

Sound Science Music Vault II Music Server

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THE MUSIC VAULT II (subsequently abbreviated as MV II) is an interesting approach to the ever-increasing number of music server devices that are appearing on the market. One definition of a music server that makes sense, as found on the SoundScience website, is that it is the Juke Box brought into the 21st Century. Among the things that music servers do: Store massive amounts of recordings, Act as a data bank for downloaded music, Play pre-configured music selections i.e. playlists, Duplicate your music, Back up your music, Have multiple Zones playing different music, Grow with your storage needs, Change the way you listen to and enjoy music.

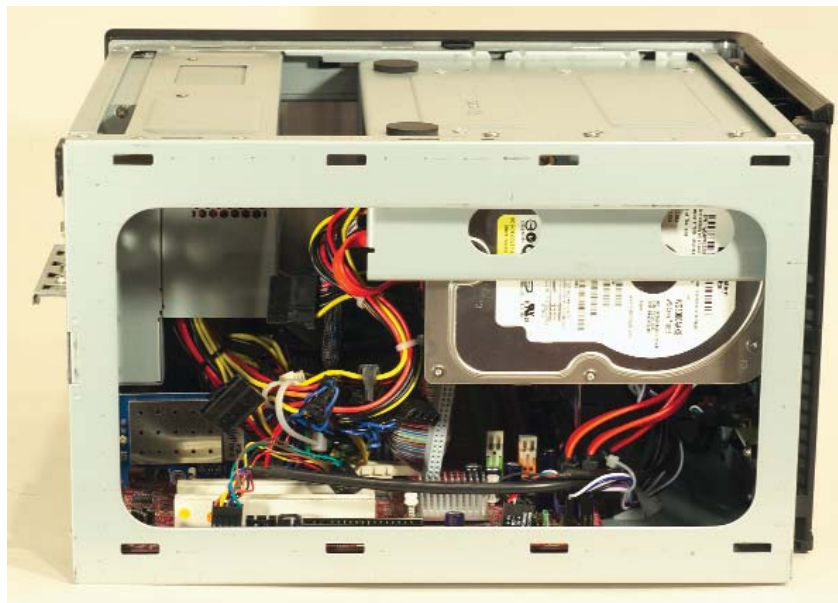
The MV II works with your choice of the following players and more: Slim Devices (Logitech) Squeezebox Classic, Squeezebox Duet, Transporter, ModWright

Truth Modified Transporter, Sonos players, Benchmark USB D/A converter, Apogee Mini-DAC, Denon networked receivers, Denon Networked Radios and iPod Doc, and all USB Sound Cards or D/A converters

In common with the other approaches, the MV has a large hard disc drive to store music files on. The review unit came with a 500 GB drive installed although the MV II can be ordered with up to a 2 TB sized drive. Additionally, a resident DVD drive allows for the ripping of one's CDs onto the drive. Ripped CDs are encoded on the hard drive as FLAC lossless files. A CD takes about 5-7 minutes to process onto the drive.

Running Windows 2003 Server, the MV II can act as an Ethernet NAD (network attached device), a stand-alone wireless network transmitter, or a source via its USB connections to an external D/A converter. Neal

Van Berg, the MV II's co-designer, among other things, is a Slim Devices dealer. He told me that he has sold more Logitech Transporters than any other dealer. As such, he has set up many systems for professionals that don't want to mess with setting up computers as music servers. A preferred setup for many of his clients is the MV II used in conjunction with a Transporter. In that arrangement, the MV II wirelessly transmits to the Transporter and no other network is needed. I promised him that I would set up the MV II that way at some point in the review period.



The Music Vault II is a wonderful device, and I truly enjoyed my time with it. Definitely recommended!

Being the impulsive barge ahead type, and since the MV II is in reality a computer, I first setup it up with a keyboard, mouse, and monitor to check out what was on it. I found the hard drive partitioned into two drive letters: C: for the Windows 2003 server operating system and D: for the music storage folder. This machine had quite a few albums already stored on it. I then connected it up to my wireless network router using an Ethernet cable. Next, on my desktop computer, I located the files on the MV II and set up some to play on the WinAmp or Foobar2000 music file playing applications. My normal computer music playing setup has an M-Audio Audiophile 2496 sound card that feeds out its SP/DIF signal through a 25' digital cable across my listening room to my sound system over on the opposite wall. The signal is received by a Genesis Digital Lens whose digital output feeds into a PS Audio DLIII D/A converter modified by Cullen Circuits and then into my system preamp. I alternatively use a Hagerman Technology HagUSB USB to SP/DIF converter device fed from one of my computer's USB ports to feed the SP/DIF signal across the room. With this working and playing nicely and sounding very good, I moved on to the next phase.

Mr. Van Berg arranged for me to get a Slim Devices Transporter to use in conjunction with the MV II. Also in the received package for the Transporter was a little receiver device called a Duet. Like the original Squeezebox, now deemed Squeezebox Classic, and the Transporter, the Duet can wirelessly connect to the MV II or one's wireless network and play Internet Radio or music files on the MV II into a sound system without one's computer being on. The Duet comes with a slick little remote control with an interactive LCD screen and scroll wheel that allows one to look at the music library on the MV II and is sorted into Albums, Artists, Genres, the MV II music folder itself, etc. in a manner similar to an Apple iPod or Sonos controller. Internet radio is also accessible on the remote.

The Logitech/Slim Devices system uses a software program called SqueezeCenter. This software can run on PCs or Mac computer. Versions are available that run on a Linux and even a UNIX operating system. SqueezeCenter will play music files from the MV II, other music sources on one's computer, and via the WWW, Internet Radio. I had prior experience using SqueezeCenter with a Squeezebox Classic and found that it was decidedly not intuitive for me to use. Nevertheless, I did learn to use it. Now with the MV II installed, I got SqueezeCenter to play its files wirelessly from my wireless router over to the Transporter and the Duet, which I hooked into my Video system in our TV room.

NOTES

Sound Science Music Vault, \$1,700.00. Sound Science, 1767 Rose Petal Lane, Castle Rock, CO 80109; 720/308-4000, web site <http://sound-sciencecat.com>, e-mail neal@soundsciencecat.com.

Associated Equipment

Genesis Advanced Technologies 6.1 speakers, Genesis Advanced Technologies G928 subwoofer, a pair of IcePower ASC200 power amplifiers with custom FET input buffers, Lector Zoe tube preamp, experimental FET developmental line preamp, McCormack UDP-1 CD/SACD/DVD Audio player, HP a1220n computer, M-Audio Audiophile 2496 sound card, LinkSys WRT54G wireless router, Genesis digital Lens, PS Audio DLIII D/A converter modified by Cullen Circuits.

What I found to my amazement, was that I could play Internet Radio or MV II music files in either system independently without SqueezeCenter running or with my desktop/music computer turned off. Of course, SqueezeCenter is always running on the MV II. Further, when I really got what the little Duet remote would do, I could select what I wanted to hear from the MV II or from Internet Radio and volume control it from my listening chair. This is way cool! With this, I instantly got how this kind of thing is the wave of the future in home music listening. I have spent some number of days just enjoying the control of the MV II and the internet radio thing and generally have been amazed at how good the sound is of the files on the MV II. I have ripped a number of CDs onto the MV II and also transferred some non-compressed .wav files from a USB connected drive on my main desktop/music computer. I put them into separate folders in the MV II's music folder and was able to select and play them. I must admit I spent some considerable time just using the slick Duet remote to select and play the files that were on the MV II. Some great music and very good sounding at it's best too.

To complete the picture at this point, I had previously obtained a Squeezebox Classic (the original Squeezebox) to gain proficiency with the Slim Devices software and procedures. I was now able to get this to work with the stereo in my lab. Now I had three Slim Devices products working independently in three places in my house.

To be complete, and to fulfill my promise to Neal that I would set the system up his preferred way, I finally connected up the MV II to the Slim Devices receivers via the MV II's wireless transmitter and shut off my Ethernet router's wireless mode. Once the correct WPA2 password was entered, connections were made. Now, the MV II and the receivers are on their own wireless network independent from my Ethernet network. Things worked about the same functionally as when I used my Ethernet wireless mode to connect the MV II to the receivers. Again, the sound was great and musically enjoyable. I was pleased to find myself enjoying the music a lot more than worrying about how things

sounded compared to the playback of a particular CD being played by one of my players. In fact, in several cases, the sound of some CDs sounded better to me than when that same CD was played back from the player that I normally use, better in the sense that there was seemingly more space, detail and musical involvement.

As a matter of technical interest, the MV II plays back 96/24 files as well as standard 44/16 CD files. I put some precision 96/24 test tone files on it and played them back in my lab through the Squeezebox Classic, Duet, and Transporter. In each case, the played back total harmonic distortion plus noise of a full scale test sine wave out of the digital outputs was close to the limit of my Audio Precision SYS 2722 test instrument at about -139 dB down. The analog output performance of the three devices, not surprisingly, was best out of the Transporter.

And speaking of 96/24 files, I had made some of myself playing two of my classical guitars using an Edirol R-44 recorder, some B&K recording mics, a Forsell SMP-2 mic preamp and a Forsell experimental A/D converter feeding the digital input of the R-44. I saved the files from the recorder, some 1.2 GB worth, onto my desktop computer. I loaded these files onto the MV II. Then I could play them back via the MV II into the Transporter whose optical out went into the PS Audio DLIII D/A or feed them from my desktop computer out through the M-Audio Audiophile 2496 S/PDIF output into the coax input of the DLIII. The sound was pretty much the same and extremely realistic. My wife more than once thought I was playing my guitar in the listening room and it was the recordings being played instead.

All was not without some connection difficulties. Nothing serious but sometimes networks do have glitches. One time, it seemed that the Transporter and Duet couldn't connect with the MV II with my wireless network going. My laptop could connect wirelessly to the router so that said the router was transmitting. I rebooted the router and then it all worked again. A few little things like that, but as I am constantly fooling with things this brings up more opportunity for things to mess up. When using the MV II to be the wireless network source, it always worked. Working with Windows networking is said to be not for the faint of heart. I was always able to make it work - but I am quite computer savvy. For the potential purchaser of this wonderful device, Sound Science will give assistance through any connection difficulties that might arise.

I truly enjoyed my time with the MV II. It has really opened my eyes to how liberating it is to have your music available in the form of an interactive remote control used to select what music to listen to. Also, I now know from this experience that streaming digital audio through Ethernet wired or wireless networks is, to me, as sonically good as S/PDIF digital audio coming out of a CD or DVD transport or from a good computer sound card going into a good D/A converter. Definitely Recommended!

