

RANGE CLASSICA

Le DAC 3

DSD - CONVERTER

TEST & REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Metronome Technologie — Digital Specialists from Montans

With the Metronome Le DAC 3, a digital-to-analog converter enters the scene that wants to be far more than just a high-resolution translator between digital source and analogue amplifier. The specialists at Metronome Technologie combine a sophisticated digital architecture, a remarkably complete interface set and an optional streaming platform that makes the DAC a fully capable digital hub. In our test, what impressed most was its almost compelling accuracy: music appears not beautified, not dissected, not staged for effect, but vertiginously matter-of-fact — exactly as it should be.

Metronome Technologie has for decades been among the manufacturers who understand digital audio technology not as a sideshow of modern HiFi systems, but as their actual core competence. CD transports, D/A converters, music servers and streaming solutions form a clearly defined line: digital precision, mechanical quietude and a sonic picture that does not pit technical accuracy against musical naturalness.

KEY FACTS

At a Glance

- ✓ Product: Metronome Le DAC 3 — High-End DAC, Metronome Classica Series
- ✓ Concept: classic DAC with optionally integrated full streaming platform
- ✓ Converter: ESS ES9026PRO — high dynamic range, very low distortion
- ✓ Resolution: Linear PCM up to 32-bit / 768 kHz and DSD up to DSD1024 via USB
- ✓ I2S: two inputs for high-quality digital sources (PCM to 384 kHz / DSD to DSD256)
- ✓ Digital inputs: USB · AES/EBU · S/PDIF coaxial · Toslink · 2x I2S (HDMI)
- ✓ Analog outputs: XLR balanced (150Ω) and RCA unbalanced (100Ω) — 3V max.
- ✓ Streaming: Ethernet · DLNA/UPnP · Spotify Connect · Deezer · TIDAL Connect · Qobuz Connect · vTuner
- ✓ Plays with Audirvana — certified via USB and network
- ✓ JPLAY Certified — optimised compatibility with the JPLAY app for Apple iOS
- ✓ MQA Renderer up to 32-bit / 384 kHz
- ✓ Display: 3.9-inch OLED, 480 x 128 px
- ✓ Chassis: 450 x 120 x 420 mm · 12 kg · Black or Silver aluminium

DESIGN & BUILD

A Device Built to Last

The Metronome Le DAC 3 feels like a device built for many years, even when unpacking. At 12 kg, 450 mm wide, 120 mm tall and 420 mm deep, it has the physical presence one expects from a serious high-end component. The chassis is flat, wide, massive and pleasantly unpretentious. The front dispenses with gimmicks, the display sits centrally, and operation remains clear and uncluttered.

The Le DAC 3 steps back visually without appearing arbitrary. It has exactly that presence which is agreeable in high-quality systems: matter-of-fact, solid, refined and free of modish exaggeration. Metronome does not rely on visual effects, but on a classic formal language that follows function and lends the device a calm, enduringly valid character. The 3.9-inch OLED display (480 x 128 px) is functional and clearly legible. Signature pointed feet provide precise mechanical decoupling — a unique Metronome design trademark.

CONNECTIVITY

Virtually Every Wish Fulfilled

A major plus of the Metronome Le DAC 3 is its complete feature set. Many high-quality DACs deliberately opt for reduction, which can be legitimate but quickly reaches its limits in everyday use. Metronome takes a different approach. The Le DAC 3 offers USB, AES/EBU, S/PDIF coaxial, Toslink and two I2S inputs via HDMI — practically any serious digital source can be meaningfully connected.

The two I2S inputs are more than a nice-to-have. In the high-end arena, I2S is becoming increasingly interesting because this connection enables very direct signal transfer between compatible digital sources and DAC. For owners of high-quality CD transports and music servers, this can be a decisive argument. Equally, the Le DAC 3 remains universal enough to integrate classic sources without any issue. XLR and RCA outputs ensure compatibility with both fully balanced and classic amplifier environments.



Rear panel: analog outputs (XLR balanced + RCA unbalanced), digital inputs (AES/EBU · S/PDIF · Toslink · I2S x2 · USB), LAN, USB storage, IEC

TECHNOLOGY

The ESS ES9026PRO at the Centre

At the heart of the Le DAC 3 works the **ESS ES9026PRO**, a converter chip that must not be understood as the sole relevant technical centrepiece here, but as part of a comprehensively designed digital architecture. Metronome does not rely on single-component showmanship, but on the interplay of signal routing, clocking, power supply, mechanical quietude and analogue output stage. The manufacturer states a dynamic range of 124 dB and a THD+N of -110 dB. In the listening test this translated not into flashy detail sharpness, but into a remarkable calmness of the sonic picture. The Le DAC 3 does not play brighter, not sharper, not artificially larger. It orders.

Metronome traditionally attaches great importance to power supply design, and this aspect is part of the Le DAC 3's overall technical concept. The care showed in the listening test not as an isolatable effect, but as the foundation of the entire sonic picture. The Le DAC 3 played strikingly quietly, stably and in a controlled manner. Sound events stood firm in space, voices and instruments retained their contour, and even more complex passages never sounded nervous or unsorted.

STREAMING

Fully Equipped — More Than Just an Option

The Metronome Le DAC 3 we tested was equipped with the optional streaming platform — and this module markedly changes the character of the device. Without streaming, the Le DAC 3 is a top-class external D/A converter. **With streaming, it becomes the central digital hub of a modern high-end system.**

Network connection is via wired RJ45 Gigabit Ethernet — WiFi is deliberately not provided. This is the right decision: in a system of this class, the question is not whether WiFi would be convenient, but whether the connection is stable and interference-free for high-resolution streaming. Two USB 2.0 ports for external storage expand practical utility. Supported services: DLNA/UPnP, Spotify Connect, Deezer, TIDAL Connect, Qobuz Connect and vTuner. The platform also carries two particularly important certifications for demanding users: **Plays with Audirvana** (USB + network) and **JPLAY Certified** (iOS). In day-to-day use, Qobuz Connect and TIDAL Connect proved especially valuable: direct connection between streaming service and device, with smartphone serving only as a convenient remote control.

DAILY USE

Sovereignty Without Complexity

The Metronome Le DAC 3 is not a device that occupies its user with confusing menus. Operation remains manageable, inputs are clearly selectable, the display provides sufficient information, and integration into a high-quality digital chain succeeds without unnecessary complexity. In daily use the Le DAC 3 proves sovereign, comprehensible and pleasantly unproblematic. The device can do a great deal, but does not force the user to constantly engage with its capabilities. It is the silent authority between digital data and analogue music.

TEST SETUP

Reference System Used

- Technics SU-R1000 Stereo Integrated Amplifier
- Sonus faber Amati futura
- Eversolo DMP-A6
- Roon NUCLEUS+
- Metronome DSAS Digital Sharing Audio Server
- Qobuz / Audirvana Studio
- Wireworld Series 10 signal & speaker cables
- KECES IQRP-1500 Isolated Quantum Resonance Power Conditioner
- Apple iPhone 14 Pro | Apple MacBook Pro

SOUND

Accuracy in the Listening Test

The first strong impression of the Metronome Le DAC 3 is not loudness, not gloss, not bass weight. It is **rightness**. This DAC plays with an accuracy that does not seem demonstrative, but simply binding. It sorts musical events so cleanly that one quickly forgets about talking about digital technology. Voices stand in the right size in space, instruments retain their body, rhythmic structures feel taut but never forced.

There are DACs that mistake resolution for brightness. Others work with warmth to disguise digital harshness. The Metronome Le DAC 3 does neither. It possesses a very fine, open treble, yet remains silky and controlled. The midrange is extraordinarily clear without becoming thin. The bass reaches deep, is excellently contoured and rhythmically precise. Most remarkably, the Le DAC 3 does not exhibit these qualities individually. They form a whole.



Le DAC 3 in black finish — the OLED display showing source and format information

Chris Rea — Road to Hell

The Le DAC 3 builds dark atmosphere with remarkable calm. The bass line has weight without excess. Chris Rea's voice carries exactly its raw, slightly dry presence. The DAC does not modernise the piece — it shows the recording with its drive, patina and studio atmosphere intact.

Cristina Branco — Alfonsina y el Mar

Precision and emotionality need not be opposites. The DAC reveals the structure without touching the fragility of the performance. The sonic picture opens wide enough to give the recording air, yet remains intimate.

Curtis Stigers — Things Have Changed

Remarkable control in the lower midrange. Curtis Stigers sounds sonorous but not inflated; relaxed but not soft-drawn. The recording gains composure.

Dean Martin — Everybody Loves Somebody

The Le DAC 3 captured the character of this intimate recording extraordinarily well. Martin's voice stood stable, warm and contoured. Nothing imposed. The DAC made it a musical scene, not an audiophile demonstration.

Doug MacLeod — A Soul to Claim

A remarkable depiction of directness. Every string attack precisely audible, the voice plastic with raw timbre. Microdynamics shown without any artifice — one feels how the musician phrases, builds and releases pressure.

Enya — Orinoco Flow

Multivocal layers and synth textures not blurred but cleanly layered. The music gained scale without artificial monumentality. The treble remained fine, spatial depth impressively stable.

Editors — Ocean of Night

Precision held up with denser modern production. Layers — synths, drums, bass, voice — remained distinguishable without the song being dissected. Bass was powerful but not broad. Structure and atmosphere co-existed perfectly.

Johann Strauss — Die Fledermaus, Carlos Kleiber

An exemplary mix of precision and musical flow. Strings had lustre without cutting edge. Dynamics leapt quickly and in a controlled manner. Kleiber's famous tension between discipline and risk remained audible. Elegant, springy, precise — exactly right.

ASSESSMENT

Strengths and Limitations

Advantages

- + Outstandingly precise, natural and sovereign D/A conversion
- + Exceptional accuracy without analytical coldness
- + PCM up to 32-bit / 768 kHz and DSD up to DSD1024 via USB
- + Complete digital interface set including two I2S inputs
- + Balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA outputs
- + Very broad streaming platform: Qobuz Connect, TIDAL Connect, Spotify, Deezer, DLNA/UPnP, vTuner
- + Plays with Audirvana (USB + network) and JPLAY Certified
- + MQA Renderer up to 32-bit / 384 kHz
- + Massive, high-quality chassis — built for the long term
- + Sonically extraordinarily coherent, calm and controlled
- + In full config: a compelling digital hub

Limitations

- Streaming module commands a significant premium
- No WiFi connectivity

CONCLUSION

Metronome Le DAC 3 Is More Than a D/A Converter

The Metronome Le DAC 3 is a D/A converter that impresses not through effects, but through consequence. Its outstanding quality lies in an accuracy that orders music with vertiginous matter-of-factness. It plays exactly, but not coldly; at high resolution, but not nervously; with control, but never lifelessly. In the tested full configuration with integrated streaming module, the Le DAC 3 becomes a digital hub that convinces both sonically and functionally. Qobuz Connect, TIDAL Connect, Spotify, Deezer, DLNA/UPnP, Plays with Audirvana, JPLAY Certified, vTuner and MQA rendering cover real-world use at a high level. In this price class it will be difficult to find something significantly better. Different, certainly. Cheaper, of course. But better? That will be very close.

PRICING

Price & Availability

LE DAC 3
8.300 EUR

Recommended retail price

Full configuration: **10.500 EUR**

OPTIONAL STREAMING MODULE
+ 2.200 EUR

Adds full network streaming platform

Austria: Audio Exclusive GmbH Germany: H.E.A.R. GmbH Switzerland: Portier Hi-Fi

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Full Specifications

PRODUCT	
Series	Metronome Classica Series
Device type	High-End Digital-to-Analog Converter
D/A chip	ESS ES9026PRO
Dynamic range	S/N 124 dB
THD+N	-110 dB
DIGITAL INPUTS	
USB	PCM up to 32-bit / 768 kHz DSD up to DSD1024 native
I2S (x2)	PCM up to 32-bit / 384 kHz DSD up to DSD256 native
AES/EBU, S/PDIF	PCM up to 32-bit / 384 kHz DSD up to DSD128 DoP

Toslink	PCM up to 32-bit / 192 kHz DSD64 DoP
ANALOG OUTPUTS	
XLR balanced	Output impedance 150 Ohm Max. output level 3V (0dB)
RCA unbalanced	Output impedance 100 Ohm Max. output level 3V (0dB)
STREAMING MODULE (OPTIONAL)	
Network	Ethernet 10/100/1000 Mbit 2x USB 2.0 for external storage
Services	DLNA/UPnP Spotify Connect Deezer TIDAL Connect Qobuz Connect vTuner
MQA	Renderer up to 32-bit / 384 kHz
Certifications	Plays with Audirvana (USB + network) JPLAY Certified (iOS)
GENERAL	
Display	3.9 inch OLED — 480 x 128 px
Power	50 W Standby: 40 W
Dimensions	450 x 120 x 420 mm
Weight	12 kg
Finish	Black or Silver aluminium
Origin	France — Montans
DISTRIBUTION	
Austria	Audio Exclusive GmbH
Germany	H.E.A.R. GmbH
Switzerland	Portier Hi-Fi

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