

AUDIO
FILE

Network-connected/USB DAC
 Made by: Data Conversion Systems Ltd, Cambs
 Supplied by: dCS Ltd
 Telephone: 01954 233950
 Web: www.dcsLtd.co.uk
 Price: £33,000



dCS Vivaldi APEX

Not content with having its own world-class D/A conversion system – the famous Ring DAC – dCS has now revised the technology, creating a new Ring DAC APEX solution. This has been rolled out in the flagship Vivaldi APEX DAC here, as well as the Rossini APEX DAC, and Rossini APEX Player. There's also an upgrade service available for existing units, priced £6000.

The Ring DAC concept may be over 30 years old, but it has been

'Its sense of enjoyment enhances the spirit of what's being played'

frequently refined, and still sets a stellar standard. The APEX overhaul is its most significant to date, for while the DSP core and Ring DAC resistor matrix are unchanged, the main board is entirely reconfigured with new output devices, power supply filtering and regulation.

A menu system enables detailed setup of the Vivaldi APEX, 'tweaks' include Mapping – changing the way incoming data is presented to the DAC matrix – to a range of master clock, upsampling and filter options for both LPCM and DSD inputs. You can also define the RCA and balanced XLR outputs as fixed or variable level and with the full-scale output set to 6V, 2V, 0.6V or 0.2V to best match your amplifier. Absolute phase can be inverted

and channels swapped left to right – a useful signal generator allows channels to be checked.

The rear panel remains equally comprehensive, with digital inputs comprising one optical and three coaxial, four AES/EBU (configurable as two pairs), and one asynchronous USB supporting 384kHz/24-bit LPCM and DSD128 in DoP. There are also three Word-Clock inputs/one output on BNCs for synchronising the Vivaldi DAC with other digital components, including the £36,000 Vivaldi CD/SACD transport.

Also unchanged are the means of control, including the company's immaculately finished remote, complete with volume rotary, and the well-sorted and flexible Mosaic app for iOS and Android.

MORE... HUMAN

Our listening started from a position of familiarity, as a Vivaldi One [HFN Feb '18] has been in PM's room for some years. It's an excellent DAC, particularly when used as an analytical tool, yet there's been something slightly *too* precise about its sound – if that's not a contradiction – and a reluctance to let rip and tingle the spine.

Or perhaps that feeling's just a reaction to what the new Vivaldi APEX DAC can deliver. Heard here were all the technically accomplished bits of the old Vivaldi, but with a new sense of enjoyment that enhances the spirit of what's being played. Simply, the Vivaldi

ABOVE: The Vivaldi's flowing curves are milled from a substantial slab of alloy. It can be controlled via the rotary and row of buttons, but dCS's huge IR remote and Mosaic control app are more convenient

APEX DAC sounded more natural, more organic, more... human.

As ever, a host of digital filters offers a chance to do very subtle 'tuning' of the sound. However, what's striking is that, whichever you choose, that sense of greater involvement is maintained across a range of file formats and genres. Thus, with the McCoy Tyner/ Freddie Hubbard set from Fabrik, Hamburg [Jazzline D7710], there was a fine sense of presence from what is certainly not an audiophile recording. 'Round Midnight' had a sultry warmth, and wonderful dynamics and gorgeous timbres. It held attention such that the music seemed to pass all too quickly.

On a grander scale, Mitsuko Uchida's reading of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* [Decca 4852731; 192kHz/24-bit] showed the DAC at its best. It did the technical stuff superbly, placing the piano on stage in the acoustic, and its performance proved utterly captivating as Uchida tackled what's often described as 'the Everest of piano'.

With The Stones' grubbier 'Fingerprint File' [*It's Only Rock 'N Roll*, Rolling Stones Records UIGY-9069; DSD64], the massed instruments were easily unpicked, from Jagger's vocal to the chugging backing of bass and percussion. But above all, it made listening to the track a blast, thanks to tight rhythmic control and illumination of the smallest details.

VERDICT

In this latest APEX implementation dCS's Ring DAC has rediscovered a sense of fun, making the new Vivaldi not just a highly accomplished piece of high-end hi-fi, but an absolute pleasure to listen to. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	5.885Vrms / 480ohm (XLR)
A-wtd S/N ratio (LPCM / DSD)	117.1dB / 116.8dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00004% / 0.00009%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00025% / 0.00025%
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/45kHz/90kHz)	+0.0 to -0.04dB/-0.7dB/-7.3dB
Digital jitter (48kHz / 96kHz)	120psec / 10psec
Resolution (re. -100dBFS / -120dBFS)	±0.1dB / ±0.3dB
Power consumption	21W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	444x151x435mm / 16.2kg