

**AUDIOPHILE  
AUDITION****Equipment Review No. 1 • April 2003****Shanling SCD-T200 Stereo Tube SACD/CD Player \$2695 [First  
review anywhere]**

Imported by Music Hall  
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**Basic Description**

Tube stereo SACD/CD player: Using 4 x 6N3 tubes, 2 for the tube output and 2 for the headphone output. Sony KHM-2334AAA drive and Sony CXD2752R SACD decoding chip, the DAC is a Burr Brown PCM 1738 24 bit/192kHz, stereo headphone output, digital level control, coaxial digital output, tube/solid state output, detachable power cord, includes SACD Demonstration Disc GRV1013, cleaning cloth, spikes (with footers) or rubber feet, remote control, warranty: 1 year labor, 1 year parts, 6 months laser, 90 days tubes; 25 pounds, 20.9" W x 15" D x 8.25" H.

**Associated Equipment**

B&W CDM-9NT loudspeakers, Krell KAV-300iL Integrated Amplifier, Krell KAV-280cd

(for comparison), Audioquest cabling.

## Setup

Setup was very basic. Included with the SACD player are spiked feet and footers that I attached to the back two feet. The front foot is adjustable and the Music Hall representative told me that moving it forward and back would change the sound of the player. I put it directly underneath the transport and left it there throughout the audition. I did not use the solid state output as my experience with these outputs is that they do not sound as good as the tube outputs—and I really don't see why you'd get this player without taking advantage of the tube capability. There did not seem to be a long warm-up time, so you can start enjoying music immediately. There is a small magnetic clamp that fits right over the CD and then the main housing clamp comes down over the disc and reads its content.

## Listening--SACDs

After both players had warmed up overnight, I began listening with track 9, the “Debussy Piano Trio-Finale” by The Florestan Trio from Hyperion SACD-67114. Dynamic range seems to be a consistent advantage with the SACDs I've listened to and this track is no exception. The sound was sweet and pleasant. Overall, my impression was that the player produced a very mellow and inoffensive sound without edge. I'm not sure if the player was toning down the sound a bit or if this were due to the recording. Later comparisons with the Krell showed that the Shanling did tend to smooth some of the very extreme top end, but not enough to complain about given the design.

Track 8 by Jacintha, “Autumn Leaves,” from Groove Note GRV1006 (also from the sampler disc) produced a wonderful sound via the SCD-T200. I was reminded more of a good LP rather than a CD. There was a puffy, pleasant quality to the voice that I usually associate with tube equipment. Just for the heck of it, I listened to the CD layer on this track with the Krell. Sure enough, the SACD was far better. On the CD, there was a slight loss of 3D space. The voice with SACD on the Shanling was much more palpable and there was less in between the music and the listener. There is no doubt that I preferred the sound of the SACD with the SCD-T200. After listening to this cut I didn't do any more SACD vs. CD listening.

I listened to track 6, “Thousand Year Prayer,” from Cowboy Junkies Open. Shrek says that ogres have layers...well, so does the Shanling SACD player. The bass was deep and powerful like it was in the room with me—it was as if there was a big heart beating. The voice was present and dimensional. There was a great air and depth, and images were well defined and existed in their own space in the soundstage.

I followed up with another SACD, track 1, “Random Act Of Love” from Al Jarreau's All I Got. The sound was very spatial, but not as present as the other recordings I auditioned. Like all the good SACD recordings, noise level was non-existent with the music playing over a superbly quiet black background. One of the operational issues I had with the Shanling was the length of time it took to get the disc playing—up to 20 seconds! First, the unit reads the information on the disc and then stops. Then, you have to push play to get the SCD-T200 going. The player remembers whether you selected the SACD/CD layer previously on a SACD. It is unlikely you'd want to listen to the CD layer, but I had to select SACD occasionally after inserting a new disc.

## Listening--CDs

All my CD listening included direct comparisons with the Krell KAV-280cd CD player. I

began the testing with track 6, “Hospital Food,” from the Eels Electro-Shock Blues. The Shanling did a nice job conveying the strange and somewhat offbeat music on this disc. There was a definite feeling of being immersed in the performance. Transient attack was good and bass was deep and tight. The soundstage was wide and extended well beyond the front listening room walls. Images were confined to their own separate space and voice was positioned up front and set out from the rest of the music. Images in the soundstage had a nice, warm, round quality to them with good presence although not nearly as lifelike as with the SACDs. The Krell was more diffuse in its presentation of instrumentation and cymbals and other high frequency sounds were more obvious. The midrange didn’t have the same “plumpness” and the sound was more even from top to bottom although it didn’t have the same “in the room” feel.

Keeping with the alternative rock genre, I put on track 5, “Clocks,” from Coldplay’s A Rush Of Blood To The Head. The Krell player was flatter and had more noticeable reverberation in the early part of the track. Cymbal crashes and overall sound is little metallic and hard, but that is my experience on other equipment with this recording. The Shanling provided a warmer, smoother presentation; so generally, it will sound much more forgiving with less than perfect discs.

To continue the investigation with another less-than-perfect recording, I put on track 15, the theme from Angie by Maureen McGovern, off Television’s Greatest Hits, Volume 6. The Shanling made the voice slightly warmer and more present. The sound was richer and had more swing. There was a slight “scrunchiness” to the sound that I usually associate with too much midrange. The Krell had a lighter balance, but was not nearly as involving.

From The Best of Paul Desmond disc I put on track 2, “Take Ten.” The blat of the horn on the SCD-T200 was mellow, warm, sweet, and smooth. There was a pleasant, warm character in the midrange (presence region)—one of the reasons my first high-end piece of equipment was a Conrad-Johnson PV5 preamplifier. The sound was lush and relaxing. The Krell provided more sizzle on cymbals and was polite and reserved—qualities to which most listeners are accustomed. The sound was not forward or too laid back, but was not as involving as I’d wished. I wanted to turn the volume up, but it did not entirely solve the problem.

I ran into another isolated problem with the Shanling while I was skipping through Sex-O-Rama II: Classic Adult Film Music. The player skipped ahead normally track by track until I got to track 6. Instead of starting to play track 6 the player went to 7, then 8, then all the way to the end. I punched in track 8 directly and the player jumped to track 10, but when I went to 9 there was no trouble. I opened the lid and let the player read the contents of the disc again, but still couldn’t get it to play properly—I guess this music just wasn’t to its taste! I did manage to do some comparison playing on track 1, and noted a more immediate sound on the Shanling. The Krell sounded neutral and under-emphasized, but the SCD-T200 had “more groove and funk” according to my notes. Sound quality of players in this range comes down to personal preference, and my preference for casual listening was for the SCD-T200.

## Conclusion

The fluidity and ease, lack of grain, and impressive dynamics are what attract me to the SACD format. The Shanling SCD-T200 was more than able to demonstrate all of these qualities. The breath, warmth, and smoothness are there, but not in the style of older tube components that often trade off dynamic capability, frequency response, or bass control. The Shanling can function as a fine CD player until your SACD collection grows--at which point the quality of sound delivered will surpass anything available from the CD format. And don’t forget how cool it looks! [Purchase Here](#)

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