

Review of MT Le Dac by Paul Schumann, December 2019, on :

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Metronome Le Dac Digital-To-Analog Converter... ...and the Technicolor Dream.



Those of you who have read some of my previous reviews know that I am in some ways a throwback, sticking with my compact discs while some audiophiles have moved to uncompressed digital files and others have embraced the vinyl side. I have a lot of CD's, and by god, I'm going to still listen to them. A few years ago I purchased the iFi Audio iDSD, and that opened up my world on how far digital has come in the last decade. At \$599, it's one of the great bargains in audio. But sometimes you start to wonder, are those fancy high-end DACs really that much better?

A few months ago, I noticed an announcement for a new DAC by a company called Metronome. Appropriately it is called Le Dac. The announcement said that the Le Dac is the new low-cost entry into the Metronome line. Interested, I contacted Steven, and before I knew it, the Le Dac was heading my way.

Be Careful For What You Wish For

There's an old saying "Be careful what you wish for, because you might get it". On the day the Le Dac was supposed to arrive I was teaching, so I let my wife know it was coming. I said it shouldn't be a problem getting in the house, "It's just a DAC", and thought nothing else of it. When I came home that evening, there was this huge box in the middle of our living room. "So much for being easy to get in the house" quipped my wife. I guess I should have read the fine print. The Le Dac weighs in at a hefty 14 kgs. That's almost 31 pounds to us backward colonialists. Not only is it heavy, but the Le Dac takes up a lot of real estate with dimensions of 425 x 130 x 415 mm. That means it barely fit in my modest stereo cabinet. I've reviewed amplifiers that were smaller.



So what warrants this wide expanse and heft? Power supplies are usually the culprit and it didn't surprise me when I learned that the Le Dac has three separate toroidal transformers supplying ten(!) independent regulation lines. Every designer will tell you that a good product starts with the power supply. The Le Dac fulfills that promise. The heart of the Le DAC is an Asahi Kasei AK4493 conversion chips. The Metronome accepts inputs from S/PDIF 75 Ohms RCA connector, AES/EBU 110 Ohms XLR connector, TosLink connector and USB type B. As you would expect, it decodes all forms of PCM and DSD. For the majority of listening, I had the Le Dac hooked up to my CD player, because that what I listen to the most. Once I got everything hooked together, I readied for that audio torture called "break in". Knowing that, I wasn't particularly concerned about the disc I put in first. I started playing Britten's Piano Concerto [Decca B00SAGBGM2].

Technicolor Within The Land Of Oz

Do you remember that scene when Dorothy opened the door to see Oz in full-blown Technicolor? Those beautiful realer-than-real colors? How can the wonder of 1939 technology still seem so magical? As soon as the piano and orchestra started playing, I noticed how dynamic and clear everything sounded. Then, at about seven-and-a-half minutes in, Roe hit a low chord with the sustain pedal that goes on for-ev-er. Dorothy's famous, "Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore," came into my head. Well what the heck elicited that response?

There's still an argument going on as to what entails the real purpose of a sound system. The more I've been involved with this business, the more I've come to realize that we all hear things in different ways. What might sound great to one listener, can sound awful to another. I really dig tone and timbre, with no real exaggerations in any of the audio spectrum. If a piano or violin has the feel, for the lack of a better word, of the real thing, I can really get lost in the performance.

Like I said, the Le Dac gives the listener that Technicolor presentation to the music. No matter what I listened to, each instrument bloomed in its full-colored intensity. Listening to Britten's Symphony for Cello and Orchestra Op. 68 [Naxos 8.553882], Tim Hugh's cello growled with such full-bodied vividness it was almost breathtaking. The complex interplay between his part and the orchestra ebbed and flowed, mimicking the struggle of the human condition. Each note had a profound meaning. By the end I was as exhausted as the performers.

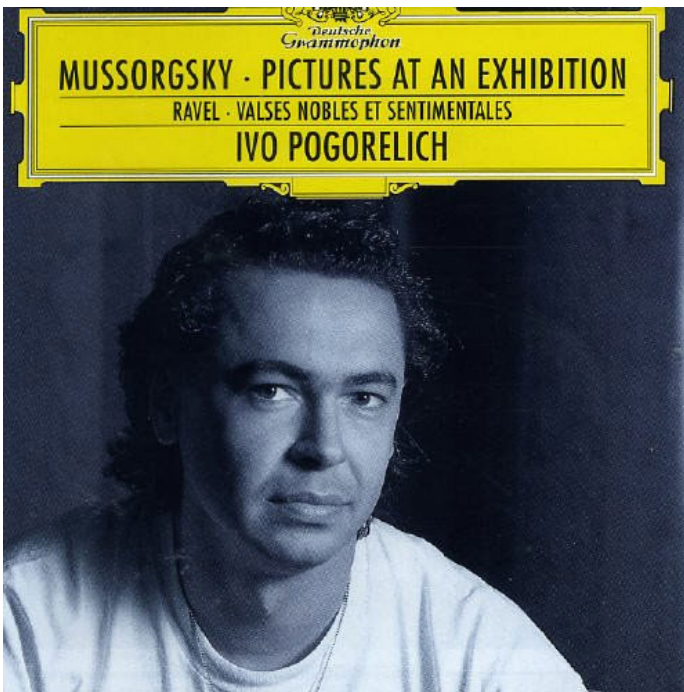


Now let's move on to Prokofiev's brilliant Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 16 [Decca B0000041LA]. Only a handful of pianists have tackled this monstrosity, Vladimir Ashkenazy with the help of Andre Previn (we miss you) give it a thrilling rendition. It begins with the orchestra and piano gently pulsating, then gradually becoming more intense and frantic through the first movement. Ashkenazy's larger-than-life piano (my one quibble with the recording) hums with electricity as he reaches the powerful cadenza. Listening to this I could feel the power of the concert grand as it vibrated the air and floor around it. Trippy stuff.



Speaking of trippy, how about Radiohead's "OK Computer" [XL Recordings B071DTQH43]. I listened to this album many times, but never with the fever dream I had with the Le Dac. Every moment was infused with emotion. Once again, I was drained by the end of the album. Nothing beats being there live to experience the music. Recently I went to a performance of the Austin Symphony Orchestra. The piano soloist, Jon Nakamatsu, had done an excellent rendition of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major. Then he sat to perform an encore of Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu*. I am very

familiar with this piece from the recordings I have, but it was the first time I had heard it (or any Chopin) live. Suddenly I was transported to a new level of oneness with the music. It was no longer notes I was hearing, but pure beauty. Without even realizing it, tears started streaming down my face. For that five minutes, I was connected to the greatness of Chopin, and all was right with the world.



A couple of days later I asked myself, could I reproduce this experience? Unfortunately I don't have *Fantaisie-Improptu* on disc. Instead I decided to listen to a fantastic performance of Pictures at an Exhibition by Ivo Pogorelich [DG 437 667-2]. In this recording the full delicacy and forcefulness of Pogorelich's playing was evident. The loneliness of the ox drawn cart, the foreboding of the catacombs, and the grandeur of the gate of Kiev, were all there. Was it as good as live? Not quite, but oh so close!

What Does The Metronome Le Dac Do Well?

Let's go back to the Technicolor analogy. You watch those old movies, you know that those colors are hyper-real, but you don't care because it's so beautiful. Those spectacular colors were due to the crazy way Technicolor worked by splitting the image in three, putting them through different filters and capturing the images in separate rolls of film. When those rolls were developed, it was up to a Technicolor technician to determine how saturated they should be. Most of the time they erred on the side of more and that is why those colors, to this day, are so vivid.
















I think one of the contributing factors in the Le Dac's Technicolor presentation is its rigorous power supply design. When the juice supplying the components in a device is spot on and lacking any ripple, then it makes a tremendous difference in the sound.



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Metronome states in their literature that their goal is to produce digital gear that sounds like pure analog. I must agree that with the Le Dac they achieved that goal. Time and time again the Le Dac removed the veil between me and the music. Music that I've listened to for years gained new meaning. The Le Dac took me places that I never would have dreamed of with my own home system.

In every instance, no matter what the recording, the Le Dac gives every instrument and voice an eerie three-dimensional tactile quality. It makes everything sound better, and gives the listener a better connection to the music. It is not only the best DAC I've heard, it's one of the best sounding pieces of audio equipment I've ever listened to. Realizing that it is the lowest-cost digital equipment that Metronome makes, I can only imagine what their more-upscale gear sounds like. On top of that, Metronome has its ultra-high-end Kalista line. As it is, the Metronome is an amazing D/A converter.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10 Hz – 60 Hz)	
Mid-bass (80 Hz – 200 Hz)	
Midrange (200 Hz – 3 kHz)	
High Frequencies (3 kHz On Up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape Width Front	
Soundscape Width Rear	
Soundscape Depth	
Soundscape Extension Into Room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	
Value For The Money	