DAC to the future

David Price thinks Musical Fidelity’s new reasonably priced MX-DAC will convert many dipgiesh to the brand

It’s funny how history repeats itself. Just 15 years ago, the world was getting excited about DVD-Audio and Super Audio Compact Disc. These two hi-res formats had been a long time coming; nearly two decades, but it felt longer. Suddenly, we had the time coming; nearly two decades, but and Super Audio Compact Disc. These

David Price

REVIEWS

MUSICAL FIDELITY MX-DAC
DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTER £700

www.hifichoice.co.uk

Headstart For Happiness on CD – an early eighties recording playing out from a Cyrus CX CD Signature (HFC 386) transport. The MX-DAC sounds super clean and clear, with little sense of its own personality. At first, when not properly warmed through, the soundstage is a tad two-dimensional but it soon widens as the music takes on a vibrant and enjoyable feel. The song breezes along, this DAC throwing oodles of detail out at me, without ever sounding too technical or analytical. Indeed, it’s a lot more lively than most at the price. By comparison the acclaimed Audiolab M DAC (HFC 368) I have to hand sounds a little coarser, with a less sweet tonality but a fraction more detail.

Moving to the lush strains of Isaac Hayes’ ‘Cafe Regios’, and the Musical Fidelity captures its warm and silky feel effortlessly. It’s always a great test to see how well a DAC signposts the difference between recordings, and this proves something of an open window. It’s pleasingly delicate too, with a genuine definition of touch, it doesn’t smash out the low-level detail in a way that some digital converters do, apparently trying to impress. Instead, the unit serves up a wide and spacious recorded acoustic, one that hangs back admirably far. Within this, instruments are tightly located, but not suffocated. The piano sparkles remarkably, the electric guitar sounds realistic and the backing strings soar. I enjoy the beautifully resolved hi-hat and realistic and the backing strings soar. I enjoy the beautifully resolved hi-hat

Despite having whiz-bang DSD capability, most people will still spend most of their time listening to this new DAC at 16/44 CD resolution; almost all music on sale comes in this package and any type of hi-res is still rare, let alone DSD. So I kick off with an old favourite, The Style Council’s

1. 1. Asynchronous digital inputs
2. 2x coaxial
3. 2x optical
4. 2x USB digital inputs
5. RCA phono, balanced XLR
6. Audio outputs
7. headphone, optional digital filter setting
8. analogue/digital conversion
9. Distributeur
10. Musical Fidelity Ltd
11. 0208 9002866
12. Tape 0029868
13. WEBSITE
14. musicalfidelity.com

along with a DC power input. Juice comes from a small 6V 2A ‘wall wart’ supply, suggesting that there’s room for an upgraded power supply at some future date? It’s easy enough to set up; as ever Windows users need to install the supplied USB Class 2 driver while Mac owners don’t.

Sound quality

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Music’s new MX-DAC is an excellent performer with useful functionality, and it serves this up in a very compact box that’s affordable for many budget-conscious audio fans. It’s lively, musical, and glass-clear sound has great appeal and only starts to fade when

Piano sparkles, electric guitars sound realistic and backing strings soar

Wings’ Band On The Run is delivered in wonderfully sharp focus, showing excellent image placement left to right and front to back. DSD is a treat too; Miles Davis’ ‘So What’ from Kind Of Blue is breathtaking in its space and power, while Alex de Grassi’s The River Garden amazes with its vast soundstage and superlative instrumental timbre. In absolute terms, it doesn’t quite match the grace, space and pace of some of the better, more expensive DACs, but it does unexpectedly well all the same.

Conclusion

This new Musical Fidelity MX-DAC is an excellent performer with useful functionality, and it serves this up in a very compact box that’s affordable for many budget-conscious audio fans. It’s lively, musical, and glass-clear sound has great appeal and only starts to fade when compared with the top DACs at twice the price. Whether you’re interested in the new world of digital audio, or just want to breathe new life into a budget CD spinner, this DAC is worth every penny.

FEATURES

BUILD QUALITY

SOUND QUALITY

WE SAY:

Nothing at this price

Apartronics

Balanced XLR outputs

Coaxial and optical digital inputs

USB-B input

The LEDs highlight the format and sampling frequency of what you play