





dCS Varèse

WINNER PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

How could we give the Product of the Year award to anything else? The dCS Varèse digital audio system represents a new standard in digital audio replay, not only setting the benchmark for detail and precision, but unlocking degrees of musical insight and enjoyment that were previously only available to the best LP systems. To sit in front of this extraordinary achievement is to be humbled by it.

Set across five boxes, the dCS Varèse abandons conventional domestic digital audio architecture to create a series of linked devices each at the absolute top of its game. And, unlike most systems, these devices are joined by a unique digital pathway called ACTUS (Audio Control Timing Unified System), which uses Lemo connectors to deliver the ultimate communications network.

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Where we think of a digital device in linear form, from input to output, Varèse considers the digital audio platform like a client/server system. Each device carries out its specialist task remotely, all conducted from the Core centre of operations. This largest box in the quintet imports, noise-shapes and filters digital files received from either a USB input or Ethernet cable as standard. An optional input/output module and a sixth Varèse box (a CD/SACD transport using ACTUS) are available.

The choice of digital file is governed by the User Interface box, which sports a user-configurable front panel and comes with a Bluetooth enabled, round, CNC-milled Remote handset.

Having done the heavy lifting of file processing and massaging, the Core unit sends the digital file to two Varèse Mono DACs. The monophonic version of dCS’ Ring DAC is part of the lockdown project that created the Ring DAC APEX for the Vivaldi, Rossini and Bartók digital converters. Reworking the Ring DAC to produce APEX paved the way for the dual differential Ring DACs used

in the Varèse Mono DACs. Which is a pithy way of brushing over many man-years of product development. In his test, Alan Sircom described this fundamental change in the dCS DAC’ central architecture as “the company’s Manhattan Project.”

To control the two DACs, there is also a Varèse Master Clock which uses the company’s Tomix clocking technology to deliver unrivalled jitter performance.

No words

The normally loquacious Alan Sircom was silenced by the dCS Varèse; “It’s a bit of a ‘fail’ for an audio reviewer; I find myself at a loss for words when it comes to sound quality.” He added that “nothing can prepare you for this. It’s nothing like digital or analogue. It feels like being in the studio. You are closer to the music and the musicians playing it” adding that all his audio notetaking immediately turned to listening to the music, not the system. “Interestingly, at no point did my notepad contain the usual terminology. There were no discussions of dynamics, staging, or details; it was all about the music and how it made me feel. This was because those aspects of performance had been so well executed that they ceased to be a concern.”

He also suggested that the dCS Varèse “elevates digital audio to such a high level that record collection need no longer be an essential part of your daily musical ritual,” and that the only real criticism of the system is it lays your musical emotions bare, resulting in an ‘ugly cry’ moment. “Be careful” he said, “This equipment unlocks emotions in ways that most other audio devices can’t.” It’s a lens on your music without being a microscope on a musical experiment. In audio terms, this is reminiscent of the first time you heard music that truly moved you.

Alan summed the dCS Varèse up by saying that it “resets your listening criteria so effectively that you feel humbled in its presence, and your usual methods of contextualising an audio product become obsolete.” And that makes it a worthy Product of the Year.

Reviewed in Issue **241**
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