



SOUNDREBELS

Ideon Audio Ayazi mk2 DAC English ver.



Opinion 1

It is commonly known amongst people interested in audio in Poland, that Krzysztof Owczarek from Audio Atelier has a great instinct to find and popularize niche brands, which are in some way exotic, but most of all, owned by people who are truly passionate. Starting with the Japanese Reimyo, a brand which has an almost cult following, following with the Finnish loudspeakers Gradient, which escape any kind of pigeonholing, Canadian Luna Cables, German electronics **Thores Puristic Audio Apparatus** and finally the ever popular Lumin or **Falcon Acoustics**, a company using heritage of the BBC speakers. This is why, one and a half years ago, when we received a box from Wroclaw, containing not very intimidating in size, and not really fitting our usual pricing profile, boxes, coming from a country, being mostly seen as a vacation destination, Greece, the **Ideon Audio 3R USB Renaissance mk2 Blackstar Edition**, we were experienced enough, to have a look at it, absolutely not ignoring it. This interest turned out to be an admiration, full of esteem about what kind of improvement this small gadget could bring into our system. So when such an item can mess up our rankings so significantly, you should not be surprised, that when we could lay our hands on its bigger brethren, we immediately asked for those to be delivered to us. So let me introduce you to the digital-to-analog converter Ideon Audio Ayazi mk2 DAC, and in the next episode, we will mate it with the USB transmission improver **USB 3R Master Time Black Star**. But let us not get ahead of ourselves, so this time we will concentrate on the Ayazi alone.





Looking at this unit from the front at this DAC, opening the Greek company's portfolio, with the flagship Absolute DAC ε above, we do not deal with a full-sized audio component, but at least one that fulfils the midi shelf dimensions. But when you look from the side or the top, it becomes clear, that with the 29cm width, it is only 17cm deep, similar to devices from the Italian manufacturer North Star Design, who has a similar love for shallow chassis. In this case the enclosure is made from thick aluminum plates bolted to aluminum corner pieces, acting as stabilizers. The front is massive, with its five millimeter thickness, and carries the company logo in the left corner, depicting a mountain, as well as the milled model name, but other than that it has only 2 small dip switches in specially milled cavities, accompanied by LED indicators. The left one puts the unit in and out of stand-by mode, while the right one selects the inputs. No displays, no LEDs that would indicate the current signal parameters. The amount of information provided is just about the unit being active or not and where the signal comes from. But do you need more to listen? In the current overflow of information, where you are overwhelmed with it, such a moment of relaxation can turn out to be something you deeply care for.

The back panel turns out to be similarly minimalist. The company left at our disposal only a coaxial S/PDIF and USB input, a pair of solid, gold plated RCA line outputs and a three pin IEC power socket. The whole chassis is supported by small rubber feet, which not only protect against unwanted vibrations, but also prevent the unit to move around on flat and slippery surfaces. The packaging cardboard box also contains two small leaflets – one with a thank you for the purchase, and another one, that you should download the user manual from a specified web page. This is very ecologically conscious approach, as most users will not have the need to reach for the manual at all, and those who still would like to do, can download the PDF, which is not hurting any trees and clogging space in your drawer.

A look inside, even a very quick one, satisfies first, but then starts to become intriguing and demands some interest. First reaction is caused by very solid power supply, based on a classic and big (it looks like having at least 50VA of power) toroidal transformer and a battery of ten 470uF Elna Silmic II capacitors, and the second reaction comes from the contents of the quite large PCB. What is so unusual about it you might ask? Seemingly nothing, because the digital coaxial input is handled by the S/PDIF receiver Wolfson WM8804G and the USB by the ultrafast CMedia CM6631A processor, but the heart of the system is the quite inexpensive, but very liked, 24-bit ESS Sabre ES9023P DAC, with built in opamp and 2V rms voltage output, from which the signal goes directly to the RCA outputs. A very clean sound path, without unnecessary elements that would extend it. Very nice from both construction and electric points of view. There is one small issue though. The Greek manufacturer declares, that the Ayazi handles PCM signals up to 32-bit and 384 kHz, what was confirmed in such a way, that we can feed the DAC with this signal, and sound will flow from the speakers. But when we look at the parameters of the used DAC chip, it does not work beyond 24 bits, and the controller also cuts off at PCM signals 32-bit and 192 kHz. So the situation is interesting. Most manufacturers are limiting the capabilities of the newest DAC chips on the input, while here, the proprietary programming of the USB controller turns out to be much more elastic, than the over 10 year old (it was introduced on 17 September 2010) ESS chip. The whole is clocked with two very good clocks Crystek CCHD-957, from which one manages the DAC, while the second one the USB receiver section. Finally one more remark, aimed at people wanting to upgrade something in their system, but not necessarily at high cost. Namely access to the fuse is absolutely painless, if you take off the top cover, what allows for an almost non-invasive tuning, that should not take more than a few minutes to perform.

Now instead of chasing numericals and measure the PCB traces with a caliper, it is much better to concentrate on music, as this, and I will tease you a little now, the Ayazi presents brilliantly. It offers a very soft and not exaggerated sound, but at the same time very resolved and dynamic. This is kind of an analog approach to the digital medium, which, when you get acquainted with it, can undermine your, seemingly well-rooted, disdain to files and streaming. Of course only, if such an approach is close to our heart, otherwise it will just confirm, that the stereotypical "digitalness" was left in the dust of time, and the final sound quality is not necessarily determined by the source medium, but by the class of the reproducing system. But there is one caveat. To get to this level of satisfaction, the unit must be burned in, what means for the IDeON about 300 hours of playing. Is this an exaggeration? Absolutely not, because for testing we got two units (as you can see on the pictures) – one with only a few hours of playing, and another one, that had already a few hundred hours on the clock, and the differences between them were absolutely noticeable and very difficult to forgo. Fortunately having over two weeks for testing, we could have both powered on and playing, so we could observe the evolution of the newer device, and hear the changes. And those were really significant. Taken out of the box, the Ayazi sounds with a "correct" sound, but quite laid back and having a slight matte touch to it. But with the playing hours passing, this matting disappears, and the laid back attitude, fluently transforms into unobtrusive musicality, engaging the listener from the first notes. Putting aside the financial issues, when on the half-way of burning in, the Greek DAC could be classified somewhere around the sound esthetics and quality of the [Meitner Audio MA3](#), what for some of the potential buyers would be a very satisfying result. But after another one hundred – one hundred and fifty hours, the almost studio-like neutrality and linearity gain on saturation, coherence and velvety

smoothness, what recalls the likes of the phenomenal [Brinkmann Audio Nyquist mk2](#). I would like to immediately notice, that the tubed competition goes much further in terms of dynamics, saturation and resolution, so it appears here only in the context of the direction of the changes in the sound, and not the intensity of the perception per se. However the Ideon becomes a herald of culture and elegance of the sound, without pressure on showing its own distinctness and without impressing its own signature on the reproduced notes. It prefers to civilize the reproduced sound instead, and make it soothe our nerves, usually strung due to the everyday struggle, and absolutely not irritate. This does not mean, that the sound is unified and averaged, as the differentiation of the recordings and the resolution, are both on high level. It does emphasize on maturity and sense however, so if you are looking for a dynamics demon, reproducing vividness without any constraints, able to make Leonard Cohen's "[You Want it Darker](#)" sound like an engaging and epic show similar to "[Wagner Reloaded: Live in Leipzig](#)" from Apocalyptica, then you should look elsewhere. But once I have called upon those recordings, let me stay with them for a little longer, due to the key differences between them. I told already about the energy load, but playing Cohen using the Greek DAC in the sound path, we should be able to easily fall for the incredible depth and calmness of the voice of the Canadian singer. The background is suggestively black, and like velvet, it plays the role of a kind of curtain, separating us, and the band playing in front of us, from ambient noise. On one hand we have the midrange reign, with nicely accented lower part of it, which glues it together well with the bass, but on the other, the treble is absolutely not lacking here, also there is plenty of the bass. Maybe both extremes do not carry as much power as my reference [Ayon CD-35 \(Preamp + Signature\)](#), which I use as a DAC. A small digression – the Austrian source "talks" best with the [Bryston 4B³](#) using XLR connections, so the Ideon did not have such a chance, as it bears only a RCA connection, which has a noticeably lower dynamics, resolution and saturation. So it was very good anyway.

Changing the repertoire to symphonics with metal only confirmed the previous observations, drawing attention to another characteristic of the Ayazi. While with Cohen, the space, due to the limited amount of instruments, was quite sparse, with Apocalyptica, it exploded. This was a concert-stadium like verve, with appropriate volume of sound and imposing, not only in terms of width and depth, but also height, construction of virtual sources. What is important, even with the tutti, I could not catch the Greek DAC on any attempts of simplification, or limitation of the sound to only the first plane events. Not at all, the package of information coming from the source remained untouched, and the only thing, that I have more spectacular and palpable on a daily basis, was the bass kick, which here was slightly toned down and lighter, with the contours drawn with a slightly softer pencil.

Although the presence of the Ideon Audio Ayazi mk2 DAC could point to a DIY market, or even a spontaneous self-made item, its sound is matured and refined enough, to not be a result of any coincidence. At the same time, it is a device aimed at a customer, who is immune to cheap tricks and short-lived hype. Ideon sounds like competition on much higher price levels, where it does not need to prove anything to anybody, and instead of showing muscles, it makes music count. Because it is the music, which is most important here, and the Ayazi presents it in such an engaging way, that if instead of looking for more revolutionary solutions or re-inventing the wheel, you just want music to soothe you, then contact with the Greek DAC could be like return to normality for you.

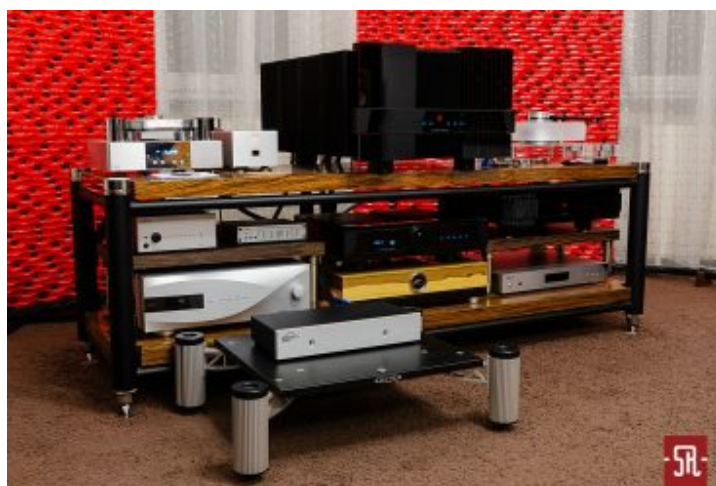
Marcin Olszewski

System used in this test:

- CD/DAC: Ayon CD-35 (Preamp + Signature) + Finite Elemente Cerabase compact
- Network player: Lumin U1 Mini + I-O Data Soundgenic HDL-RA4TB
- Digital source selector: Audio Authority 1177
- Turntable: Kuzma Stabi S + Kuzma Stogi + Dynavector DV-10X5
- Phonostage: Tellurium Q Iridium MM/MC Phono Pre Amp
- Power amplifier: Bryston 4B³ + Graphite Audio IC-35 Isolation Cones / Synergistic Research MiG SX
- Loudspeakers: Dynaudio Contour 30 + Brass Spike Receptacle Acoustic Revive SPU-8 + Base Audio Quartz platforms
- IC RCA: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
- IC XLR: Organic Audio; Vermöuth Audio Reference; Acrolink 7N-A2070 Leggenda
- Digital IC: Fadel art DigiLitz; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
- USB cables: Wireworld Starlight; Goldenote Firenze Silver; Fidata HFU2; Vermöuth Audio Reference
- Speaker cables: Signal Projects Hydra; Vermöuth Audio Reference Loudspeaker Cable
- Power cables: Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R; Organic Audio Power + Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II; Furutech Nanoflux Power NCF
- Power distribution board: Furutech e-TP60ER + Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-50 NCF(R) /FI-50M NCF(R)
- Wall power socket: Furutech FT-SWS(R)
- Anti-vibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
- Switch: Silent Angel Bonn N8 + Silent Angel S28 + Silent Angel Forester F1 + Luna Cables Gris DC; Innuos PhoenixNet
- Ethernet cables: Neyton CAT7+; Audiomica Anort Consequence + Artoc Ultra Reference + Arago Excellence; Furutech LAN-8 NCF
- Table: Rogoz Audio 4SM
- Acoustic panels: Vicoustic Flat Panels VMT

Opinion 2

The country, we will be talking about today, does not have a wealth of recognizable brands on the market, yet, when looking at the offerings of Polish distributors, you can be surprised, that some Greek brands are present, and are faring well. I will not provide you with a listing, but just mention the [Ypsilon](#), we tested some time ago, or the LAB12, appearing in some audio press. Do you know them? Or not? It does not really matter, as the main thing showing positive reception of those brands in Poland is their remaining presence in the catalogs. And the brand we are going to test today is becoming more and more visible amongst them. And I am of course talking about a brand from the sunny Greece, which had already its debut in our portal in the form of a review of the small in size, but big in spirit [USB re-generator](#), distributed by the Wroclaw based Audio Atelier, called Ideon. This time we received a very interesting item, from the ones mentioned in the company catalog, the digital-to-analog converter, Ayazi mk2 DAC.





In terms of size, the Ideon is a typical midi component, with aluminum chassis. While being universal in terms of height, it is a tad narrower than your typical audio component and significantly less deep. But for this kind of size, it is surprisingly heavy, what suggests, that the money spent on it did not go for appearance, but on the main dish – converting of digital signals. The front is made for a slab of aluminum with rounded edges, with only two dip switches – the left one applying power, and the right one selecting between SPDIF and USB inputs, with LEDs indicating the actual mode of the unit. The back plate is equally sparse in terms of connections, but the amount of mounted sockets is absolutely sufficient for the device to perform its tasks. So we get two digital inputs, one SPDIF and one USB, one analog RCA output and a power socket. Regarding the managed input frequencies, the device handles PCM up to 32 bits 384 kHz while using USB, and 24 bits 192 kHz when the SPDIF is used. And that is it. Not enough? I assure you, this is more than enough, what it showed having absolutely no issues with introducing it into the system, as described below.

As it often happens, I was curious, how the tested device will sound when compared to the dCS I won, on the other I was a bit afraid, it might cross the border of good taste, regardless in which way. For my daily listening I like the music world to be somewhat sweetened – and I assure you, I was able to manage that using a DAC often described as soulless, but when presented in a proper way, I do not shy away from neutral aesthetics. Things get worse, if something is moving towards overinterpretation of those ways of sounding. And it does not matter, if the sound evolves in the direction of bigger body or speed, you always need to keep a healthy consensus. And this was achieved by the Greek.

Absolutely, the whole was shown with a thicker line and more plasticity, but still with a good package of information and a way of sounding, which was far from being obese. The music engulfed me with nice intimacy, what resulted in an impression of higher realism of recordings made in one take. In this case I am thinking about, for example, the Japanese mastering of the opera “The Marriage of Figaro” Mozart (Blu-spec CD2). Those are some not in correct order, pieced together arias, but keeping in touch with the joy of listening to this material; and here you could clearly hear, what the designer of this DAC was hoping to achieve. It is about the higher intimacy, but also palpability of the sound, caused by increased saturation and plasticity, and in case of human voices, this turned out brilliant. The full beneficiaries of such way of sounding were the orchestra, very important for this genre, but also the stage itself, with the splendidly reproduced wooden floor, sometimes agitated by the artists moving on it quickly. This was a such interesting experience, that instead of firstly enjoying the clean leading of the orchestra by Teodor Currentzis – by this I mean clear marking of the phrases and sonic counterpoints, in the way the more palpable Greek DAC presented it, the only reaction was to turn my attention to other aspects of this aria – the mentioned, very pleasing palpability, and not perceiving any shortcoming of interpretation of the musicians gathered around the conductor. Jazz and even rock, were similar in taste, although with light, but also I assure you, painless reproduction of the sharpness of the drawing of the individual presences on the stage. The gentlemen from RGG showed their newest disc with a smaller spark of the cymbals, but at the same time the piano was nobler, still multicoloured piano and a slightly fuller, but with consistently good amount of information about the string, double bass. The rebellious Antimatter on the disc “**Black Market Enlightenment**”, instead of showing the vividness of the all-present cymbals, while not diminishing its impetus, but only making them slightly more golden, concentrated more on saturation of the other, also very important for them, instruments. There was still power, energy and swing, but with the difference, that it had a more human face. And you know what? Despite being raised on the mainstream, in this genre AC/DC, I am buying that

approach. This note of nice to the ear sound, without any signs of slowing down, with appropriate essence, as with the, relatively small loss of the speed of rising of the sound, and harshness, seemingly reserved for that kind of music, I got the pleasure of enjoying the vocals and instruments being well placed in terms of timbre. The reason for that was the consistency of reproducing the reality of the strong sounds, and this is what everything is about in this genre.

As you can see from the text above, the application of the tested Ideon Audio Ayazi mk2 DAC results in the music getting a little more essence. This, in turn, translates into a more natural reproduction, more vividness of the artistic events happening in our listening room. For me, this was bulls-eye. Of course, this might not be true for everybody, this will depend mostly on the natural preferences of the listener, and the demands of the system. There are absolutely no other sonic issues of the tested device, as it is absolutely far away from crossing any border of good taste, when adding some timbre to music. So if you are on a crossroad in terms of conversion of digital signals, then please do not forget about this representative of the Greek engineering. In terms of abilities of presenting music to you, the Ayazi is much more, than it looks could reveal. In my opinion, this is a true black horse for any music lover, that will not ruin your pocket.

Jacek Pazio

System used in this test:

Source:

- transport: CEC TL 0 3.0
 - streamer: Melco N1A/2EX + switch Silent Angel Bonn N8
 - DAC: dCS Vivaldi DAC 2.0
 - Master clock: Mutec REF 10 SE-120
 - reclocker: Mutec MC-3+USB
 - Shunyata Research Omega Clock
 - Shunyata Sigma V2 NR
 - Preamp: Robert Koda Takumi K-15
 - Power amplifier: Gryphon Audio Mephisto Stereo
 - Loudspeakers: Dynaudio Consequence Ultimate Edition, Gryphon Trident II, Gauder Akustik Berlina RC-11 Black Edition
 - Speaker Cables: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
 - IC RCA: Hijiri Million „Kiwami”, Vermouth Audio Reference
 - IC XLR: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond, Hijiri Milion „Kiwami”
 - Digital IC: Hijiri HDG-X Milion
 - Power cables: Hijiri Takumi Maestro, Furutech NanoFlux NCF, Furutech DPS-4.1 + FI-E50 NCF(R)/ FI-50(R), Hijiri Nagomi, Vermouth Audio Reference Power Cord, Acrolink 8N-PC8100 Performante
 - Table: SOLID BASE VI
 - Accessories: Harmonix TU 505EX MK II, Stillpoints ULTRA SS, Stillpoints ULTRA MINI, antivibration platform by SOLID TECH, Harmonix AC Enacom Improved for 100-240V, Harmonix Room Tuning Mini Disk RFA-80i
 - Power distribution board: POWER BASE HIGH END
 - Acoustic treatments by Artnovion
- Analog stage:
- Drive: Transrotor Leonardo 40/60 TMD
- Cartridge: Phasemation PP-200
- Step-up: Thrax Trajan
- Phonostage: Sensor 2 mk II

Polish distributor: [Audio Atelier](#)

Manufacturer: [Ideon Audio](#)

Prices: 3350 € Silver, 3500 € Black

Specifications

Digital inputs: USB-B type 2, SPDIF(F/Coax)

Output full scale: 2 V RMS

Output impedance: 250 Ω

Frequency response: 10 Hz-25 kHz (+/- 0,5 dB)

SNR (A WEIGHTED 20HZ-20KHZ): >112 dB

THD+N (1kHz FS 96 kS/s): <0,002%

Crosstalk: -110 dB

USB input: Asynchronous (dual clock) Device class: Type 2

- Bit depth: 32 bit
- Sampling rates: 44,1, 48, 88,2, 96, 176,4, 192, 352,8, 384 kHz

SPDIF / COAXIAL INPUT

- Bit depth: 24 bit
- Sampling rates: 44,1, 48, 88,2, 96, 176,4, 192 kHz

Power consumption: 20 W (max)

Dimensions (W X H X D): 290 x 170 x 80 mm

Link do tekstu: [Ideon Audio Ayazi mk2 DAC English ver.](#)