

# stereonet

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LUMIN

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M1

Lumin

# M1

STREAMING AMPLIFIER

Distributor: Audio Magic  
\$3,290 RRP

“Long story short, it is because we are all audiophiles here!”

Lumin. No, I hadn't heard of them either.

If you'd asked me a month or so ago, I would have likely mistaken them for a specification one might look at when researching a projector, or even a character from the Dexter TV Series.

In this case however, Lumin is a brand of high-end audio products (surprise!) from Hong Kong based company, Pixel Magic.

Pixel Magic formed back in 2003 and on paper appear to be focused primarily on Digital TV solutions, but appearances can be deceiving.

I discovered upon contacting Pixel Magic that they have been involved in serious audio for quite some time, confirming that:

*"Lumin is actually not our first audio product! ...more than 10 years ago, we had an HD Mediabox 'Audiophile Edition', designed (amongst other things) to playback high resolution audio files!"*

I managed to have a small amount of back and forth with Li On from Pixel Magic and asked him what drove him and colleagues to start work on developing high-end audio products such as Lumin.

His response was both candid and direct:

*"Long story short, it is because we are all audiophiles here!"*

*Myself and many audiophile friends, we all wanted a better quality high end music streamer... (when) SACD ripping was possible for the first time, we looked in the market for an audiophile streamer which was DSD playback capable, sadly there were none!*

*The rest is history."*

It wasn't until 2012 however that they developed their first Lumin Audiophile Network Music Player.

The M1, the subject of this review, takes their existing streamer platform and integrates a 2 x 60 watt (into 8 ohms) amplifier into the mix.

It supports AAC, MP3, FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF, as well as DSD formats, DSF, DIFF and DoP.

“a wonderful simplicity  
in a product like the M1”

## Setup

The Lumin M1 came packaged exceptionally well, double boxed, and within fabric protection. Also included is even a pair of handling gloves so as not to get fingerprints on the finish. And what a finish it is!

While not nearly the weightiest component I've held (the M1 weighs in at just 4.5kg), the build quality still appeared to be outstanding. The front aluminium panel was a not insignificant 10mm thick and was brushed to perfection.

Without doubt, the casework is meticulously constructed.

There is a wonderful simplicity in a product like the M1, there's no need for interconnects and not having to worry about external power supplies, you just connect your speakers (the M1 has high quality binding posts suitable for spades, banana plugs or bare wire), wire it

up to your network with Ethernet and plug it into power.

The M1 has been used previously in the **StereoNET** office, so in the interest of diplomacy, I engaged the 'Reset' switch on the rear panel to gauge setup ease from factory settings.

Upon opening the Lumin control app, it had already located the player as well as my network shares. It prompted me to select my library, which I did.

The M1 also caters for streaming services Tidal and Qobuz, as well as Internet Radio.

If you're thinking of plugging in that old turntable though, you'd best think again as the M1 is geared towards one purpose and one purpose only, streaming.

The Lumin M1 is an example of a Digital Direct type amplifier, not unlike my NAD M2.

It keeps any data in the digital domain right up to the speaker outputs where digital to analog conversion takes place.

The benefit of this technology is an exceptionally low noise floor as the signal isn't sent through any unnecessary gain stages, it simply comes in as digital data and stays that way up until you hear it come out of the speakers.

There are no connections either digital or analog for external sources, with the exception of Type A USB inputs on the rear for external storage devices.

The front panel simply consists of a power switch, volume dial and smart looking OLED screen.

The M1 also supports Apple AirPlay, and as a result could be used as a Roon access point provided you are happy with a maximum 16/44.1 resolution.

Tapping the Tidal icon on the control app prompted me to login. From the get go, this was going to be an interesting test.

I connected the Lumin M1 to my ELAC BS 403's.

They are a 4-ohm nominal load and aren't easy to get sounding their best, dipping down as low as 3 ohms at certain frequencies. When I first got them I had to go on a bit of an amplifier hunt, trying a variety of different amplifiers before ultimately settling on my Vincent SV-237.

It seemingly offered the best balance with the speakers (or at least it did to my ears). With that in mind, it would be interesting to see how they respond to the Lumin M1.



## Listening

I have been a fan of Bon Iver for years, but not quite since their first album. Their self-titled release was the first I had become accustomed with. I'm also part of the minority who enjoyed the second release more so than the first, a travesty!

'22, A Million' is their third studio release and I have to say, it hasn't taken long at all for it to have grown on me. The production work is excellent; it embodies everything I liked about their previous releases whilst taking the band forward in a whole new direction.

The bass response coming out of my ELAC's during track

two, '10dEATHbREasT' was astonishing, it rivalled what I'm used to from my regular Vincent combination.

The background 'gibberish' on 33 'GOD' had a clear place on the left and right outskirts of the mix, the dark beat enveloped my listening room. Yeah, the Lumin could do dynamics.

If there was a characteristic I could tag the M1 with, it would be one of neutrality. It appeared clean without being analytical, and musical without drifting towards being lush.

Solange Knowles doesn't seem to get nearly as much recognition as her sister, but her new

album 'A Seat at the Table' is an outstanding musical statement.

The opening track, 'Rise' gave great depth, the hi-hats in particular had a really nice bite without sounding at all hard.

The sixth track, 'Mad' hit with huge impact. It began with a phat and I mean PHAT beat.

Whilst listening, I had wandered into my own little world, but this track immediately had me perk up and take notice once again. Punchy brilliance.

Not wanting to let me lose focus, track seven 'Don't You Wait' started off equally as ambitious, helping me to once again get lost

in the dynamic nature of the music.

Olafur Arnald's 'Living Room Songs' is a classic recording, relaxing and beautiful and a personal favourite. He actually does compositions for TV and film, including the excellent series, Broadchurch.

'Near Light' is the second track and it presented itself stunningly through the Lumin M1. The strings ripe with bite, the melancholic piano captivated and the electric kit lifted it to ethereal levels. Not one instrument got in the way of any other.

## Roon-y Tunes

Lumin are listed on Roon's partner page, but with that ever-frustrating asterisk indicating 'Coming Soon'.

In the meantime, and as mentioned earlier, the M1 is an AirPlay device and so can be used with a Roon core on your network (though not the ideal way of using Roon).

I engaged it, and lost the usual detailed display and instead got the Lumin name encircled by an AirPlay logo.

You can approach this usage in one of two ways;

You could set the Lumin volume to the *MAXIMUM* you would be comfortable with and use the Roon Zone volume to adjust, or keep the Roon output at 100% and then adjust the Lumin volume either manually or via the Lumin app.

Playing back Joe Pug's (a favourite folk/Americana singer) 'Hymn #35' from his 'Nation of Heat' EP, I did a play-by-play comparison.

The Roon output via AirPlay was good, or at least I thought so until I played back the same track natively via the M1. This was a

definitely better presentation, more detail, space and clarity. No AirPlay for me then!

Upon seeking further clarification from Lumin regarding Roon, this is what they had to say:

"We are currently implementing the RoonReady feature. Unfortunately, we have other urgent projects so Roon development has been a bit delayed. Our current estimate is to release RoonReady by the end of 2016."

Good news for Roon fans and even better news for Lumin owners.



## Control App

Now that I am a Roon convert, every other control app seems to be 'just enough' to get you going without offering anything more and the Lumin app is much the same.

Where Roon stands apart is it is striving to be more than just an app control, it wants to be an experience for the end user, and that is why you pay a premium for it.

The Lumin app is not bad, not by any means, it just doesn't attempt to be better than anything else.

It's easy to navigate, though some of the icons do take some getting used to.

The app control is reminiscent of the QAT MS6i I reviewed previously, albeit a touch better laid out.

The controller also seemed stable, not crashing once during use. It was quick and responsive too.

The phone version didn't seem to lose out compared to the tablet version either, everything was still accessible and the Lumin designers have tried to keep it as similar as possible in structure and functionality with the tablet version.



## Drawbacks

Given the design focus of the Lumin M1, I never felt as though there was any obvious weakness.

You could argue that a lack of inputs could be one, but given that this was designed to be a streamer that could connect directly to speakers, is it really a drawback?

The app control could be better, but it isn't worse than anything from any of the major streaming players. If you can justify the expense, once Lumin and Roon work seamlessly, this would be a moot point anyway.

I actually struggled to find fault with the Lumin M1, it does everything it has set out to with aplomb.

## Conclusion

I find myself struggling to let go of the Lumin M1. Yet let it go I must, save having my head on the chopping block for buying yet another audio component.

It's a stunning looking piece of equipment that has the performance to match.

I loved the convenience of being able to activate it from my phone as soon as I rose from sleep, and I was constantly blown away by how competently it drove my ELAC speakers, no easy feat.

If I were to set up a third (yes, you heard me) system somewhere around the house, I would be giving the M1 some serious consideration.

If you're fed up of the vinyl resurgence, or have ripped all your CDs and palmed the rest off to St. Vinnies and you want music streaming done well, you would be remiss to not take a look at the Lumin M1.

**Excellent product and wholeheartedly recommended.**