

Ideon Audio aYaZi DAC

DAC a la Greece

REVIEW BY:
TILEMACHOS KATSENIS

- ✓ Sabre ES9023 dac
- ✓ 384kHz and DSD Support
- ✓ Minimalist Design



A MINIMALIST GREEK DAC, CAREFULLY THOUGHT OUT DOWN TO ITS LAST DESIGN DETAIL, WITH EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE THAT OUTPERFORMS MANY COMPETING DEVICES AT THIS PRICE RANGE

Ideon Audio became widely well known to the public during the Athens High End Show in November 2015, when the company presented its first device, a DAC unusually named Ayazi, the technological offspring of (the familiar designer) Vasilis Tounas.

Priced at 990 Euros, the Ayazi DAC faces intense international competition from designs which, at this price range, are (already) abundant while newcomers keep popping up like mushrooms.

The Ayazi is a small device # 300mm wide, with a very careful construction, metal chassis and aluminum fascia in black or silver. Unlike competitive devices where the plethora of inputs and facilities plays an important role, in Ayazi DAC the company selected a design philosophy of absolute simplicity.

The DAC has only two inputs, one coaxial

SPDIF RCA and one USB, with the respective selector at the front of the device. The second selector which completes the front panel settings is the on/off switch, while a LED light informs the owner when the device has locked the incoming digital signal. In the DAC's rear panel, we see the SPDIF and USB inputs as well as the analog output of the device.

Despite its simplicity, the Ayazi can tackle all the potential of digital signals that would need decoding. From the SPDIF input it supports PCM signals up to 24bit/192KHz, and from the USB it will decode signals up to 32bit/384KHz resolution; (While) it is not directly compatible with DSD, the Ayazi can reproduce DSD files through conversion into PCM 24bit/352.8KHz. Internally, the Ayazi DAC presents a top-notch image, with great attention to the power supply and all the passive components. Its heart is the ESS ES9023 DAC chip, using the respective Sabre DAC technology, based on the Hyperstream architecture and on the Time Domain Jitter Elimination circuit for jitter reduction. ESS9023 has operational amplifiers (op-amps) embedded that provide a 2Vrms direct analog output, simplifying this way the implementation of the analog stages, without the use of classic DC filtering capacitors. The DAC partners with two different

interfaces, depending on the selected input. The signals coming from USB port are managed by the Cmedia CM6631A chip, while as a SPDIF converter, the Wolfson WM8804 is used - a receiver which keeps the jitter at very low levels through extended reclocking. As per the system's clock, the ultra-low phase noise oscillator CCHD-957 (HCMOS technology) by Crystek, is deployed. The device's power supply is based in a sizeable toroidal transformer, with a basic filtering stage, having 8 capacitors of 1000µF and local stabilization 1000µF (10x100µF) for the ESS DAC chip.

THE GREEK DAC STRIKES BACK

By analyzing the circuit board of this Greek DAC, it's obvious that its designer has implemented a "serious" DAC, paying a lot of attention even to the slightest detail. He prefers to sacrifice a plethora of inputs and other facilities that competitive designs offer, (opting instead for) carefully hand-picked passive and digital components and the high quality power

COMMENT

The Greek Ayazi DAC is minimalist and carefully designed down to the very last detail. With a sizeable power supply, high quality parts, and a high-end digital-to-analog converter from ESS, (the Ayazi) comfortably outperforms its competition.





supply. All these are highly audible in Ayazi DAC. Connecting it to our reference system, and using Sony SCD-XA9000ES along with an Apple MacBook Pro as sources, Symphonic line Amplification and ATC SCM70SL speakers, the Greek DAC surprised us with its exceptional sound performance.

Its most strong point, even in CD reproduction as well, is the exceptional wide dynamic range – to such an extent, that we were having difficulty in adjusting the volume levels in programs like Mahler symphonies, Wagner's Ring and Ravel's Daphnis et Chloe. In this area, it is obvious that the Ayazi reproduces the whole dynamic range of the digital signal, as it is, revealing even the very last little detail in the gentle, quiet transients, and rendering explosive outbursts with great genuineness and plausibility. The extended dynamic range certainly requires great "quietness" as well, and this is an area where the Ayazi DAC also has excellent performance. It uncovers sound and musical particles that with other, competitive DACs, pass as unnoticeable as they are lost within the noise.

The second, very important attribute of the Greek DAC, is the wonderful "air" and flow which distinguish it in all kinds of music. Music breaths and flows, and expands like a tidal wave, surrounding the listener.

Despite its exceptional dynamics, the Ayazi DAC never sounds aggressive or exaggerated – on the contrary (harmonics and) the sound decay is velvet and properly rounded, and rendered very naturally.

The sound stage that the Ayazi DAC re-creates is impressively three-dimensional with exceptional separation of the individual layers and great accuracy in the placement of individual instruments and groups of instruments – as very impressively sounds in the introduction of Mahler's 2nd symphony.

In terms of tonality, the Ayazi is extremely neutral with granite-solid low frequencies, that have impressive extension, punch and articulation, rich and concise midrange and airy highs that do not tend to over-analytical nor are they too soft. This way, the Greek DAC, essentially "disappears" from the signal path, highlighting the quality of good recording to a superlative level, "uncovering" though all the problems of less good recordings.

In its price range, the Ayazi is another brilliant high-end success of Greek design and production, and we have to warmly congratulate its creators and to firmly recommend this device. It may lack some of the facilities of other DACs in this price range, but it is superior in terms of sound reproduction performance. ■

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TECHNICAL SPECS

CATEGORY: converter USB DAC
PLAYS: PCM up to 32bit/384KHz and DXD
DAC: ES9023 Sabre
INPUTS: 1xCoax, 1xUSB 2.0
OUTPUTS: Line Out (single-ended)
DIMENSIONS (WXHXD): 290x80x170 mm

FOR

- VERY QUIET
- VERY WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE
- HOLOGRAPHIC SOUND STAGE

AGAINST

- NO HEADPHONES OUTPUT
- PLAYS DSD ONLY AS PCM

MANUFACTURER: IDEON AUDIO
CONTACT: 210 6199887

RATING:

★★★★★★ // 4.70

PRICE: €990

