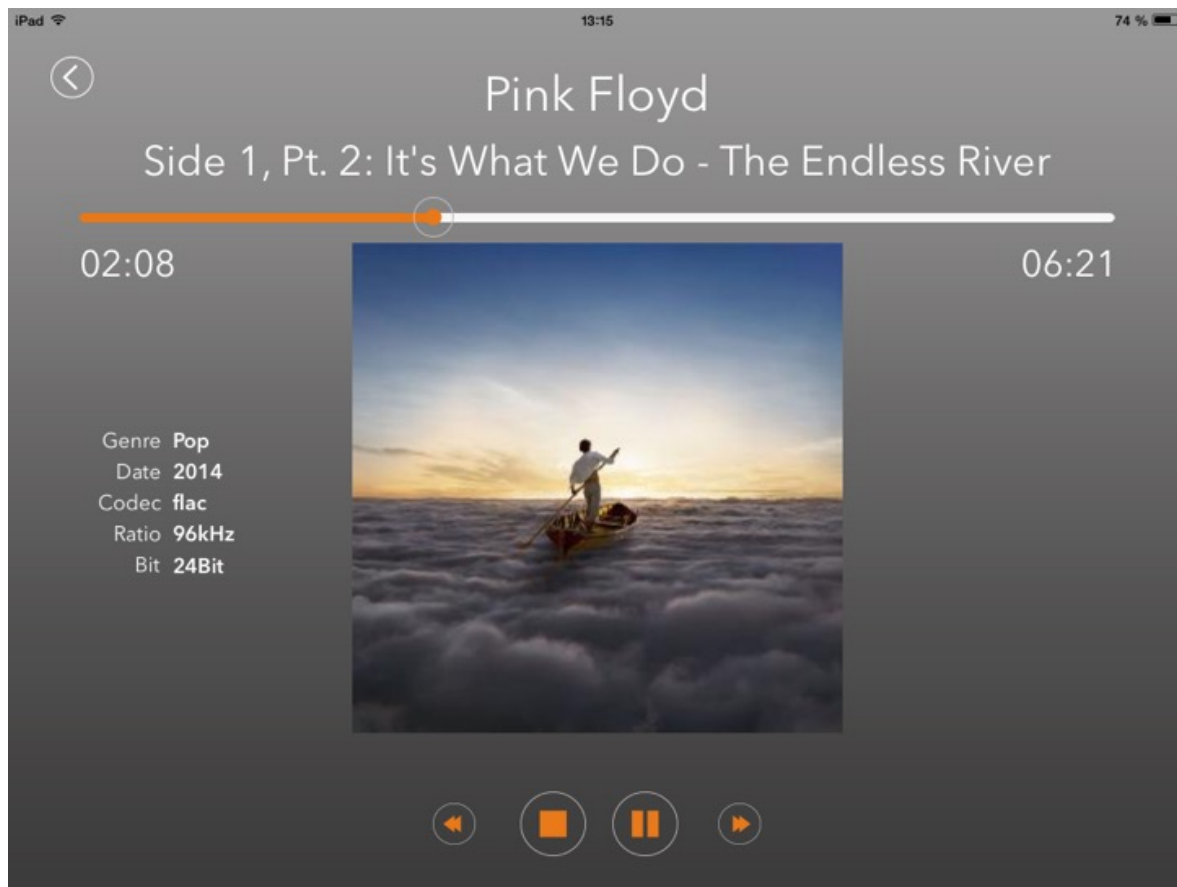
151 with FIX output. Caution: Use only when 151 is connected to a preamplifier!

Genius: The 151 has a pre-amp output with adjustable output voltage. So it can be

used to control a power amplifier or a pair of active speakers directly.



The reading process can be seen in the overview on the menu.



If the music is playing, the album cover and the resolution are displayed. Listening to Pink Floyd at 96 kilohertz and 24 bits is absolute bliss.

As the icing on the cake, the 151 can access your account at "Highresaudio." There's no better and more comfortable way, that is the beauty of the new high-end world.

Tags:

Speakers Burmester 151 Musiccenter