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JULY/AUGUST 2008  
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## Qsonix

### QJB110 Nostalgic digital jukebox

**R**unning the gamut from computers to dedicated components to iPods, hard-disk-based music servers have radically changed the way we listen to music. But most servers are essentially dull black or silver boxes. Load 'em up with music and then forget about them as you sit back on the couch to enjoy your collection.

Even though they're terrific tools, servers rarely inspire any kind of emotional connection. People do love their iPods, but a server usually gets a ho-hum response at best. For me, that all changed when I first encountered Qsonix's QJB110 Nostalgic digital jukebox. I was drawn in by the colored lights of its classic Rock-Ola styling and its prominent touchscreen — and when I actually touched that screen, I was smitten. Add its unique interface, which provides easy access to all of your music, and what's not to love? But the *SAV* editors needed convincing. "We recently reviewed a Qsonix server [the Q100, available at [soundandvisionmag.com](http://soundandvisionmag.com)], and now you want to do a jukebox? It had better be something really special." Con-

fidant that the QJB110 was indeed special, I requested a sample.

#### SETUP

The Qsonix jukebox typically arrives via "white glove" delivery, which means it's carefully brought in and set up in your home. For me, however, it arrived on a truck and was unceremoniously offloaded into my driveway. Unpacking the shipping crate and hefting the 300-pound jukebox into the house confirmed it was a serious piece of hardware. Made with actual hardwoods, chrome, copper, and brass, this is a real-deal commercial-grade jukebox, not some cheesy reproduction.

Once I'd wrestled it into my living room, the actual setup was a breeze. Praise Rock-Ola for installing wheels to easily roll the Qsonix around! Beyond electricity, the jukebox only requires an Internet connection. On initial power-up, its screen guides you through entering time, date, and network settings; selecting the CD ripping quality (WMA Lossless, 320 kbps, or 192 kbps); and configuring the four-zone audio outputs.

To import my music library, I only had to enter the network address of the shared music folder stored on my Media Center PC. You can also rip music into the system via the unit's CD drive, which also serves as a competent CD burner so you can take your playlists on the road.

The jukebox can only handle WMA and MP3 music files. Conversely, you need to turn on media sharing if you want other devices to be able to access the stored music. You can also enter a network path for photo files — useful for adding album art or using the screensaver to display digital photos.

The QJB110's rear panel offers several important connections for distributed audio. Its four stereo analog outputs carry the four different streams the jukebox can serve up, while a single coaxial digital connection conveys only the first stream. And using the digital connection comes with an even bigger limitation: Enabling it *disables* all four of the analog outputs as well as the jukebox's amplifier and speakers. (The unit I received used a Peavey 900 power amplifier, which Qsonix informed me has since been replaced with an improved Crest model.) This was a bummer since the digital connection delivers the highest-quality signal to an outboard home theater system. There's

## The Short Form

### Snapshot

A full-featured music server wrapped in a package that's sure to bring a smile to anyone's face

### Plus

- Versatile, fun-to-use interface
- Appealing jukebox design
- Tapestry feature automatically generates themed playlists
- Integrated MusicGiants online store

### Minus

- Digital output limits functionality
- IR remote too basic to be useful

**Price** \$14,500

**Even when nothing is playing on the Qsonix jukebox, there's a sense of excitement and animation surrounding it that other products can't match.**

also an RS-232 serial connection for integration with third-party control systems, two USB connections that can be used for adding a hard drive to back up your collection, and an input for an infrared control. A third USB connection, located on the front of the jukebox, is perfect for docking an iPod, or for connecting a USB keyboard to enter data.

#### PERFORMANCE

Once it's powered up, the Qsonix jukebox comes alive with a glowing array of revolving rainbow-colored lights and bubbles. Even when nothing is playing, there's a sense of excitement and animation surrounding it that other products can't match. It will become the focal point of whatever room it's installed in.

While the lights and bubbles look cool, the magic happens on the touchscreen, which acts as the portal to Qsonix's terrific interface. The 15-inch screen, which is big enough to easily read and select everything, is divided into Album Browser, Now Playing, and Playlists.

It's a cinch to surf your collection and find music since you can browse by artist, album, genre, year, and cover art. A bar at the bottom of the screen lets you jump immediately to a letter for quick navigation through large collections. Plus there's a powerful search feature for hunting down artists, albums, and song titles.

You use your finger to drag your selection into the Now Playing area. That might not sound like much, but it's so intuitive and cool that you have to experience it

to appreciate it. You can drag selections over in a variety of ways: single albums, specific tracks, or by genre. You can also select all tracks by an artist, in a specific year, or from an entire decade. Selecting by genre also lets you drill down into more detailed subcategories — for example, jazz that's modal, postbop, or fusion.

The Qsonix integrates metadata from the All Music Guide (now known as Allmusic, or just AMG) to provide automatic track and CD identification. The server's powerful track indexing allows for three excellent playlist-generating features. The first, Play Similar Songs, lets you quickly generate an evening's worth of music around the vibe of a single song. I simply selected a Sinatra or Bennett song, and almost every subsequent tune fit in with the feel of my initial choice. The second feature, Tapestry, allows for more focused automatic music selection with Themes like "Feelin' Good" and Tones like "Passionate/Sensual." The third option, Styles, offers even more nuanced genre selection.

The jukebox also provides instant access to the MusicGiants online store, which offers an easy way to buy and download music. And, unlike iTunes, which uses lossy digital compression, MusicGiants uses the WMA Lossless format, so the fidelity isn't compromised. Every Qsonix system ships with an established MusicGiants account and a \$50 credit to welcome you to the store. MusicGiants also sent me their Gold Concierge package (\$995), which includes a broad mix of 500 songs plus \$300 in store credit. The collection arrives on a hard drive that imports rapidly into the jukebox and is a terrific way to instantly build a music library.

The QJB110 also has some iPod functionality, with the ability to transfer any or all playlists to your Pod for music on the go. Once your player is connected, the jukebox checks it for existing tracks and then transfers the new music. Each playlist can be set individually to transfer at quality levels ranging from 128 kbps to uncompressed WAV format.

The included IR remote is extremely limited. Outside of volume adjustment, it offers only the most basic transport commands. The control-via-IP feature, which let me operate the machine wirelessly from my laptop in a manner similar to the onscreen interface, was far more useful.

The jukebox produced better than expected bass and clear mids and highs, and it played *really* loud. But its five-speaker array — a pair of 1-inch tweeters, dual 5¼-inch mids, and a 10-inch sub — isn't audiophile-quality since the drivers don't provide the separation or the sonic detail of a standalone speaker system. Also, the fans on my unit were very loud, to the point where I turned off the jukebox whenever I wanted to watch TV. Qsonix says that the change to Crest amplifiers and the use of quieter fans has greatly reduced the noise.

The jukebox offers a ton of exciting features, and Qsonix plans to add Internet and satellite-radio support by the end of the year. If you like this server's features but plan to use an existing audio system, the Q110 (\$6,795) has *identical* functions but is packaged as a standard A/V component with a separate 15-inch touchpanel.

#### BOTTOM LINE

If it's not totally obvious by now, I love the Qsonix QJB110 jukebox. It was incredibly fun to live with, and my family used it every day it was in our possession. If you have the room — and budget — for a jukebox, this will be a terrific addition to your home. My wife summed up our feelings about the Qsonix when she said, "I'll really hate to see this go." **S&V**

### Key Features

- 500-GB hard disk holds 8,850 CDs with lossy compression or 1,400 CDs with lossless compression
- Four-zone output allows for housewide audio distribution
- 400-watt amplifier powers five-driver speaker system
- Full-size Rock-Ola "bubbler" jukebox with terrific build quality
- 15-inch, 1,024 x 768-resolution color touchscreen with drag-and-drop interface
- RS-232 control for interface with automation systems
- Built-in MusicGiants interface for easily buying new music
- 60 x 33 x 27 in; 300 lb

**QSONIX.COM :: 818-332-9504**