



Linn Organik DAC in the DSM Network Player

\$39,000/\$7020 (DSM/3; upgrade to any DSM unit)

Linn Products' digital expertise is on full display in the all-new Organik DAC built into the company's DSM Network Player, and available as an upgrade to any generation of DSM going back more than a decade. Rather than relying on off-the-shelf chips, Linn has created, in-house and from scratch, its own innovative digital-to-analog conversion architecture and circuit. This effort pays off in the Organik DAC's extremely refined timbral smoothness and liquidity. The Organik has a relaxed sound, with tremendous ease and naturalness. Despite the Organik's easy-going character, it is also superb at resolving fine musical details. The treble has a finely filigreed quality that reveals the delicate dynamic and harmonic structure of cymbals. Despite this treble delicacy, the top end is imbued with a full measure of energy, yet the sound has a relaxed ease, owing to the utter liquidity of timbre. The Organik DAC has tremendous clarity—of instrumental line, of pitch definition, and of soundstage transparency. The Organik resolves electric bass lines with aplomb, revealing each note's dynamic structure, pitch, and texture. The starts and stops of each note are clearly articulated rather than blended into a homogenous blur. The Organik's spatial presentation is also spectacularly great, with tremendous depth, dimensionality, and an impression of air around instrumental outlines. It is the antithesis of the flat, sterile, and airless sound that characterizes much digital, with outstanding resolution of very fine spatial cues at the back of the soundstage. This crystalline clarity contributes to your ability to hear deep into the mix or recording venue. A *tour de force* in contemporary digital-audio conversion, Linn's Organik DAC is worthy of *The Absolute Sound's* Product of the Year Award. (333)

DACs of the Year

dCS Vivaldi Apex

\$46,500

It would be difficult to think of a more formidable DAC than the dCS Vivaldi Apex. The venerable British company has outdone itself by revisiting the original Vivaldi. New and improved power-supply filtering and voltage regulation have been instituted to further enhance what—let's face it—was already a powerhouse of digital reproduction. The sonic improvements are instantly and readily comprehensible, manifesting themselves in a markedly lower noise floor, tauter bass, and increased detail retrieval. Perhaps the most salutary improvement arrives in the scale of the soundstage, where the Apex seems to inject digital recordings with a massive sense of air, similar to listening to vinyl. Its ability to reproduce a concert venue, its sheer spaciousness, means that a variety of recordings not only sound more coherent but also more plainly enjoyable. This sense of space allows the listener to revel in the massive resolving power of the DAC, which never manifests itself as anything other than a smooth and satiny finish—the very opposite of a cloying or strident sound. While the Apex may not be dCS' final word on digital playback—even more, egads, is whispered to be in the offing—it sets a high bar, indeed. (333)

