

# Manche tranche

France's Micromega is hoping its new MyDAC can tempt buyers on this side of the Channel. But does it have 'je ne sais quoi'? Jon Myles finds out.

**A**nyone looking to add a standalone DAC to their system is faced with an increasingly wide range of choices nowadays.

As the computer audio bandwagon rolls unstoppably on, it seems any company worth its salt (and a few that aren't) are producing their own variations on the theme.

Even at the cheaper end of the market (think £150) companies like Arcam are producing perfectly good products – while if you've deep enough pockets there are plenty of other manufacturers willing to sell you DACs with prices stretching into the thousands of pounds.

With such a range of alternatives now on offer new contenders really have to offer something special to stand out. France's Micromega enters this fray with a distinctively-styled unit pitched at £300.

Unlike some companies which outsource manufacture to the Far East, Micromega has designed and built the MyDAC on its home turf. Whether that actually makes much difference nowadays is open to question but credit to them for

patriotism. The lightweight ABS case has an undeniably Apple-flavoured look – coming in white or black with rounded corners and measuring around the size of an AirPort Extreme base station.

Its undeniably lightweight but Micromega says that's a conscious decision – claiming the plastic enclosure helps to lower the noise floor compared to a metal case. The front sports a sideways mounted rotary wheel to select standby and inputs – USB plus digital coaxial and optical up to 24/192. A small switch on the back toggles between USB class 1.0 and 2.0 modes. Both can be accessed directly from a Mac while Windows users need to download a driver from the Micromega website for 192kHz operation.

Thin white LEDs on the front glow white to indicate which input has been selected or flash if no signal is being received.

Interestingly, the MyDAC boasts asynchronous USB input – the preferred option for reducing jitter from computer audio but still far from universal at the unit's price point.

One other important feature

is that the MyDAC designers have eschewed a wall wart power supply and instead housed their switch-mode power supply inside the ABS plastic casing.

There's no doubt this looks neater. But less pleasing was the obvious RFI interference the MyDAC put back onto the mains when first plugged in. All three radios in my house in West London suffered to the same extent – not something I've ever experienced from other pieces of equipment.

The simple expedient of plugging the unit into a bog-standard Maplin-sourced Tacima mains conditioner fixed the problem but it's worth bearing in mind if you are considering the Micromega.

On the plus side the unit runs cool at all times and draws less than 500mW in standby and 2.5W in operation.

## SOUND QUALITY

Once the RFI issue was sorted it took just a few minutes to establish the MyDAC's strengths. This is an extremely fleet-footed and spacious sounding DAC. Instruments have a particular sense of air and separation



around them which can shame some competitors costing significantly more.

Feeding it a 24/192 download of Kate Bush's '50 Words For Snow' via a MacBook Pro and the atmosphere of the recording really shone through. It seemed particularly adept with piano – capturing the timbre of the instrument without ever tripping over into brightness. It's a quality which works especially well with natural recordings, seemingly bringing out more of the atmosphere of a live performance or one-take studio cut.

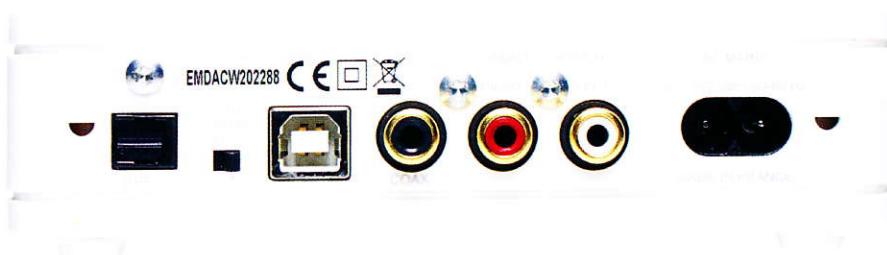
Keith Jarrett's 'The Koln Concert'

"Jarrett's various grunts and moans as he ups the pace also rang out true"

was a delight with superb imaging and the right sense of timing and rhythm. Jarrett's various grunts and moans as he ups the pace also rang out true whereas on less accomplished devices they can be relegated to vague background thumps.

Switching inputs to the S/PDIF connection and the Micromega proved it can also up the pace when needed. Led Zeppelin's 'Immigrant Song' thundered along but still retained that admirable clean treble which conveys so much musical information. It's very easy to just sit back and enjoy the music, so effortlessly does the Micromega seem to go about its work.

There was no doubt the S/PDIF seemed to bring out a bit more body to the sound which was a welcome thing. Don't get me wrong, the Micromega is by no means lightweight but in absolute terms it lacks the outright authority of something like the Chord QuteHD. On more bass-heavy music there's just the slight suggestion that it's not quite extracting that last bit of oomph from the recording. But, then again, the Chord is a different beast and some £700 more expensive so it's perhaps not quite a strictly fair comparison. What the Micromega MyDAC does very well is convey the spirit of what it is playing.



USB and S/PDIF inputs (optical and electrical), stereo audio outputs (red & white) and a USB1/2 switch.

It lacks any of the graininess and false zing some other digital converters occasionally display.

Proof positive came in the shape of the 96kHz download of the Michael Tilson Thomas/San Francisco Symphony Orchestra's recording of Mahler's Symphony Number 1. It's a sumptuous performance and the

MyDAC did it full justice. The highs were clean and extended and never did the Micromega show the slightest sign of strain or congestion. Instead I was just carried away by the music – which, really, is all you can ask for.

**CONCLUSION**

The Micromega MyDAC is in a tough marketplace but is distinctive enough to stand out from the crowd. It conveys music in a lovely liquid style with a fine sense of flow to the sound. Reservations about RFI interference aside, it put in a strong performance and is well worth an audition.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Mydac gave a very wide analogue frequency response with 192kHz sample rate, reaching 77kHz (-1dB, higher than is common. Many DACs roll off slowly from lower down for a pulse response with no pre-ringing, so the Mydac may sound a bit lighter than rivals.

Both optical and electrical S/PDIF inputs worked up to 192kHz sample rate on our Rohde & Schwarz UPV digital analyser and they were linear with a 24bit signal, if not quite up to the very

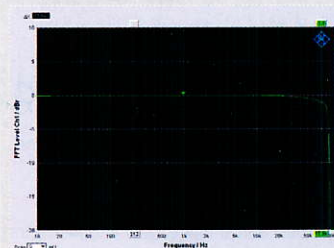
best, with 0.04% distortion against a possible 0.02%, noise and some re-sampling products appearing on 48kHz and its multiples; 44.1kHz and its multiples were clean, suggesting 44.1kHz is the basic clock frequency.

EIAJ Dynamic Range figures were good at 103dB for 16bit and 113dB for 24bit. 16bit gets no better than this but 24bit can reach 117dB.

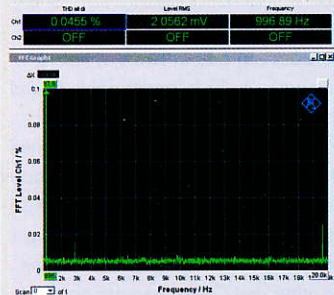
Results via USB were identical to S/PDIF in terms of distortion, dynamic range and noise, but frequency response was a tad more extended, to 92kHz, with 192kHz sample rate. Micromega have gone for maximum analogue bandwidth with this DAC, as a flat response out to 92kHz (-1dB) is very wide by current standards.

The Mydac measured well in all areas, offering very wide analogue bandwidth from all inputs, more than most rivals. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**



<b>Frequency response (-1dB)</b>	
<b>96k sample rate</b>	<b>4Hz-77kHz</b>
<b>Distortion (16 / 24bit)</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>0dB</b>	<b>0.008</b>
<b>/ 0.008</b>	
<b>-60dB</b>	<b>0.22 / 0.045</b>
<b>Separation (1kHz)</b>	<b>112dB</b>
<b>Noise (IEC A)</b>	<b>-113dB</b>
<b>Dynamic range (16/24bit)</b>	<b>103 / 113dB</b>
<b>Output</b>	<b>2V</b>

**MICROMEGA MYDAC £259**



**VERDICT**

A fluent, open sound with excellent imaging and strong timing.

**FOR**

- asynchronous USB
- 24/192kHz capable
- distinctive styling

**AGAINST**

- RFI issue
- plastic case

Absolute Sounds  
+44 (0)20 8971 3909  
www.absolutesounds.com