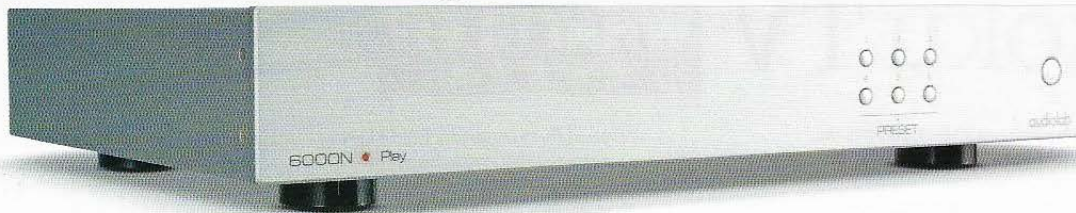


View offers

whf.cm/6000NPlay

Audiolab 6000N Play


WHAT HI-FI?
 ★★★★★


Had Einstein still been alive today, we could just picture him drawing up his next quantum physics theory while listening to the Audiolab 6000N Play.

Audiolab's first standalone music streamer would certainly have fitted Einstein's philosophy that a 'simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone'. Aesthetically, the 6000N Play is as unassuming as hi-fi streamers come, with a screenless, largely unadorned chassis that gives nothing of its vast network talents away.

But behind that modest façade, the 6000N Play has every right to exude an air of quiet confidence. It arrives as the third component in its mid-range 6000 Series, following the five-star 6000A integrated amplifier and the 6000CDT CD transport, borrowing tech and features from both.

Tasty ingredients

The 6000N Play uses the same DAC chip (ES9018 Sabre32 Reference) found in the 6000A amplifier (and the company's Award-winning M-DAC), which we've previously praised for its ability to present a capable and composed sound.

With the talents of the 6000 Series siblings stopping short of network streaming smarts, the 6000N Play is left to create its own heart and soul. The foundation of its streaming experience, however, is based on another's creation; DTS's Play-Fi hi-res, multi-room platform.

Having Play-Fi at its software core means that when connected to a network through ethernet or its dual-band wi-fi, the 6000N Play can access services such as Spotify Connect, Tidal, HDtracks, Deezer, Qobuz, Amazon Music, Napster, TuneIn, iHeartRadio and SiriusXM.

It also means it can stream hi-res music files up to 24-bit/192kHz from networked servers, thanks to DLNA and UPnP compliance. It can also connect

wirelessly with up to 32 other Play-Fi-equipped devices.

The gateway to all these functions is the DTS Play-Fi control app, whose well-equipped streaming smarts are backed by an intuitive, stable experience.

You'll also notice a Hi-Res logo, which engages the all-important Critical Listening Mode necessary to enable high-resolution music playback. As Play-Fi is a universal multi-room platform that can connect rooms full of Play-Fi products together, the software downsamples hi-res files to broadly CD quality (16-bit/48kHz) by default to maintain stream performance.

For those with only one or two DTS Play-Fi products, who are naturally prioritising optimum sound quality over bandwidth juggling, Critical Listening Mode scraps that downsampling process, enabling the full transmission of every bit and sample frequency.

Helpfully, Audiolab and DTS have worked to create a custom 6000N Play feature by way of six on-unit presets. You can assign a preset for whatever is currently playing by simply holding down one of the six preset buttons on the unit's façade. Selecting a preset does often throw out app synchronicity so you have to start all over again when you want to change songs or sources, but this is a hiccup rather than a disaster.

A recent software update has brought 'Works with Alexa' support, allowing audio playback to be controlled via voice

commands to an Amazon Echo speaker or Alexa-enabled device.

We play Big Thief's *Cattails* and the Audiolab reveals a wide-open canvas, colouring it with well imaged detail lavished with a welcome amount of subtlety and space.

It has the insight to capture the band's trademark quality - Adrienne Lenker's distinctive vocal is carried with stark clarity, acoustic finger-picking is tangible and there's the dynamic interest to convey the subtle eruptions in its folkly flair as well as the relentless build as the song creeps to a dense, frenetic climax.

Getting to the heart of it

As we play *Orange*, with Lenker's honest, exposed vocal as the centrepiece, the 6000N Play deftly employs its articulation and transparency to lay down the vulnerabilities in her quivering delivery.

The Audiolab doesn't quite knit music strands together as tightly as the Bluesound Node 2i (see opposite), nor does it have the warmth we are instantly drawn to with its rival, but with greater clarity, openness and a down-the-middle tonal balance, it proves the more insightful and involving listen.

The Play is a great, affordable way to implement streaming into your system without compromising sonic quality - and with the bonus of being able to slip into your hi-fi rack inconspicuously. Quite frankly, it's the best budget solution we've had the pleasure of meeting.

"Behind that modest façade, the 6000N Play has every right to exude an air of confidence"

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Clear, articulate sound
- Well equipped streaming platform
- Intuitive app

AGAINST

- No display
- Imperfect presets integration

VERDICT

Proof that you needn't spend loads to acquaint your system with great-sounding streaming