

Digital Drive

Review: Jam'n Audio / Response Audio Signature Jolida CD100A

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Posted by [Bixby \(A\)](#) on January 15, 2005 at 11:59:39

Mini Review of the Jam'n Audio/Response Audio Signature Jolida JD100A

I have been on the lookout for a new digital front end for the last year or so. I heard a number of units in stores, at friends, and at shows. I enlisted help via suggestions of members here and on some other boards. My budget was \$4000 max, if I could get the kind of digital enjoyment I was after.

At the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, I heard lots of systems in less than ideal situations. One of the best setups there was by SP Technologies and Jam'n Audio/Response Audio. The SP speakers I own, the Timpieces were in a system using an expensive Goldmund CD player as a front end. Very nice sound! After the show, I contacted Joe Jurzec from Jam'n Audio outside Chicago. I asked for his ideas on new CD front end. He gave me several and one he thought might at least tide me over and give me more enjoyment until I found the Holy Grail of CD front ends was a new mod developed by Bill Baker at Resonse Audio, his east coast partner. Since these guys were involved with 2 of the best sounding speakers and systems at the show (the SP technologies and Daedelus), I figured they know what they are doing.

I decided to try the new mod that Bill had developed and ordered up a new Signature Jolida JD-100A. The version I ordered has some damping done to the case and Chris Ven Haus' designed V-Caps in the output stage of the Jolida. Bill installs two brand new Oil Impregnated V-Caps in the output stage and two smaller teflon V-Caps in the second stage. He also includes Joe's Jam'n Audio power cord to the mix as well as swapping out the stock tubes for Svetlanas. I have a lot of respect for Joe and Bill and Chris so I was excited to get this new machine. If it was not better than what I had at least I could use it in my office system, I thought.

The unit arrived several weeks ago and I began breaking it in. For grins I decided to listen in to the progress with my Grado SR-125 phones with the front panel mounted headphone jack and volume control. Nicely detailed sound and more real sounding than my CD player through my Grado headphone amp. I found out later that the headphone circuit does not benefit from the Cap mods as they are not in that signal path. A good beginning!

The break in period, I was warned, would be at least 100 hours and my initial reaction to the sound was that the mids were nice and less dry, and bass full but a bit flabby and highs tizzy. No worries, I have learned to be patient. I just went through a 400 hour breakin on my speaker cables (VH star quad) and it changed a lot from the first few hours.



Breakin did take about 100 hours. Let's start at the top. Details in the high end are very good and a cymbal sounds like a cymbal, yea! I have heard lots of cd players that get it wrong. The transient response, wave front and decay were all better than my player and many I have heard. Highs appeared with good believability and less air than some machines. But more real to me. Moving down to the mids, there is a slight edge or glare in the upper mids on some recordings that are not the best recordings. This is hugely dependent on the power cable used. With the stock cord it is annoying but not real bad, remember the recording is the culprit here. Don't expect the modded Jolida to smooth everything out.

Using the Jam'n Audio cord (a Belden design) at less than \$100 smooths things out significantly. Not only that, it takes a bass that is clearly too fat and tames it with good definition. This minor quibble about the mids is just that, as the midrange on this machine is clearly the best I have heard. Background is black as can be with no noise artifacts that I can tell. In fact this is one area that makes a high end system. From poor cord or outlet upgrades to these fantastic caps. Getting a black space background as black and quiet as can be is key to a fairly convincing reproduction of a real musical event. And notes are focused in the soundstage better than many players I have heard. They just emerge, jump, etc. from distinct locations within the soundstage wall. And do so with more real body or palpability.

Male and female vocals are outstanding and much more real than I have experienced, yes more 3 dimensional. I can almost see how the best reference systems might give a clue to a head turn being noticed, but I have not experienced that quite yet. Bonnie Raitt and Joni Mitchell on the Chieftans album "Tears of Stone" sound more real to me than on any other player I have auditioned. And Johnny Adams singing on "One Foot in the Blues CD is so dynamic! A very good recording! Goldfrapp's CD "Felt Mountain" is a workhorse for letting a system define what the producer is doing to create some of the sounds. It has very good depth and space cues and it sounds so much better on this player especially the location of sounds within the field and their placement relative to front and back. The soundstage is not wider or particularly taller than some others I have heard, but the realness of the notes and the impact of dynamics are pure joy. These caps are doing amazing things to the music with this player. It simply is a more real experience to me.

On down to the low end. Bass is freaking awesome with this machine. I thought my former machine has great low end. In fact it was noted for it. This player has tone detail, dynamics, and balls in the low end. In fact, percussion tone and attack are fantastic. My friend says he has not heard a system that does drums and percussion this well. I agree. No wonder! Chris VH is a drummer. I used Mickey Hart's CD a lot when evaluating components. When things get complex, this modded Jolida does not get flustered, instruments stay where they are with no irritation or compression.

Changes to the power cord are noticeable, as I mentioned earlier. And as good as the Jam'n Audio cord is over the stock cord, going higher up the resolution chain pays dividends. I tried the VH-Audio Flavor 4 on this player and it takes care of most of the slight glare on most not so perfect CDs that exhibit this, without screwing with the rest of the tonal spectrum. It also adds more weight and impact to the low end. Where the Jam'n cord leans to a slight leanness and a focus on resolution, the Flavor 4 makes things more organic, open, and slightly smoother without losing definition. Even at close to \$300 it is an upgrade I will be making.

Other tweaks to my system over the last few weeks after it has broken in are very audible. Adding Herbie's Tenderfeet under the stock feet help with image stability and definition and Herbie's Hal-O Jr IC dampers for my interconnects lock in focus. Who would have thought these down right cheap tweaks would have so much impact! I also replaced the spring loaded tube

covers with Herbies Hal-Os . I cannot tell if they had an impact by themselves, since I have not done a good test. But the Hal-Os work so well on my other tubes, that they should be a good tweak.

All in all, my serach for the holy grail has been sidelined for now. No this is not going in the office system. Is this the Holy Grail? No! We all chase after it but it doesn't exist. Is this the best player on the market, No! But it is a very good value and highly musical and resolving. With everyone and their brother doing mods on Jolidas with clock mods, rca, mods, wire changes, etc., I was a bit skeptical, but Jam'n Joe Jurzec and Bill Baker have something really special here.

I think the V-Cap is a unique and very relevent component to the musically wonderful sound of this player. I am impressed with the work Bill did on the mods, and like the solidness of the Jolida. I have a feeling this could be considered a "giant killer" Yes I said it! It is for me! At under \$1400, I would have to be blown away with some stock machine before I would part with the Signature Jolida and I know something like that would cost in excess of \$4000.

All of the above has to be taken with a grain of salt. These are my opinions only and yours may differ. When writing about audio all the little things get magnified and one mans big change may not be so with you. I know you can only get so much out of a few paragraphs, you have to listen to decide for yourself. Me sharing my thoughts is to help those who have helped me in the past discover something that may bring joy to thier life. To all you folks looking for a moderately priced ticket to musical nirvana, you might want to get a hold of one of these and decide for yourself.

Chris Ven Haus has hit a grand slam with these caps and Bill and Joe are pioneers in bringing an excellent value to audiophiles who just want good tunes without the hype and cost often associated with this lifelong trek.

Cheers

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