



# My way

Micromega's MyDAC digital convertor is so cute and curvy that it could have come from Apple, but how does it sound? **Jason Kennedy** listens in...

**O**f the MyDAC is anything to go by, then Micromega has taken a long hard look at the market and decided that if it's going to appeal to the world at large – those that like good sound but aren't hard bitten hi-fi enthusiasts – it needs to come up with a new, more far reaching game plan.

As such, the new MyDAC is the first in a radical range of Micromega My products, which will eventually include an amplifier, MM/MC phono stage, headphone amp and wireless streamer. I imagine that they will all inhabit the 15x14cm casework seen here, which is quite unlike anything you'll have seen from the company before. Indeed the nod to Apple products is about as blatant as you can get with curved corners

and white finish. Given the success of that company in the computer audio field among others, it seems like a pretty savvy idea.

However, the positive impression is slightly let down by the light weight of the casework. An ABS moulding, it isn't *quite* in the Apple league in terms of finish, it has to be said. Unsurprising perhaps, as very few [if any! *Ed.*] companies in the high quality audio world produce anything near the unit numbers that are required to make such a result economically viable.

It's also important to note that, to its very great credit, Micromega also builds the MyDAC in France. This of course makes it inherently more expensive than Chinese products. Fortunately for the audio industry however, Apple doesn't make a

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Micromega MyDAC

**ORIGIN:** France

**TYPE:** digital-to-analogue convertor

**WEIGHT:** 300g

**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 140x135x150mm

**FEATURES:**  
• digital inputs: coaxial, optical, asynchronous USB

• S/PDIF sampling range: 32–192kHz

• USB sampling range: 44.1–192kHz

• output level: 2V rms

• colours: white, black

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Absolute Sounds

**TELEPHONE:** 020 8971 3900

**WEBSITE:** micromega-hifi.com

standalone DAC, but if it did the chances are that it would include many of the features seen in the new MyDAC.

One of the most unusual is an onboard power supply, which must be a switching type because of the unit's low 300g weight. This supply makes it extremely energy-efficient, using less than 500mW in standby, and only two and a half watts when in use. It is described as being extremely fast and low noise, which needs to be the case if results are to be up to par. As Linn and Chord Electronics, among others, have proved, switching power supplies can be good if their potential for creating noise is addressed. While most compact DACs have wall-wart power supplies, the majority opt for linear types, but one obvious competitor, Arcam's rDAC has a switcher as well.

The key feature from a sound quality perspective is the inclusion of an asynchronous USB input, this approach to keeping computer jitter out of audio circuitry is slowly becoming the norm but is still rare at this low price. The MyDAC runs a 24-bit/192kHz convertor, but doesn't specify which chip. Getting a 192kHz sample rate out of a Windows machine requires a driver that can be downloaded from micromega-hifi.com. Macs can drive it without any assistance. Happily you don't need

**HOW IT COMPARES**

I HAD A COUPLE OF THE MYDAC'S direct competitors to hand so was able to establish quite precisely what its pros and cons are in the general scheme of things. The £299 Arcam rDAC came first, this is a rather nicer unit thanks to the cast metal case and rubber base that is also pitched at the Apple aficionado. It doesn't go to the full 192kHz of the MyDAC, but does have the option of adding wireless operation with the addition of a dongle. Sonically the rDAC is more grounded and definite than the newcomer, it is not quite as spirited nor musically fluent but makes up for this with greater depth of tone and stronger dynamics.

A rather better equipped, slightly more expensive alternative is the £350 Cambridge DacMagic Plus, this has onboard volume control, headphone output and alternative filter settings, there is even the option of adding a Bluetooth dongle. Its USB input is not asynchronous, yet this doesn't stop it turning in a rather better performance than the MyDAC in terms of image solidity and timing. This lets it produce a more palpably real version of events, one that is highly involving as well.

a Windows driver for up to 96kHz and this is presumably why there is a switch for class 1.0 (96kHz) or class 2.0 (192kHz) operation.

Inputs exist for coax or optical S/PDIF connections to traditional audio components, and switching between them is achieved with the sideways rotator in the front panel; this also selects standby.

**Sound quality**

I started the listening by hooking the MyDAC up to a Mac Mini. Well, it just seemed like the right thing to do, if you know what I mean! I used Vertere D-Fi USB cable to make the link, and used Audirvana Plus software on the Mac. The initial result was clean, detailed and precise, but a little short on substance; it wasn't grainy but had a dryness to it that lacked tonal appeal and rhythmic drive. It had been on for twenty four hours or so, but I decided to let it burn in for a few more days to see if that would help; fortunately it did, even though this thing runs cool as aforementioned...

When I came back to it, a lot of the sense of dryness had gone, and it had been replaced with a genuine fluidity that while still a little lacking in gravitas, was not short on musicality. Indeed it had become decidedly engaging to listen to. Imaging proved a strongpoint with Gillian Welch's voice being projected very clearly into the room between the speakers with David Rawlins' guitar placed firmly to one side. It has the sort of balance that lets in a lot of light, it's very open and a little on the sparkly side. Some might consider it bright, but in the context of a neutral system this serves to highlight the zing of new guitar strings or the brilliance of a fine piano's high notes. This was more apparent with higher resolution

material where there's less of a real barrier to the natural roll-off of high frequency content. I particularly enjoyed Fleetwood Mac's *Oh Daddy* in 24/96 guise, where the cymbal work took on a stronger role without overpowering the real charm of the song's vocals.

I also hooked the MyDAC up to a Naim UnitiServe to assess its S/PDIF input. This generally seems to deliver a better result than the Mac, and this proved the case here too. It elicited a bit more weight from the convertor which made for more relaxed listening. I have, however, heard more palpable results from similarly priced convertors, and found that the best at the price delivered a better sense

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of timing, but there's no getting away from the fact that this is a very engaging DAC. It has a fleetness of foot that serves the spirit of music very effectively. It's also good at creating a well-defined image, presumably a result of its lovely, open and clean treble.

It worked rather well with an integrated valve amplifier that I had on hand – the Linear Audio Research IA-30 – which is a push-pull amp with a typically smooth and natural top end and revealing midband. For run-in purposes I put on a live recording of Captain Beefheart and couldn't help being dragged to the listening seat by the Magic Band's irresistible groove. This recording usually sounds pretty ragged, but the Micromega managed to deliver all the energy and funk of the

performance without highlighting its crude nature which made for an awful lot of fun.

The Micromega's lightweight construction may not have anything to do with this aspect of its sound, but when compared to its various rival metal boxed DACs it's hard not to wonder. I didn't go so far as to put any extra damping weight on top of the case for fear of marking it, but it would be interesting to see what this does.

**Conclusion**

Micromega's new MyDAC is a distinctive digital convertor. Its lightweight construction and free and airy sound won't be to all tastes, but it has a musical fluency and ability to communicate that is simply impossible to resist with a good tune. And you have to give Micromega full marks for making it in its home country, rather than on the other side of the world. Of course, this may not make it as cheap as possible but it's a politically astute move, and of course better for the environment with all that shipping saved. A welcome new addition to a very competitive market, it's well worth a listen. ●

**Hi-Fi Choice****OUR VERDICT****SOUND QUALITY**

**LIKE:** Open, fluent and musical sound with strong imaging and plenty of sparkle

**VALUE FOR MONEY**

**DISLIKE:** Slightly light in both the build and tonal senses

**BUILD QUALITY****FEATURES**

**WE SAY:** A distinctive design for those who crave the music's *joie de vivre*

**OVERALL****CONNECTIONS**

- 1 F8 IEC mains input
- 2 RCA phono outputs
- 3 coaxial digital in
- 4 USB digital in
- 5 digital optical input