



Métronome Technologie Le DAC

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digital to analogue converter DAC

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Métronome made its name with CD transports in the '90s, substantial sculptural examples of the art that made most of the competition look flimsy by comparison. Now that the silver disc is in decline in many parts of the high end world the French company has branched out into streamers and DACs. OK it has been making DACs for some time but they used to be a lot more expensive than this, and some of them still are, Le DAC from the classic range is the least expensive converter the company makes.



It's a substantial piece of kit that's nearly as deep as it is wide and once perched on the conical feet that can be magnetically attached to the standard feet stands quite high too yet still fits in a standard rack. The conical feet are made of a material called Delrin, an engineering plastic that has such low friction that this 12 kilo converter will slide on a glass shelf with the greatest of ease, I put some white tack on the glass so that I could make connections. It has all the usual suspects on the input front including two each for optical, coax and AES/EBU which brings the tally up to seven when you include the USB. Outputs are on balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA and I used the latter exclusively for this review.

The display lets you know the incoming sample rate for both PCM and DSD signals as well as the selected input, you scroll through the inputs with the two stainless buttons. It doesn't have remote control because output volume is fixed and you don't have to change inputs very often, mind you if you actually have seven digital sources it would be handy.



I initially used Le DAC with a Métronome DSs streamer with a coaxial connection as that doesn't have a USB output, I generally find coaxial connections to be less detailed but often more musical than USB and that proved to be the case here. The combo sounded nice and open with the ability to extract an awful lot of the vitality in each recording, so Jaco Pastorius' bass bounces along on Joni Mitchell's Dry cleaner from Des Moines and the brass section is energetic and vibrant, sitting still isn't an option when the sound is this fresh. It's not a bright DAC but rather an unusually ebullient one with the ability to deliver the energy from each recording you play. It's not short on drive either, delivering tight but fulsome bass lines that propel the rhythm when it's required and reveal its depth and power when the production lets it do so. I really enjoyed the musical flow it delivered with a variety of pieces of music and, despite my comments about coaxial connections, was impressed by the amount of detail that it revealed. I did find that the [OePhi](#) coaxial cable that we tested recently proved to be a usefully calming influence, regular (see relatively affordable) coax cables being a little forward with a DAC of this transparency.



Le DAC reveals dynamics like a bad ass and the timing is a treat, so much so that it makes music seem more diverse and interesting than many converters. It reveals impressive depth of imaging on Matthew Halsall's Salute to the Sun where pools of sound around harp notes and cymbals expand in the sound stage. I played Arab Strap's New Birds from *Philophobia* which on the face of it seems to be a lo-fi recording, yet it this track at least has unusually wide dynamic range and with this DAC proves that you don't have to have a big bucks studio to make a great sound. However, Patricia Barber's Mourning Grace (*Café Blue*) makes a good case for high end

production, her voice sounds phenomenal and the band really energises the room with incredible power from the drum kit and the acoustic it was captured in. Another recording that is super spacious and yet has very chunky bass is Marcus Miller's is Mr Pastorius where the definition of leading and trailing edges gives the sound a completeness that makes it sumptuous yet taut. Le DAC is very good on quality of recording but doesn't emphasise the shortcomings of lesser examples, that said the female vocal on the Civil War's version of Billie Jean is uncanny. On the more familiar Decks Dark by Radiohead the depth is excellent and it feels like you can hear the whole reverb envelope on this highly manipulated but great sounding production.

Using the Auralic Aries G2 .1 streamer as a source and a USB connection produces a similar result but with more detail and a really powerful sense of presence in the room, it's also extremely quiet in the background so the fine details are easy to appreciate. Timing is also very good so the grooves are very strong and with a great track from Abdullah Ibrahim there is no alternative but to resort to air piano, I really didn't think that his *Africa - Tears and Laughter* album could sound this good on digital. I also enjoyed the way this band create a sound that rolls along so easily, not least because Le DAC has very low distortion and that means you can play it louder without discomfort.



An orchestral recording of Schubert on the Linn label (Maxim Emelyanychev, Scottish Chamber Orchestra) proved that if you want big dynamics classical is hard to beat, this is a particularly good recording but many systems seem to compress the crescendos, that was not the case here and closing my eyes meant I could almost suspend disbelief and imagine myself in a concert hall. I tried a Rega Saturn-R as a CD transport with this DAC and found the experience too hard edged, this is a bugbear I have with silver discs that streaming eliminates, but have to admit that when it comes to timing the original digital format is still quite entertaining.

I carried on using Le DAC to assess a variety of other components and found it to be highly revealing of differences in any part of the chain, the better the music server, streamer and network switch got the better the sound through the Métronome. Le DAC has an open and lively character that while not as polished as the company's less affordable converters can be immensely revealing and musically engaging, I will be sorry to see it go.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Type: Digital to analogue converter

Distortion THD+N: not specified

Dynamic range: 123dB

Digital Inputs: USB 2.0, 2x coax on RCA, 2x optical on Toslink, 2x AES/EBU on XLR

Wireless inputs: none

Analogue outputs: single ended RCA, balanced XLR

Supported sample rates: PCM 44.1kHz – 384kHz, DSD up to DSD512

Output Voltage: 3V RMS balanced & single ended

DAC chip: AK4493

Accessories: none

Dimensions HxWxD: 130 x 425 x 415mm

Weight: 12kg

Warranty: 2 years