[0030] 4th: The file management software of the present invention sequentially delivers portions of the first music file to the CPU (6) where the decode algorithm decompresses each file using the file management software of the present invention stored in RAM (4). Once decoded, the PCM audio data is transferred in one of three ways: the CPU delivers the PCM audio data to the South Bridge (see FIG. 3 (32)) FIFO buffer; the DMA in the South Bridge transfers the data internally within the South Bridge to the FIFO buffer; or the special purpose circuit transfers the data to the FIFO buffer from the LPC interface. The FIFO buffer then sequentially feeds each piece of decoded music to Codec (8) (also see FIG. 3 (42)), through the special purpose circuit of the present invention, where the decoded signal is converted from digital to analog. Then the output signal from the Codec (8) is amplified (10) (also see FIG. 3 (44)) to drive the speakers and/or headset (see FIG. 3 (46)).

[0031] 5th: While the final song of the first set from the play list is playing from memory, the file management software of the present invention stored in the RAM (4, 30) returns control to the 4th step to retrieve the next set of compressed music files from the memory of the RAM, as determined by the earlier scripted song play list developed in the 1st step. Thus, the 4th and 5th steps are repeated for each set of compressed music files until the last music selection in the set plays. At that point in time control returns to the 3rd step to load another set from the play list, which is similarly played through the 4th and 5th steps. When the last song is played from the overall play list of the 2nd step, or when the user turns off the music player function, the operation of the player ceases.

[0032] The mini-OS power saving software of the present invention ensures that the CPU, Peripheral Chips, HDD and other controllable system elements will be in idle state for the highest percentage time possible. An interesting attribute of the solution offered by the present invention is that the higher the MIPS (Million Instructions Per Second) capacity of the CPU, the smaller percentage of time the CPU will spend performing the decode function. This means that higher performance CPU's will demonstrate even lower power usage when playing compressed music performances, thus saving even more battery power and further extending the length of time that the battery maintains sufficient charge to power the portable computer.

[0033] The mini-OS monitors the audio control buttons (e.g., play, fast forward, rewind, pause, scan, previous track, next track, first track, last track, fast forward/rewind while listening, audio source/media select (e.g., HDD or CD), etc.) (see FIG. 3 (48)) for user actuation through the special purpose circuit (see FIG. 3 (40)) of the present invention, and communicates user requests to the mini-OS file management software of the present invention. Optionally, a small LCD display (see FIG. 3 (34)) can be connected to the special purpose circuit to provide visual status indicators (e.g., Song #, Song titles, track #, Playtime & icons) under control of the mini-OS display management subroutines.

[0034] The mini-OS power saving software of the present invention primarily manages the usage of the CPU, and the MP3 storage devices such as CD, HDD, and flash media such as SD (Secure Digital) cards, MMC (Multimedia Card), memory stick, and SMC (Smart Media Card), while maintaining the rest of the system, including the memory, corelogic chipsets, in a fully on and functional state. Secondary power saving is applied to other PC subsystems to minimize power usage still further by putting them in an idle state.

[0035] For example, with a 500 MHz Pentium III CPU having about 225 MIPS of processing power and the decode algorithm requiring about 15 MIPS, the CPU will be operating less than 10% of the time. The other 90-95% of the time the CPU will be in a standby mode that requires only milliamps of current. Alternatively, the CPU can be run at a slower clock speed, which is usually an option provided by most of today CPUs, such as the AMD's Athlon CPU. Similarly the HDD is accessed during the time it takes to fill or refill the RAM. Thus, since the average song takes about 4 minutes to play and the RAM holds about 30 songs for 120 Mbytes, and since the HDD needs 1-5 seconds to spin up and only several seconds to load the song play list into RAM, the total access time for the HDD may be 30 seconds out of 120 minutes of play time; a ratio of 1:240, less than 0.5% of full power operating time. These factors add to the power savings gained by using the mini-OS of the present invention instead of the full operating system of the portable computer. The result of the overall power consumption of the present invention is very low when the portable computer is in the music play mode, and that directly translates into the battery maintaining a useful charge level for a much longer time than allowed by the prior art. As those skilled in the art will recognize, the compressed music data of this invention may reside on a hard disk, on other magnetic (e.g., tape) media, optical (e.g., CD-ROM) media, flash media (e.g., SD cards, MMC, memory stick, SMC), or any other storage medium.

[0036] FIG. 3 is a generalized overall block diagram of an exemplary system 31 consistent with one embodiment of the present invention. The majority of the blocks in system 31 are components known in the art and are generally included in all PC computers for producing sound through the speaker of the computer. Shown here is a system clock 56, which, for simplicity of FIG. 3, is not shown connected to the various components that need a clock signal. Additionally, CPU 26 is shown interfacing with North Bridge 28. In turn, North Bridge 28 interfaces with system RAM 30 and South Bridge 32. Then South Bridge 32 interfaces with HDD 36 and CD-ROM 38. Typically South Bridge 32 also interfaces directly with Codec 42 through AC_link; however, in the exemplary system 31 shown, special purpose circuit 40 (see discussion of FIG. 4 below) is inserted between South Bridge 32 and Codec 42 to enable the playing of compressed digital audio in conjunction with the mini-OS 80 of the present invention from system RAM 30, without affecting the ability to play non-compressed analog audio. In this configuration, the mini-OS 80 is stored in the BIOS, although those skilled in the art will recognize that the mini-OS could alternatively be stored in its own ROM (either within special purpose circuit 40 or external to it), a hard disk, or other media. Thus, AC_link_1 from South Bridge 32 is coupled to special purpose circuit 40, which performs the decompression function as necessary, and then provides any audio signals to Codec 42 via AC_link_2. Codec 42 then performs the usual function on all signals received