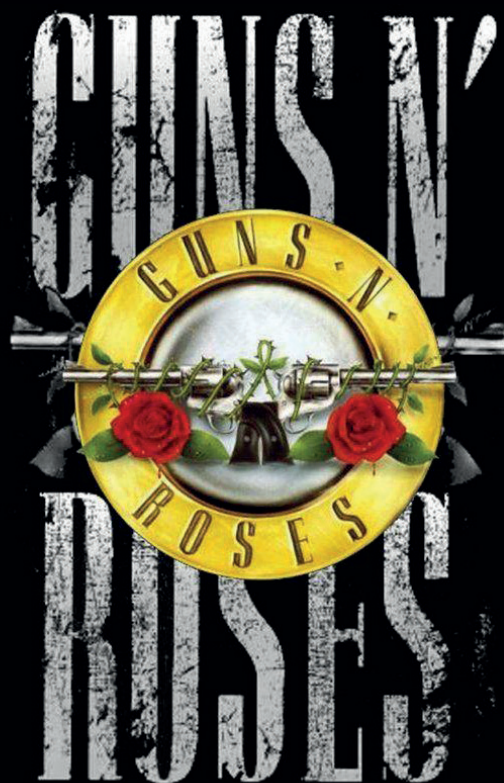


# DO YOU NEED HI-RES AUDIO FOR MULTIROOM AUDIO?



**Wayne Hyde, Technical Manager at distributor Custom AV Distribution, asks the question.**

At Custom AV Distribution showroom, I regularly stream online music from TIDAL, via our 'made for CI' music streamers from LODE. The combination makes for a high-quality source to demonstrate many of our product ranges and to aid audio calibration. The playlists we create aren't necessarily HD, Master or MQA content; they're tracks that just sound good. The songs sound good because of the musicians, the engineering, and the production techniques that were skilfully applied at the beginning in the studio. And this is whether the piece was to be released on cassette, vinyl or streamed. It's always been that way; the cream rises to the top regardless of the carrier being hi-res or not.

That's not to say that low-res music streaming is just as good as hi-res; there's a point where the resolution becomes good enough and should be thoroughly enjoyable throughout the home. Internet radio stations that stream at 32 or 64kbps, to me, are noticeably poor. The content would have to be pretty special to stay tuned in to that! From 256kbps and up that's where it becomes a good enough carrier to get the message across. An analogy could be a comparison to video resolution; there's a point where a very high resolution is arguably offering a minimal contribution to the experience.

On the hardware front, what makes a great music streamer sound fantastic? Should it be able to playback hi-res, should that be 24-bit/96kHz or DSD128? Well, the thing is, the fundamental design of the hardware should be good in the first place. Quality audio products require careful selection of internal power supplies, plus the correct application of the DAC chip is important, whether they are from Wolfson or Burr-Brown

for example. And then as an installer, it pays to know how to connect the streamer to your multiroom system for the most musical results. Will the digital output or the analogue output be best? Remember, if you opt for the digital output then you'll bypass the DAC circuitry that you've just paid for!

In all areas of audio, from studio to band equipment, from broadcast to residential, over the years there have been certain pieces of classic audio equipment that prevail. And this is rarely because of an add-on or impressive logo-related features. In custom installation, our task is to fill that residence with multiroom music, bring it alive so that as much content as possible sounds good.

Sounding good can mean different things to different people. For those wanting to tune in to spatial imaging, envelopment and soaring dynamics then you can't beat a dedicated two-channel music room. The other sounding good, achievable for multiroom is the one that's centred around singing out loud in the shower, shaking your booty when exercising and drumming with cooking utensils when hanging in the kitchen.

With the right combination of audio products, a synergy is achieved that brings the soul and song out of any format for the whole family to enjoy.

## WHAT'S DOLBY ATMOS LIKE WHEN STREAMED?

Now this is something else, something I'm finding more exciting than hi-res when it comes to streaming. Spotify and TIDAL now have a great selection of tracks mixed in Dolby Atmos (many hi-res tracks were not created as hi-res to begin

with). This of course isn't for multiroom but to be played through a multi-channel audio system, with you at that all important centre seat position.

When streamed, Dolby Atmos lacks the clarity that you'll hear from most discs, but on the other hand, the streamed sound benefits from audio compression, which can make songs sound fatter and warmer and cause less strain on an entry level sound system. If you thought the variation in two channel music between bassy and bright sounding songs was wide, then wait until you hear the difference between all the ways Dolby Atmos has been mixed. Therefore, the streamed version could be considered better, plus it is easier to access too of course.

Streamed tracks to try in Dolby Atmos; Elton John - *Rocket Man*, Sheryl Cole - *All I Wanna Do*, Guns n' Roses - *Welcome To The Jungle*. Discs to try in Dolby Atmos; The Beatles - *Abbey Road*, Steven Wilson - *The Future Bites*.



# TIDAL