

Product Review

Sony CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 CD Players

Reviewed by Gary Galo

Sony CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 CD players. Sony Electronics Inc., 1 Sony Drive, Park Ridge, NJ 07656, 800-222-7669 or 941-768-7669, FAX 941-768-7790, www.sel.sony.com. CDP-XE400: \$160; CDP-XE500: \$180. Warranty: one year parts and labor.

Sony's CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 are the least expensive single-play CD players from the Japanese electronics giant. Inexpensive single-play CD players are becoming increasingly difficult to find, since most manufacturers are pushing CD changers.

The CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 players are identical except for a few basic features. The CDP-XE400 is a bare-bones player—no remote, no digital output. For \$20 more, the CDP-XE500 adds a Sony Remote Commander infrared remote control, a Toslink digital output, and digital volume control operated from the remote. The digital volume control affects both the line outputs and the headphone jack.

The CDP-XE400 chassis contains the receiver for the infrared remote control, so full remote capability (including the digital volume control) is possible with the remotes supplied with many Sony receivers. You may also control the CDP-XE400 with a "universal remote," with one caveat: Sony's track-selection system does not allow direct entry of tracks higher than ten—all Sony remotes contain a "greater than ten" button (>10) for this purpose. If your universal remote does not have this button, it may not be compatible with these players. Among the incompatible remotes is the Radio Shack 15-1994 remote I reviewed in aX3/01.

FEATURES

The Sony CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 players include a full array of standard features. Play modes include program play, in which you can program up to 24 tracks on a disc to play in any order



PHOTO 1: The Sony CDP-XE500 CD player with its supplied remote. The lower-cost CDP-XE400 does not come with the remote control, but the internal infrared remote receiver allows you to use it with the remotes supplied with most Sony receivers, as well as many universal remotes.

you choose, and shuffle play, in which the player randomly selects the program order. The repeat feature can repeat an entire disc, track, or selected program, or begin another shuffle of the entire disc. The edit/time fade button allows you to produce a program to fit any standard cassette tape length. You can also program the player to fade out at a specific time on the CD.

The peak search feature quickly locates the highest recorded level on a CD, allowing you to set the level on a cassette deck at that spot. When you insert a disc in the player, the total number of tracks and total playing time are displayed. If the disc is not played after insertion, the displayed information disappears after a few seconds (the display reads "0" tracks).

Pressing the time button restores the total time and track information for about three seconds. The time and track display is always active when the player is in the play mode. The time button also allows you to toggle between elapsed time, remaining track time, and total remaining time on the disc.

The music scan feature plays the first ten seconds of each track—when you hear the track you are looking for, simply press the play button to play this track from the beginning. You can change the playing time of each track sample to 20 or 30 seconds by toggling the music scan button.

These players do not contain a keypad for track selection—you select individual tracks using a rotary control located in the upper right-hand corner of the front panel. Sony calls this control the AMS ("Automatic Music Sensor"). Direct keypad entry is supported on the remote supplied with the CDP-XE500, or the remotes supplied with Sony receivers. Both players come with standard double-arrow search buttons. You can conduct the search silently, monitoring the time and track display, by pressing the pause button.

INTERNALS

Sony uses what it call a "Hybrid Pulse D/A Converter" in these players. This chip bears Sony number CXD8567AM and is a combination 8× oversampling digital filter and bitstream-type D/A

TABLE 1 MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATIONS (IDENTICAL FOR BOTH MODELS)

Frequency response: 2Hz–20kHz, ±0.5dB
Total harmonic distortion: 0.0045%
Signal-to-noise ratio: 100dB
Dynamic range: 98dB
Channel separation: 95dB
Line output voltage: 2V with 50kΩ load
Recommended load impedance: >10kΩ
Headphone output: 10mW/32Ω
Power consumption: 10W
Dimensions: 17 × 3¼ × 11 5/8" (430 × 95 × 295mm)
Weight: 6 lbs, 10 oz (3.0 kg)
Supplied accessories:
Stereo audio patch cord (both models)
Remote control and (2) AA batteries (CDP-XE500 only)

converter with analog voltage outputs. The analog circuitry is about what I've come to expect in low-cost players. Each channel uses a JRC NJM4558 op amp for analog filtering and output buffering, and a Mitsubishi M5218AL for the headphone amplifier. The M5218AL will sink $\pm 50\text{mA}$ of load current, making it suitable for headphone amplifiers.

The CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 players are surprisingly well-built, particularly considering the price. The chassis and cover are all-metal, and the front-panel controls have a solid operational feel. The mechanism is quite sturdy, and the CD tray operates smoothly. The isolation feet are mounted with the screw holes off-center to help diffuse vibration modes.

Both players bear the designation "Made in China" and, in case you haven't noticed, the quality of Chinese manufacturing has improved considerably in recent years. Overall, these players exhibit none of the chintzy look and feel so prevalent in inexpensive consumer electronics.

PERFORMANCE

At these prices, the sonic performance of the CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 can't be beat—these players are as good as any I've heard for under \$200, and better than most in this price range. Although Toslink is not the best digital interface, the CDP-XE500 makes a respectable entry-level CD transport when used with an outboard digital

processor. I recommend a high-quality Toslink interconnect, such as the Kimber OPT1 I reviewed in *AE* 4/99.

Looking for an under-\$1000 system for your son or daughter? Try mating the CDP-XE500 with Sony's STR-DE445 receiver (street price \$250) and a pair of Boston Acoustics CR-9 loudspeakers (\$420 per pair; www.bostonacoustics.com). You can operate the Sony receiver in the two-channel stereo mode or as a five-channel Dolby surround unit (with additional speakers, of course).

The receiver has both Toslink optical and S/PDIF coaxial digital inputs, so you can digitally link the CDP-XE500 CD player to the receiver, which also comes with a Sony universal remote to operate the CD player. I assure readers that I haven't abandoned perfectionist, high-end audio, but I do find it remarkable what \$820 will buy these days, if you pick your components carefully.

Over the past two years we at The Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam, have purchased around 20 of these players for use in the faculty studios and music library. About six months ago I installed a dozen CDP-XE400 players in library listening carrels, where students tend to give any piece of electronic equipment a real workout. So far, they are holding up extremely well. My dealer told me that several local radio stations are using these players, with similarly positive reports on reliability.

These players typically sell for about \$30 below the manufacturer's suggested retail price, whether through mail order

or a local retail dealer. If there is no dealer near you, try J&R Music World (www.jandr.com). At these prices the Sony CDP-XE400 and CDP-XE500 are a great bargain, and are my first choices among under-\$200 CD players. ❖

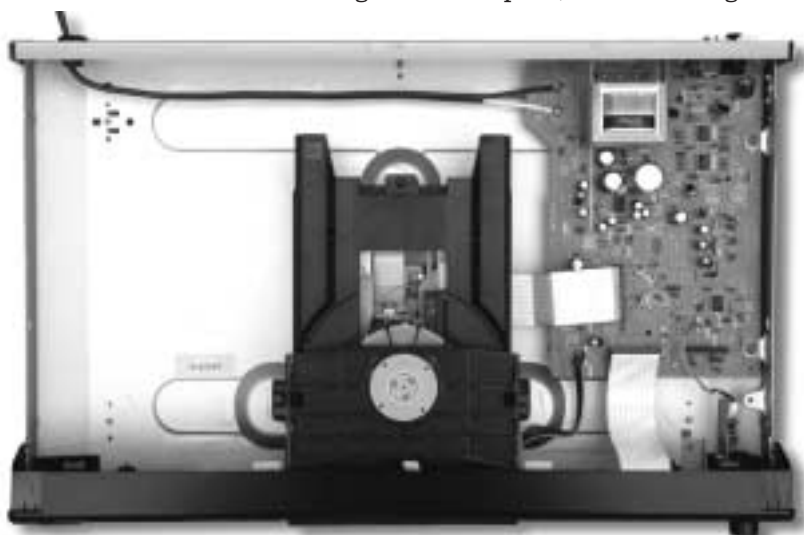


PHOTO 2: Inside view of the CDP-XE500 (the CDP-XE400 is virtually identical). The build quality belies the low cost of these players.