

Qobuz – The Mystical Power of Streaming

Hi-Res streaming is not new, but it still holds a lot of mystery for many. We see many cars with sophisticated Hi-Res audio upgrades on board, which sound quite average when fed from inferior streaming platforms. When the same music is played from Qobuz, everything sounds worlds better.

We no longer need to go into scary technical explanations of Hi-Res music, comparing 16-bit 44.1kHz encoding with 24-bit 96kHz. This has been done by many. In fact, we did this back in 2017. These technical insights are necessarily complex and put many people off even trying.

Instead, we simply demonstrate the difference. In much the same way, people do not buy products for their cars based on technical specifications, but on the assurance of their reseller that their music will sound better.

Dan is a music industry firecracker based in New York. His effervescent personality gets people excited. He has worked in the music industry since leaving high school. For a time, he was a working musician, playing live and recording in a punk band. With that out of his system, he moved into artist management and record company marketing. He has worked for many labels during that time and is a dedicated melomaniac, like me!

Qobuz was “invented” by two French classical musicians who, when realising the size of the budget required to make it a commercial success, sold it to the current owner, privately owned, Xandrie SA in 2016. Dan joined the company in 2018. He has been instrumental in helping Qobuz grow and establish better relations directly with record labels and equipment manufacturers alike in the quest for mass market appeal.

Today, Qobuz has 110 employees and exists in 26 countries. A lot of gossip surrounds the world of streaming, with many claims and counter-claims that on some platforms, files are perhaps secondary-sourced and some processed to suit their audience's listening habits. In my personal experience, Qobuz and Tidal perch at the top of the tree. There are differences in streams when AB compared, but actually, they are both currently worlds better than the services offered by the likes of Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon.

Dan tells me categorically that all of their files are received as Wave files (.wav) directly from the record labels themselves. Apart from converting to Flac for space-saving

I was fortunate to get a Google Teams meeting with Qobuz Managing Director (Northern Europe, North America and English-speaking territories), Dan Mackta. I had questions and he has answers! Read on for some great insights into my favourite streaming service.

purposes, they are delivered as they arrive, with absolutely no interference from Qobuz. As Dan says, Why would they do anything? They are already delivered as the artist intended, and that is the whole point!

I was curious to know why a lot of content is specified as 24bit 48kHz when the Japan Audio Society (JAS) requires equipment to be capable of rendering files with a sampling frequency of up to 96kHz. Dan confirmed that Qobuz is also JAS accredited, and their spec only goes as far as defining bit depth. So, anything 24bit is considered Hi-Res. He went on to inform me that the record label dictates the sampling frequency.

The files themselves are stored on Amazon Web Services (AWS) servers in massive sheds around the world and delivered from the one closest to the consumer. For consumers in the UK, files are most likely hosted on servers in Ireland.

Artist remuneration has been a hot topic when it comes to streaming services. Qobuz proudly offers the highest Artist Revenue Per User (ARPU) of all services; however, it is the labels themselves that determine how streaming revenue is shared among their artists.

Dan sees the relationship between Qobuz and record labels as one of its key strengths. This is pivotal for access to new releases and also reworked versions of legacy recordings, which all sound better in Hi-Res.

I often look back to music from my past, but I also enjoy new music, and find the weekly Qobuz New Releases section to be compelling listening. My weekend always begins with trawling through these to find interesting new stuff. I have experienced supposedly “Tailored Playlists” from other services, meant to be “carefully curated” based on my tastes and listening habits, that contain absolutely nothing of interest to me. In contrast, the Qobuz Autoplay feature leads me to discover and research new artists I have never experienced, making my life richer in the process.



Dan's Top Five Tunes

Neil Young & Crazy Horse -
Everybody Knows This is Nowhere
PJ Harvey -
Dress
Black Sabbath -
Changes
Public Service Broadcasting -
Go!
Big Star -
Thirteen



qobuz

REDISCOVER MUSIC

Qobuz has traditionally been at the higher end of the cost spectrum, although that has changed, and the cost is now comparable to that of other services in the market. I have been using it for eight years, and during that time, my subscription has actually decreased, and I have become proficient in finding my way around. I also use Tidal, but being of a certain age, I am not so enamoured by its obsession with young music. Obviously, money makes the world go round, and youth appeal has always been seen as key to success for music makers and sellers.

Personally, I am not interested in hearing a podcast or watching a video where media-trained artists talk about their shopping habits or legendary behaviour or interactions with kings, queens, stars of the past etc. For me, streaming is all about the quality of music reproduction, and in my experience, Qobuz does it best.

I am most grateful to Dan for giving up his precious time, knowledge and wisdom, and wish him luck in continuing to help Qobuz shine brighter in the future.○

N.B. All opinions on streaming quality in this piece are mine, based on my own experiences of listening to many different streaming services both at home and in 100's of cars!