

AUDIO
FILE

SACD transport, upsampler/network player, DAC and clock
 Made by: Data Conversion Systems Ltd, Cambs
 Supplied by: dCS Ltd
 Telephone: 01954 233950
 Web: www.dcsLtd.co.uk
 Price: Trans, £24.5k; Upsampler, £12.5k; DAC, £20k; Clock, £9.7k



dCS Vivaldi Digital System

Flagship front-ends don't come bigger than the multi-box dCS Vivaldi, comprising an upsampling CD/SACD digital Transport, an outboard DAC, outboard Upsampler and dual-mode Clock. Its new industrial design is realised in spectacular, sweeping curves and matching, full-colour TFT displays (albeit run in greyscale).

Each box has a limited range of soft-touch buttons to navigate through the various configuration menus. There's a heavy alloy IR remote but most users will gravitate towards the dCS app available on the iPod/iPhone/iPad, Android, Mac OS X and Windows PC platforms.

The app allows you to view and select music sources, including USB stick, iPhone, NAS and UPnP renderers. You can also browse and select music by location, artist or album. All relevant track metadata is provided for the selection in play (or queued) while global controls deal with play, pause, fast forward/reverse, DAC volume, DAC phase and upsampling rate.

You're not obliged to drop £67k on the entire system: you could begin with the CD/SACD Transport and DAC. Or if you've ripped your disc collection, are acquiring hi-res music downloads

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and want to replay via a USB drive or wired network then you'll be looking at the Upsampler/DAC combination. Whichever route you take, the addition of dCS's stabilised 44.1kHz/48kHz (word) Clock is the icing on its digital cake.

The Transport allows upsampling, taking CD data to 24-bit/352.8kHz DXD while SACD is communicated as dCS-encrypted 1-bit/2.8MHz DSD.

But the real heart of the system is the Vivaldi DAC. Now boasting the very latest dual-mono Ring DAC, integrated volume control and selectable 2V/6V output, it will drive any power amp directly.

The Upsampler is arguably the most accommodating source component in the Vivaldi stack, accepting digital audio data from any legacy source. It offers the same upsampling options as the DAC and yet routing the CD/SACD transport via the Upsampler to the DAC still results in an improvement in sound quality.

SUBLIME SACD

This is the most exquisite digital front-end we've auditioned. With the Vivaldi DAC also performing preamp duties via a balanced connection to a Krell S-1500 power amp and B&W 802 loudspeakers, Eric Bibb's *Blues, Ballads And Work Songs* [Opus 3] sounded truly sublime. Bibb's picking of that Martin seven-string truly lifted the pace of the classic 'Cocaine Blues', both guitar and voice delivered with a realistic but agreeable intensity.

Turning to the Upsampler as source with both USB and network inputs, listening to Glen Hansard's *Rhythm And Repose* [Anti/Epitaph] was a truly moving if conflicting experience, the contrast between the mournful tenor of the vocalist and the exquisitely accurate reproduction of strings, percussion and bass once again exposing the inherently natural disposition of the Vivaldi Digital System.

And can the Vivaldi rock! Elliott Sharp's *Terraplane* [Sky Road Songs],



ABOVE: Each fascia is milled from a 16kg slab of alloy and the flowing curves, make for a bold design statement. The units can be controlled via the limited array of buttons, but dCS's iPad app is preferred

a full-on and thoroughly eclectic mix of blues and electronica pumped full of energy found the Vivaldi standing its ground, deftly navigating the foaming rapids that swirl through this album.

VERDICT

Hugely flexible, hugely capable, the Vivaldi system represents a milestone in the development of digital audio. We have never heard music delivered so richly imbued with colour from a digital source so obviously colourless in its own right. Which is exactly how it should be. ⚡

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level (Balanced)	2.04Vrms at 550mohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD/SPDIF/USB/network)	108.9-109.1dB (balanced out)
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00002% / 0.0002%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00025% / 0.0011%
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/40kHz/90kHz)	0dB to -0.02dB/-0.1dB/-13.1dB
Digital jitter (CD/SACD/SPDIF/USB/net.)	116/30/20/10/10pscc
Res. @ -100dB (S/PDIF / USB / network)	±0.2dB / ±0.2dB / ±0.2dB
Power cons. (Trans/Ups/DAC/clock)	15W / 21W / 10W / 10W
Dimensions (WHD, Transport/DAC)	444x196x435/444x151x435mm