

Audio CD Players

Every Macintosh produced today has a built-in CD-ROM drive. And, while it does an excellent job of running the latest CD-ROM titles, most people overlook the fact that it is also an excellent way to play Audio CDs (ACD).

Of course, Apple didn't do much to help matters. The first Audio CD player released by Apple could do little more than play ACDs, and it had a really poor interface. So what happens when a program falls short of expectations? The shareware authors go into a feeding frenzy. Several excellent shareware utilities were released to help fill the void left by Apple. In fact, even Apple finally realized the benefit of having a better ACD player and released the AppleCD Audio Player in a CD-ROM Software Update, in late 1993. It was not included with the system software, however, until System 7.5.

Here are my reviews of some of the better ACD utilities I could find. Since each one offers a little something different, read on to find out which one might be best for you.

Program Information

Author ♦ David Lebel

RAM ♦ 512 Kb

System ♦ 7.x or later, Color QuickDraw

StreetPrice ♦ CDWare

Of the ACD utilities reviewed here, AudioDeck is the most polished and offers the greatest variety features. Here is the list of features the author gives as just a few of the reasons for purchasing his program:

- ♦ can automatically play inserted CD's
- ♦ can force internal CD input and enable playthrough

- ◇ plays adjacent tracks in shuffle and program mode without skipping a beat
- ◇ can disable or enable individual tracks in shuffle mode
- ◇ uses the existing disc and track titles of CD Remote Programs
- ◇ adds new categories to the database including custom disc settings (i.e.. volume)
- ◇ has gratuitous Balloon Help for just about everything

The author leaves out that the interface is not only nice to look at, but offers as much information as you could possibly want. And, with a quick click of the button in the upper right hand corner, you have access to the names and playing times of the individual tracks.

It is obvious that a lot of time and energy went into AudioDeck. The features I am the most fond of are: the ability to auto-play any ACD inserted, the ability to import audio tracks and save all or part of them as System 7 sounds, and the ability to save custom volume levels for different ACDs. As an added bonus, AudioDeck is also a FAT binary, meaning that it runs in native mode on PowerPC machines.

If you are looking for an application that offers most or all of the high-end features found in expensive CD players, then AudioDeck will suit your needs. Considering what you get, the shareware fee is a steal.

<<ftp://mirrors.aol.com/pub/mac/sound/soundutil/audiodeck2.06.sit.hqx>>

rogram Information

Author ◇ John Brochu
System ◇ 7.x or later, Color QuickDraw
StreetPrice ◇ Shareware (\$15)

Whatever high-end features PopupCD is lacking, and it is not lacking many, they are made up for by its ease of use. PopupCD allows you access to the most of its

features from a convenient pop-up window. And it's an easy to use control panel.

Here is a list of the main features:

- ◇ Complete audio CD functions including shuffle play.
- ◇ Eject function opens the tray even if no disc is loaded.
- ◇ Automatic play option plays discs automatically upon insertion, or after startup.
- ◇ Automatic resume feature resumes playback and/or shuffle play after a restart.
- ◇ Automatic eject feature ejects any audio CD or CD-ROM at shutdown.
- ◇ Unique popup remote control, with LCD track, time, and volume level display.
- ◇ Informative multi-color track/disc elapsed time bargraph and track pointer
- ◇ Different display modes easily selectable by clicking in the display area.
- ◇ Full access to all audio CD functions from the popup remote control
- ◇ Responsive continuous-action keyboard commands for scan and volume control.
- ◇ Unique direct track access keyboard command.
- ◇ Control panel allows configuration of keyboard commands and popup key modifiers.
- ◇ Complete balloon help is available in the control panel and all associated dialogs.

As you can see from the list, PopupCD offers a few features AudioDeck cannot, simply because it is a control panel and is always running. I really like the ability to continue shuffled tracks after a restart. I am also fond of being able to call up the controls whenever and wherever I wish. Unfortunately, the very thing that makes it so easy to access also means it may cause some conflicts with your system configuration. I have run PopupCD for a while now and have not yet had any problems with it, but applications on the whole are usually a safer bet.

The only feature common to most ACD players that PopupCD does not support is programming tracks. This omission, being a relatively basic feature of any good ACD player, cost it half an antler in its rating. With any luck the author will add this feature in a later version.

If convenience is your thing, PopupCD is the best of the bunch. It takes up very little hard drive space and offers an incredible number of features for the money.

<<ftp://mirrors.aol.com/pub/mac/system.extensions/cdev/popupcd1.10.sit.hqx>>

rogram Information

Author ◇ Henrik Eliasson

System ◇ 7.x or later, Color QuickDraw

StreetPrice ♦ Shareware (\$10)

CD Menu is another player in the form of a control panel. What CD Menu offers beyond the normal pop-up menu is an icon that appears in the Finders menu. Using the icon means you do not have to remember any obscure command-key combinations to access the CD controls.

What CD Menu adds in convenience, though, it loses badly in features. It offers only the basic CD functions and does not even include a shuffle play option. It is also difficult to operate its controls. Dragging the mouse across any button pushes the button and may activate its feature, depending on the button. This means if you do not want to skip to the next track on the way to changing the volume level, you had better make sure you slide your mouse to the outside of the controls on the way there.

With a shareware price of \$10 and the problems I just described, CD Menu needs more work before I can recommend it.

<<ftp://mirrors.aol.com/pub/mac/system.extensions/cdev/cdmenu1.31.sit.hqx>>

rogram Information

Author ♦ Craig Marciniak

RAM ♦ 128 Kb

System ♦ 7.x or later, Color QuickDraw

StreetPrice ♦ Shareware (\$10)

CARP, which stands for Craig's Audio ROM Player, is a small ACD player that offers the fewest features of any of the players reviewed here, but has the advantage of being an application and using the least amount of system resources.

The controls window has all of the normal CD keys and shows the number of the track being played. It also offers a few options for handling the ACD after play is through and will auto-play an inserted ACD.

CARP is an average utility for anyone with basic CD playing needs. It would be worth it if it were free, but at \$10, it just does not have enough to offer.

<<ftp://mirrors.aol.com/pub/mac/sound/soundutil/carp2.0.sit.hqx>>

rogram Information

Author ♦ Apple Computer, Inc.

RAM ♦ 195 Kb

System ♦ 7.x or later, Color QuickDraw

StreetPrice ♦ Free

Apple's second attempt at an ACD player was a rousing success. The AppleCD Audio Player does not offer any of the extra features found in the better players, but it has a clean interface and works well with few resources.

It has a shuffle option and the ability to program using drag and drop. It also has some really nice keyboard combinations for adjusting the sound and changing tracks. Audio Player also has an options menu, but of the four items listed, two of them were for changing the background colors!

I highly recommend the AppleCD Audio Player for anyone who just wants to play an occasional CD. It does all the basics well and looks good doing it. Best of all, the price is right.

<ftp://sam.austin.apple.com/Apple.Support.Area/Apple.Software.Updates/US/Macintosh/Display_and_Peripheral/CD-ROM_Setup_5.1.1.sea.hqx>