

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Devilsound v2.1 DAC

By Alan Sircom

One of the great joys of the computer audio revolution is that you can approach it with as much or as little OCD as possible. You can ensure every last checkbox is ticked, isolating the computer from the rest of the system, spending weeks trying every possible USB cable, media player software and compression rate, or you can take a computer, plug it into a DAC, and plug that into your amp. The amount of effort you put

into the process dictates the ultimate performance, but everyone's got to start somewhere, and the Devilsound DAC is the ideal launch pad.

It comes in a box not much larger than a CD jewel case and comprises USB socket at one end, a pair of silver

cables terminated in Eichmann Silver Bullet plugs at the other and in between is a digital converter about the size of a book of matches. The whole thing is seven foot long, with an additional 10 foot USB-USB connector available. It couldn't be simpler to use, as it doesn't require drivers for Mac or PC; just plug it in, select the

relevant control panel on screen and you are good to go.

The Devilsound takes its power (regenerated, thanks to a MAX8614 DC-DC converter chip) from the PC. Inside the box is a Burr-Brown PCM2706 as low-jitter USB receiver, a pair of Analog Devices AS1851 DAC chips and a custom Xilinx logic device for bit and channel splitting, with a single op amp output stage free from coupling caps. All of this is explained in healthy amounts of detail on the Devilsound website, and is well worth checking out as a model of clear information about a relatively complicated subject. Version 2.1 brings cryo-chilled cables to the party.

There's an interesting comparison between the Devilsound and the Naim DAC. The Devilsound is how you might expect the Naim to sound; it's lively, up-beat and possessed of a wicked sense of rhythm. The comparison ends there, because the Naim product has more detail, a more accurate balance and more poise than the Devilsound (as you'd hope, given the more than seven times price differential).

The convertor is extremely good at playing well-recorded music (like Johnny Cash's *American III*), with a big, immediately impressive soundstage, a strong and deep bass and lots of energy from top to bottom. Less well-recorded music (like Vampire

Weekend) is also big and impressive, even when it isn't. This is not a big complaint, and the smooth mids and top more than make up for the overt impressiveness, especially when price and convenience is taken into account. And what remains especially good about the Devilsound is its ability to handle vocals with ease and detail – Ali Farka Touré's final *Savane* album is a perfect example, handling the frail power of a dying man's voice with exceptional grace.

DACs that take both datastream and power from USB are compromised next to a converter that has its own power supply. And, although 'compromised' doesn't seem like the right word here, that holds with the Devilsound too. This is a quality product in a very small package that represents the perfect starting place for computer audio without tears, and you do have to go very far up the DAC list to find better. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Devilsound DAC v2.1

16 bit, non-oversampling USB DAC

Recorded frequencies covered:

32, 44.1, 48kHz

Regenerates power from PC

Integrated unit with cryo-frozen silver cables and Eichmann Silver Bullet plugs

Manufactured by Devilsound

URL: www.devilsound.com

