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MÉTRONOME LE DAC 2 REVIEW

After the expiry of my Resonance Mirus Pro, I've been on a DAC hunt. In the absence of a used Kalliope & after several demo's of several options, I finally put my money down on the Metronome Le Dac 2. I've not found a single owner review of this lovely DAC - so here's mine.

Le Dac 2 weighs 12kg. Much of it must be the incredibly solid chassis & the 3 toroidal transformers. Its solid, minimalist looks fit very well with my Gryphon boxes. Its processor is a ES9026 Pro chip that decodes up to 32 bits/768 KHz in dual mono design, Class A output. All inputs handle up to 384kHz PCM & DSD. Costs £6,700 in UK.

The feature set is relatively

basic - no filters, vol control, ethernet.. I like to think I'm paying for better investment & implementation in the more critical areas of performance. Inputs are S/PDIF, Toslink, AES/EBU, USB & I2S. Metronome are also building a streamer with i2s output which will be interesting if the rumours are true about i2s being superior to USB. Analogue outputs are RCA & balanced XLR. This is all I need as I hook-up my Melco server via USB & XLR's to pre. I have no DSD so couldn't test it.

Set-up of the dealer demo' unit with some 100hrs on it was a cinch. It was truly plug and play with the Melco app seeing it immediately.

Straight out of the box it sounded perfectly respectable

but these things need time to warm-up & settle, especially after being transported, so I left it playing & sat down for a critical listen next day. This turned-out to be the right thing to do, because it was immediately clear that the sound had filled out & become more detailed. Yet, something was still off. I've been here before. My rack is suspended on Townshend corner podiums which seriously negate floor-borne vibration; but my t/t still benefits greatly from its own set of podiums, as have DACs. I removed them, put them under the Dac et voila - immediately the sound became more precise & coherent, the bass in particular filling, tightening & gaining impact.

The attributes I'm, generally, looking for are no-etch/digititus, big soundstage, visceral but tight bass, musicality (toe-tapping engaging) a sense of 'being there', timing & coherence & sufficient detail.

Digititus - there just isn't any. Whilst highs & leading edges were well extended & never felt rolled off, they had just enough smoothness to not offend, but not so much that I fell asleep. Leading edges & dynamic attacks were pitched in such a way that they were deeply impactful & toe-tapping but without any grain or ear ache. Dac 2 also allowed me to play tracks

which other DACs had made unplayable, owing to harsh highs - my pet hate. I don't know how they do that because you might think that it would require a DAC to be rolled-off in the highs & less resolving; but Dac 2 is neither of these. A hot track will still be hot - just not quite as

unplayably so. I find piano a great test of a DAC's potential to be too hard or harsh or thin etc. Piano on this DAC is a delight. The low keys are dense, full & warm; the high keys are just correct with no irritant. Overall, piano is utterly believable & moving.

Soundstage - excellent without being unnatural. Wide & high, Dac 2 reproduces the atmosphere & shape of the recording space of any live performance in spades, filling the room with it. Perhaps not quite as deep as some manage, but I think I can improve on this by optimising room treatments. Channel separation is superb. Backgrounds are as

black as you like.

Bass - plays a major part in emotional impact & I sure didn't want one of those bass-light/thin-sounding, uber detail machines. Dac 2 didn't disappoint. When it's meant to, bass brims with micro detail into which you can hear it decays into the depths. But it's also tight in all the right places, thundersome (is that a word?) & chest-pounding when it should be. The big hits towards the end of Dire Straits 'Private Investigations' were the weightiest & most palpable I've ever heard them. They reverberated in my chest & shook the sofa - I need bass corner traps. Elsewhere, a



reviewer described Dac 2 as 'romantic'. I think I know what he means. This 'romance' comes from the mid bass which had a voluminosity (& touch of warmth) I didn't experience to such a degree elsewhere. Sometimes too much voluminosity. Again, my room/speaker combination is a likely culprit in this & corner traps will help control it. But that mid bass plays a key role in generating the big soundstage & imparting upon the sound a level of (ok, romantic) sophistication to which you can listen all day without getting a headache. Generally, the bass leaves other DACs I demo'd trailing & I don't want for more.

Did I 'tap my toes'? I found the sound to be output in a way which truly connected to my emotions & more so than many DAC's I'd tried. This requires all the other attributes to come together in just the right way, especially coherence & timing. Dac 2 gets this very right for me. The level of detail, touch of warmth & timing of Le Dac 2 just press all my emotional buttons. Where the music requires great delicacy Dac 2 will capture it; balls-to-the-wall - it'll do that to. It seems to be able to play pretty much every genre evenly, rather than being so imbued with a particular

character, that it's more suited to some than others. Jethro Tull Live in Montreux was fast, energetic & hugely entertaining. I was drawn right into Nanci Griffiths' lovely folk/country compositions. Bill Evans live jazz put me at

a smokey table about half way back; & the closing movement of Swan Lake was a rollercoaster epic.

I also plugged the TV in via Toslink to watch The Tape (Amazon) & was moved to tears - though, to be fair, the visuals contributed; but I've had questionable results via Toslink on at least one DAC. Dac 2's Toslink is exceptionally well implemented.

In terms of being there/performers in the room - Dac 2 frequently put a lead vocalist in my room or transported me to a hall. Other times, especially in complex



passages with a lot going on, I had a bit more of a second row view. Latter might be one reason why its sound is easy on the ear. I have experienced more forward DACs which put the entire gig in your room but, mostly, I'd get ear-ache after a period of listening to them. DAC 2 is entirely non-fatiguing - even when the performer is hanging in the room. They've got the balance between authentic presence and fatiguing materialisation absolutely perfect. There's plenty of air around instruments/voices, too, contributing to getting a true sense of the scale of any live performing space. In this area, Dac 2 is one of the finest machines I've had in my system.

Detail - the way music is presented is more important to me than outright detail but, nevertheless, Dac 2 reproduces oodles of detail. It's not up there with some machines (costing more) but, at this pricepoint, I don't know of another DAC that presents the detail in such a refined, overall package. Though it handles everything thrown at it with aplomb, & at risk of contradicting myself, there's no doubt it really shines with solo vocals in simple arrangements. Its detail level becomes very obvious,

here. When Martha Tilston joined me, convincingly, in my room for a spell, she sounded utterly beautiful & tied my stomach in knots. That breaking bottle in (again) Private Investigations, is absolutely palpable, but in a very delicate - not a metallic,

etched - way. I can hear fine nuances in voices and this make them deeply expressive; string plucks, piano pedals, breaths - they're all there. I don't need anymore detail than this DAC delivers & especially not at the cost of 'musicality' - & this DAC is so 'musical'. There's also an unforced density to instruments and voices; a weight that is missing from some DACs. This contributes to an 'analogue' feel and a more relaxed listen - which isn't to say Le Dac 2 doesn't rock when fed the right music. It really does. It just does it in the sense of a full bodied Malbec, rather than a light, sparkling white.

Le Dac 2 isn't perfect. It's achilles heal, in my set-up, lay in more complex passages of music where I found that lead vocals could drop back into the mix a tiny bit more than I'd ideally like. Also, in those same passages, it was just a bit more difficult to pick out individual instruments compared to one or two other DACs - costing more. This is a mark down in the coherence box. But, critically, this didn't detract from the emotional roller coaster ride those passages delivered, generally - I can live with that, given it does everything else so well..

In summary:

Likes: emotional, smooth but not sleepy, bass warmth, dense, airy, extended, palpable, perfectly timed, refined, sophisticated.

Dislikes: slightly less well defined instruments in complex, busy passages.

My demo came from Audio Destinations, Devon. Mike & Caroline are the best. They put up with my borrowing the dac no less than 3 times over the last 3 months, while I worked my way through DACs from elsewhere. Every time, I came back to Dac 2. On this last session, I had a T+A 200, too. For the money, this is a fun DAC. It's more forward than DAC 2. It's detailed, engaging, has impactful bass (but well short of Le Dac 2 in texture) & is slightly more coherent in complex passages. In a less resolving system it would likely be a great choice at its pricepoint. But, in my revealing system, it was too much. It didn't take too long for 'wow!' to become 'my poor ears'> It wasn't harshness - there was none. Its forwardness was just a level of reality pushed a step too far. Le Dac 2 was 2+ levels of sophistication above; a Bentley Continental GT to a lime green Lambo'. And when I swapped Dac 2 back in after 3hrs it was like applying an instant balm to my hearing - in a good way. At that point, decision made & I ordered. The new unit arrived next day, today & is on the rack burning in. Martha's voice is moving me to tears, again, even out of the box.