



headphone jack has a nice tight snap. The back cap holds a single set of gold RCA output jacks as well as both an optical and USB input.

Like other DACs, the D1 installs into the computer-based audio system in just seconds, whether Macintosh or Windows-based. The D1 will accept optical input up to 24/192k and 96k with USB, respectively. Signal to noise ratio is stated to be 110db, a number that just a few years ago was the domain of more expensive genres.

Listening

I did all of my listening using an Apple MacBook without the power cord being engaged to eliminate as much outside noise as possible. Much like the average D1 user I chose to use the half-meter USB cable provided by Audioengine. For headphones, most of my listening was done with the Sennheiser HD650, though I did spend a little time listening with an older budget pair of HD422s as well as the Skull Candy 50/50 in-ear phones.

One of the aspects of (all) headphone listening that must be taken into account is that it is a different aural experience than from speakers. For a few days prior to beginning the review I listened solely via headphones. With every selection I listening both directly from the laptop and with the D1. I began by selecting Doug Macleod's *Come To Find*, foreshadowing what became an obvious characteristic of the D1, a bigger and deeper soundstage. The harmonica was clearer. Bass strings were deeper with greater detail in "Bring it on Home." Slight string loose vibration was distinct rather than fuzzy without the D1. In the track "Since I Left St Louis," a light tapping of a digit against the guitar (during the chorus) is clearly evident, but went missing without the D1 in the loop.



Switching over to the Flaming Lips' *At War with the Mystics*, it contains lots of buzzy synthesizers against Prince-style talk-vocal in the track "Free Radicals." Never had I been able to tolerate this song with DAC-free headphone gear. As a matter-of-fact, I historically avoided it altogether with the cans on. For the first



time I could listen with headphone gear as the D1 was able bring out the true sound instead of fuzzy mush. Unfortunately, I was unable to say the same for the flawed “Sound of Failure,” as the distortion, whether artistic or mastered in, personally brutalized my auditory senses.

Recently, I’ve rediscovered my enjoyment of Grateful Dead and *Terrapin Station* in particular. I’ve always enjoyed the percussion in this recording. The D1 in particular presents tighter drums in “Sampson and Delilah.” The tom hits are placed off-center giving them a higher pitch. Listening to “Trucking,” the bass is surrounding. The high-hat hits are distinct sounds with space to themselves. The percussion is a part of the rarely used trot-style drumming with strokes coming half way between the head’s edge and center.



Changing genres once again, in the Indigo Girls’ harmonies in *Strange Fire*, the D1 wonderfully delineated Amy Ray’s and Emily Salliers’ unique voices in the title track, all the while showing how well they blend. During all my listening I can think of no better example of the difference the D1 makes than hearing the background flute in “Crazy Game” during the chorus. Without the D1, the flute is all but non-existent when straight from MacBook’s headphone out.

I would be remiss if I didn’t plug the DAC1 into my home system; taking out the PS Audio Digital Link III and inserting the DAC1 along with the MacBook. Without question the DAC1 did well for itself. All the basics of a good DAC were present, the limitations minor. There was more grain than with the PS Audio and the D1’s resolution was a bit lacking in comparison. Nevertheless, in a pinch, I wouldn’t think twice about placing the Audioengine into the system if necessity required.

During the review period I had to spend some time out-of-town at a job site. Knowing that a clock radio was the only “audio” source furnished at my accommodations, I borrowed Audioengine's N22

amplifier and P4 speakers from A\$\$A's founder. The setup easily fit into an overnight suitcase.

Within minutes of unpacking, I had a *fine* small system to keep me company as I poured over various reports and permits. Most impressive was the fullness and quality of sound at the requisite *reasonable* volumes. I have no doubt this situation was envisioned with Audioengine's brain trust.

Final Thoughts

If there is anything that an engineer appreciates, it is good, quality execution and the Audioengine's D1 DAC has it in spades. From the solid feel to the smooth edges along with the most important aspect, the sound output, the D1 is another Audioengine winner. Less expensive portable DAC's can be found on eBay, but none with the construction, finish quality and pedigree of the D1. For a USB-only powered budget DAC, consider the Audioengine's D1 a top-tier contender.



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