

REVIEW NAIM MU-SO 2

A stereo system in a single box

Not so much updated as completely reinvented, despite the similar looks, the new version of Naim's all-in-one system is an even more attractive buy

Officially called the 'Naim Mu-so 2nd Generation', what is almost inevitably shortened to 'Mu-so 2' may look just like the groundbreaking model it replaces but is actually substantially updated, re-engineered and reinvented, with the aim of delivering even greater flexibility and performance. For that, no one can accuse the Naim engineers of lack of ambition: after all, the original set new standards in its class – well, actually, it invented its class – and set the company on the path of attracting a whole new range of buyers to its brand.

The 2014 launch of Mu-so marked a series of firsts for the Salisbury company. It was its first integrated system, taking the idea of the Naim Uniti models to its logical conclusion by building speakers and amplification into a single housing; it was designed and engineered in the UK but built in China, in huge quantities; and it was sold beyond the usual Naim retailer base, in the likes of Apple stores, John Lewis and even Currys PC World.

Now, with Mu-so 2, the company takes a step upmarket – the original was £995, although discounted below £800 towards the end of its life, but the new one is £1299 – and justifies that with the adoption of its Future Platform, bringing enhanced file format and streaming service compatibility, extra features and a completely revised audio section. That new platform, first seen in the major revision of the Uniti range unveiled late in 2016 and then rolled up to last year's new ND-series network music players, is the result of major development investment in Salisbury, and was designed not only to bring it up to date with current streaming trends but also to futureproof it. So, with all that investment, it makes sense that the company is using it as widely as possible.

What it brings to Mu-so 2 is a much more powerful multicore processor to run the digital signal processing – it has a capacity of 2000 MIPS (million instructions per second), against the original's single-core 150MIPS – meaning that it's now possible to handle audio up to 384kHz/32-bit as well as DSD files. Spotify Connect, Tidal, Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2 are all built in and the Mu-so is Room-ready, while the Chromecast built in allows audio to be streamed from hundreds



NAIM MU-SO 2

Type Network music system

Price £1299

Inputs 3.5mm stereo analogue, optical digital, USB Type A, HDMI with ARC and CEC

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi

(IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n/ac)

Streaming Apple AirPlay 2, Bluetooth, Chromecast built in, UPnP, Spotify Connect, TIDAL, Room Ready, Internet Radio

File formats (depending on input) PCM-based to 384kHz/24-bit, DSD to DSD128

Audio Three-way stereo speakers, actively driven with 450W (6x75W) of amplification

Accessories supplied Remote handset, black speaker grille

Dimensions (WxHxD) 62.8x12.2x26.4cm
naimaudio.com

of compatible apps, including Qobuz, Deezer, TuneIn, SoundCloud and Pandora.

Added to the existing input capability – USB, network, optical digital and 3.5mm analogue – is an HDMI socket with Audio Return Channel capability, allowing an easy way to connect TV sound through the Mu-so 2 and the ability to control the unit through the TV remote, while on the same subject an improved remote handset comes

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with the Naim system. Most users, however, are likely to control the Mu-so 2 via the Naim app on either a tablet or smartphone: this opens up network streaming of music as well as the system's multiroom feature, which is now possible via AirPlay 2, Google Apps or Naim's own system, which allows multiple Mu-so, Uniti or ND- products to be combined wirelessly.

The top-panel main control retains the large volume wheel of the original but now has 15 touch-buttons built in, while new colours are available for the removable/interchangeable grilles: black is standard

but you can buy extra grilles in Terracotta, Olive or Peacock. Within, the Mu-so 2 has a redesigned speaker array, the result of co-operation with Naim's staminate, Focal, and a larger internal volume for better bass, while the room compensation feature now has a choice of three settings, allowing the system to be used near a wall, near a corner or in free space.

PERFORMANCE

With the exception of those extra features and facilities, using the Mu-so 2 is just like setting up and operating the original. With it connected to the mains and the home network, the rest of the configuration is done in minutes using the Naim app, after which the system is ready to be used. And a system this certainly is, both in terms of capability and performance: those who have referred to the Mu-so models as 'wireless speakers' are some way wide of the mark, as this is actually a complete stereo system in a single box.

That's clear as soon as one listens to the Mu-so 2. Good though the original was, the new model delivers an even more room-filling sound, with a more substantial bass, better clarity and detail, and an enhanced sense of stereo sound stage – which was, in itself, already impressive from a 'one-box' system in the original Mu-so. What one gains in the Mu-so 2 is a better sense of the scale and presence of the sound, as much with solo piano, say, as with full orchestral recordings.

In fact, larger-scale works are surprisingly effective through this system, with plenty of weight and even a good sense of concert-hall ambience where relevant. And from a system this compact – while substantial, the Naim is hardly huge – that is somewhat remarkable. In fact, provided you don't have a huge room to fill and are looking for a system that's neat and stylish, perhaps even to fit on a unit beneath a wall-mounted television, you won't go wrong with the Mu-so 2. It will do everything you want and more, is simple to set-up and use, and delivers striking sound for both its size and its price. Yes, it's more expensive than the model it replaces – and much more expensive than the discount prices at which the original Mu-so was available as it began to approach the end of its life – but what it can do makes it a rather persuasive buy. **Ⓔ**