



dCS Network Bridge

"Take 'em to the bridge"

James Brown, "Sex Machine"

Can a piece of hi-fi be a sex machine?

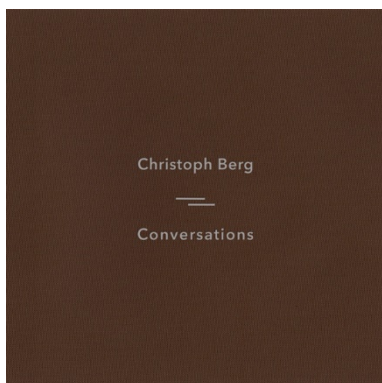


The dCS Network Bridge is meant to reside in a hi-fi system between the network and the hi-fi; a bridge over troubled water¹. The Bridge accepts an input from your network via wire (Ethernet), AirPlay, and WiFi capabilities are coming this summer which will handle file resolutions up to 24/96, and converts your musical data into a DAC-acceptable output (see "Output" above). The single AES and S/PDIF outputs pass up to 24-bit/192kHz PCM and DSD64 (DoP), while the dual AES outputs pass up to 24-bit/384kHz and DSD128. The SDIF-2 outputs make due with 96kHz and DSD64. AirPlay passes PCM up to 48kHz. The Bridge can also perform integer down-sampling to match your DAC's resolution limits. Supported file formats include FLAC, AIFF, WAV, ALAC, AAC, MP3, WMA, OGG, and DFF, DSF.



Various: *mono no aware*

Now for some people those facts, or what they *do not* include, may make the dCS Network Bridge a no-go because it cannot play every resolution bit-perfectly unless you have a DAC that supports dual AES inputs. I, on the other hand, am of the opinion that how well a piece of hi-fi plays *most of my music* is its most important trait. I admit to not owning, or if I do I don't really care, any PCM music above 24/192, and I can count those on a disinterested hand, and DSD multiples pale in comparison to a system that plays *most of my music* well. Or to put it another way, I am not of the school that says "High-Res for High-Res' sake" ("l'hi-res pour l'hi-res").



Christopher Berg: *Conversations*

The Network Bridge is what we call the proverbial no-brainer for dCS DAC owners looking to plug into networked audio. dCS has developed their own control app for playing back your stored music while the Bridge also streams Tidal and Spotify Connect. Done. Unless of course you want a better interface to your music and Tidal in which case dCS has made the Bridge Roon Ready. The question for those of us who do not own a dCS DAC, if you do you can skip this review and go to your dealer and listen, is—does the Bridge work for the rest of us?

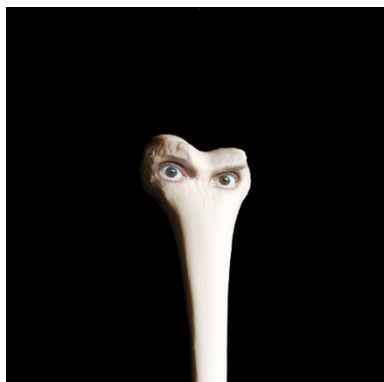


Ryuichi Sakamoto: *async*

Being dCS, the Bridge is a FPGA-based design which means the elves at dCS have seemingly imbued the Bridge with dCS magic pixie dust, er bits. The other "Key Features" worth noting, because they are more than likely key to how the Bridge performs in situ, is the Auto clocking system (as used in the dCS Vivaldi and Rossini) and Multi-stage power regulation which isolates digital and clock circuitry. While there are still some hermits in caves who believe WWII is still being fought and "bits are bits", we know better. The Bridge, being FPGA-based, is firmware updatable via its network

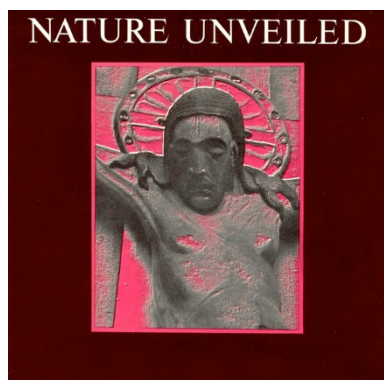
connection ("What dark magic is this?"). These software updates will include performance enhancements including an MQA update which will natively perform the 1st MQA unfold to 24.96 and

the USB port, which is currently for USB storage, will become USB DAC enabled so you can output your data via USB to your USB DAC.



Juana Molina: *Halo*

The Bridge is, in dCS terms, rather understated in its appearance being all 90 degree angles and all (no wave), and its sole subtle little blue front-mounted LED is the only indication that its On. The on/off switch is located around back (set it and forget it) along with all of the ins and out business. The dCS logo sits subtly up top, white over aerospace-grade machined aluminum. In terms of sex machine status, I view the Bridge as the understated silent type.



Current 93: *Nature Unveiled* (new to me)

The Bridge displaced my microRendu in my system which includes the DeVore Fidelity gibbon X, Ayre AX-5 Twenty, and totaldac d1-six all cabled together with Tellurium Q Black. For this review and my future well being, I purchased the Tellurium Q Black AES cable which I used to connect Bridge to totaldac.



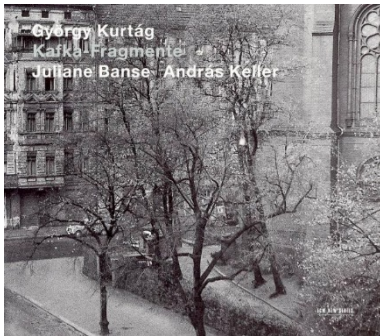
"Stay on the scene"

To my ears, my system has sung with the best of 'em. By "best", I do not mean to suggest that my system is "that which is most desirable," rather it is among those systems that connects me to my music the mostest. I say this as preface to the fact that while I have my overachiever Sonore microRendu won hand for direct comparison, its \$640 price tag may make some readers cry *foul!*; psychological pricing? My point being, I have heard my system sing with many pieces of hi-fi including the stellar \$16k Sound Galleries SGM Server which lifted things to heretofore higher heights. So while I will not be comparing the dCS Network Bridge to a similarly-priced competitor, I will be comparing it to what I choose to own and what I would choose to own if my bank account was suddenly bloated beyond recognition by the demise of an unknown relative.



Golijov: *Azul*

With the dCS Network Bridge installed, my system sounds as good as it ever has (besides, I don't have, nor do I need, any unknown relatives). What this means is, it is my opinion that if you own a healthy helping of network-attached stored music and are interested in streaming from Tidal or Spotify and you have been sitting on the fence about how to connect A to B (A being the network-based music and B being your hi-fi) because you felt "this stuff changes too fast so I'll get something cheap", dCS' the Bridge provides a very compelling argument for the getting the hell off the fence.



György Kurtág: *Kafka-Fragmente*

As compared to *my system*, which includes the overachieving microRendu, the Bridge-endowed system and the music it played sounded more refined. More real. This means that I hear things more clearly, feel things more fully, and am generally more able to lose myself in music. That last bit being the entire point of this hobby. For me.

Have you ever had a run where all of the new music you hear you love? I've been on one and the dCS Bridge made all of it all the more lovely by caressing the beauty out of the bits. To my ears and experience, the Bridge does not suffer from self-noise or if it does, it does so to vanishing low levels. This means music is presented as if emanating from its source without obstruction. Most digital, even my overachieving microRendu, *adds* something in between causing the blurring or stifling of Jean-Marie Piel's *infinitely small*:

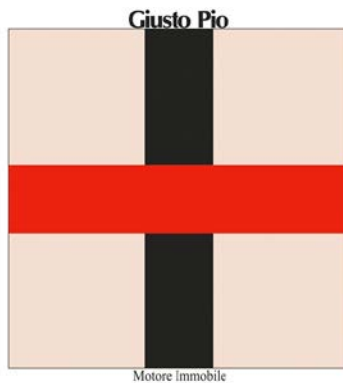
"The essence of an interpretation lies in working on the infinitely small -- be it an attack on a note held back for a fraction of a second (perceptible if the preceding note is reproduced neither too short nor too long), or be it a note that develops in itself; or, on a larger level, a crescendo or diminuendo encompassing several notes -- all of which gives music a sense of direction, its palpable dynamics, its quivering life, and all of which, in the end, lies in the nuances."

Nuance is reproduced music's life blood and dCS gets it. And the Bridge gets this as fully as any other similar-functioning-device I've heard in my system including the Sound Galleries SGM Server, at least according to my pleasure-O-meter and recollection of listening to much of the same music through both, including many-a-piece I'm nearly painfully familiar with, what having heard some selections going on 30 years or more (or less). You could then say the Bridge is a damned bargain! Or you could say, \$4000+ for something a \$35 Raspberry Pi can do? If you said the latter, I have to wonder what you are doing *here* since our basic believe systems about this fine hobby are in conflict. And looking for conflict in a hobby is just plain silly².



Rahim Alhaj: *Letters from Iraq: Oud and String Quintet*

The dCS Network Bridge brought out the best my totaldac has to offer, and it has a lot to offer. When we buy hi-fi, there's nothing better than finding that something we own can rise to any occasion (or system "upgrade"). The d1-six does this and so do my DeVore gibbon X, which I've heard paired with near countless amplification and upstream components. These kinds of components are like sleeping beauty, waiting for the right kiss. The Bridge laid one heckofa smacker on my d1-six. And me.



Giusto Pio: *Motore Immobile*

I'm a fan, a big fan, of letting other people play their music through my hi-fi, easily. Without fuss, without pretense. Playing my iPhone-resident music through my hi-fi via the Bridge's AirPlay took all of a few seconds to happen and what's more is it sounded wonderful. Was it better or worse than Ethernet? I conducted a series of double-blind tests and concluded that I prefer real butter. And if you want to read a love poem to butter, I have read none better than Alex Halberstadt's "Is the World's Best Butter Worth 50 Dollars a Pound?".



"Should I take 'em to the bridge?"

But...is it worth it? I thought I heard someone thinking that and the obvious answer is...that's for you to decide. What I'm saying is that in my experience, the dCS Bridge offers some of the finest-sounding musical output my system has had the pleasure of pleasing me with.

You could say the Bridge is a bargain or you could say its really expensive. Either way, its way with music is like a sex machine (get on up).

Device Type: Network Player/Roon Endpoint

Input: Ethernet, AirPlay, USB (data), 2x Word Clock Inputs on 2x BNC, WiFi (coming this summer)

Output: 2x AES/EBU on 3-pin male XLR connectors (can be used as dual AES), 1x S/PDIF (Coax), 1x SDIF-2 interface on 2x BNC connectors

Dimensions: 360mm/14.2" wide x 245mm/9.65" deep x 67mm/2.65" high

Weight: 4.6kg/10.2lbs.

Availability: Authorized Dealers

Website: www.dcsLtd.co.uk