



Mono Stereo

dCS Rossini APEX Player And Rossini Clock Review



There is no doubt that dCS products are among the most sought-after digital front ends today. Despite their rich heritage and roots, dCS is far from anachronistic. Their continuity in product development is tremendous and impressive, to say the least, and their major technical and esthetic transformation a few years ago makes them straight away recognizable even from a quick eye glance.

Many high-end audio companies painstakingly strive to achieve this instantly recognizable esthetic, sound and leitmotif. Achieving this is a complex task in itself. Making all products distinguishable (sonically and visually) across the entire portfolio is an even more complicated undertaking.

But dCS has accomplished this with flying colors. While retaining the essence of the classical aura, they have managed to infuse the devices with a unique elegance that is further supported by smooth operation and enticing music playback.



All these efforts are not cheap, to begin with. I remember a conversation I had with dCS sales director Raveen Bawa over coffee at the high-end audio trade show in Rimini few years ago. He told me what it takes and how much it costs to make the front panel alone for Rossini and Vivaldi. It's actually more than the cost of some standalone DACs! dCS, under the baton of Managing Director David J Steven, has understood at the right time that the market is diverging from the comfortably safe path and how it is transforming into a new era. Yes, it's a fact that our beloved niche industry is part of a larger part of the luxury business, but luxurious products are far from just bling-bling. Many of the high-end audio brands learned this lesson a hard way. Many are still in the awakening phase.

As with Haute Horlogerie and luxury sports cars, aside from brand heritage, the real essence of luxury is hidden in the actual performance. It cannot be hindered or simulated. And dCS Rossini is not lacking in performance by any means, as you can read in the first and next installments! From the very first notes, the dCS Rossini player and Clock proved to be digital luminaries, uniquely reproducing the music frame by frame. The sophisticated workmanship hidden beneath the carefully crafted exterior reproduces the complexity of the music with feathery ease and with a breeze of a very different fresh air.





The Rossini Player

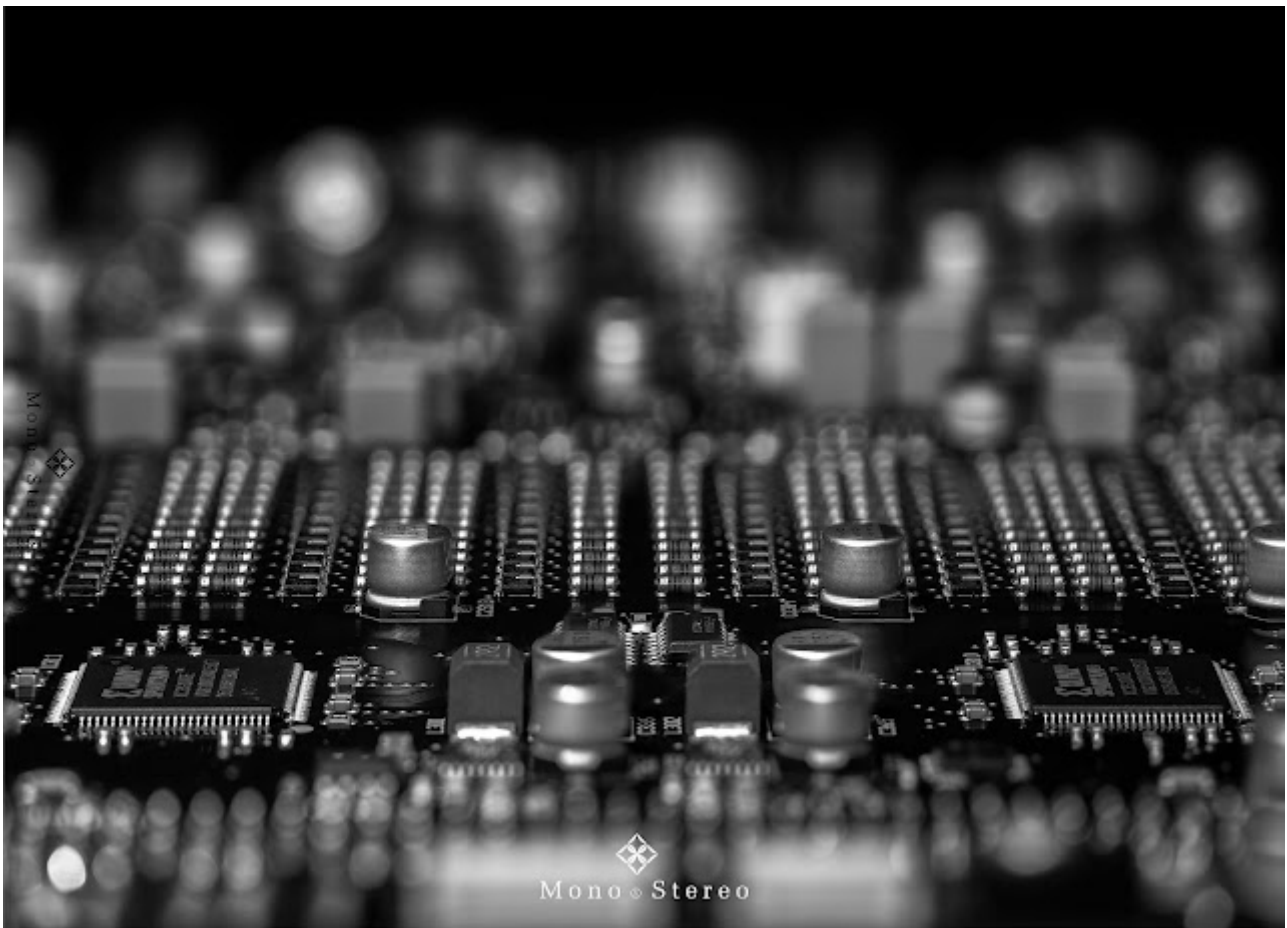
The Rossini combines three decades of engineering expertise and a wealth of breakthrough technologies in a distinctive, elegant, and streamlined design. Inspired by the dCS Vivaldi series, it offers a unique aesthetic that combines order and precision with artistic expression.

Each model is encased in aerospace-grade aluminum, a lightweight material selected for its acoustic properties, and features internal acoustic damping panels to reduce mechanical vibration and magnetic effects. The panels are formed using state-of-the-art milling machines and finished with a smooth and durable pearlescent coating.

From the precision-engineered cabinet to the hardware and software inside, every aspect of the Rossini has been refined to deliver the purest possible sound with the lowest possible distortion. Each system is crafted from the finest materials and built to exacting standards. Before it leaves the factory, it is extensively tested and inspected to ensure the highest level of quality and reliability.

The latest generation dCS Digital Processing Platform provides state-of-the-art signal processing and flexibility.

The Rossini APEX Player features an integrated high-quality CD transport for silver disk playback, Multi-stage DXD oversampling design with optional DSD upsampling; user-selectable DSP and DSD filters, and a full MQA™ decoder. This MQA™ implementation is unique in that it provides, for the first time, the ability to use a DAC that achieves the desired temporal behavior with very low modulation noise by playing back accurately beyond 16x (768 kHz).



The Apex Upgrade

I have been living with dCS Rossini Player and Clock for a few months and didn't know that the APEX upgrade was in the works. So I was very surprised and excited about the announcement and subsequent factory upgrade.

The dCS Rossini was already an outstanding product, but the APEX upgrade blew me away. I was expecting some enhanced sonic benefits, but not such a magnitude of sonic change. I rarely put gushing words to paper, but the APEX upgrade had me scratching my head constantly.

The original Ring DAC was developed for the Radar system over thirty years ago and has been under constant development for over three decades. A discrete DAC developed in-house avoids the shortcomings of off-the-shelf solutions.

It's always risky to build on something that was already considered state of the art, but over time marginal improvements are discovered and each discovery, no matter how small, can add up over time to a product with better performance and sound. That's why it takes years to upgrade such complex products. The APEX upgrade is not just an upgrade for the sake of upgrading. Making something significantly different and, most importantly, sonically meaningful is by no means an easy task.

In keeping with the dCS DNA, the APEX provides even more aural equilibrium, delves deeper into the realms of music, delivers further vertical and horizontal sound expansion, and introduces even more lifelike dynamics and transparency with the newfound density that creates a far greater amount of acoustic focal points, thus creating a more holographic and expanded three-dimensional presentation.

All of the qualities are extended evenly across the frequency spectrum, with newfound speed, greater transparency, and higher resolution that does not detract from the already impressive, but now expanded rich, palpable, and extremely organic timbre. It just feels like the music has more control.

But among all the new virtues perhaps most important is the refined smoothness and naturalness that arrives with some of the qualities I usually associate with analog realms.

The dCS Apex upgrade introduces a new dimension to the Rossini line. It provides fatigue-free long-term listening that conveys a natural harmony to the digital domain, where more often than not a back and forth interaction with numerous inconsistencies comes as a rule.

Oppositely, dCS Apex Player simply feels more in tune and in sync with the music!



The Rossini Clock

Timing is the key to everything in audio. It provides order, accuracy, in-phase response, etc. Our perception of music can change instantly with the slightest misbehavior in timing: In this respect, we are extremely sensitive to timing delay and phase. Even outside of our beloved industry, timing is critical on many fronts. For this reason, all kinds of master clocks are constantly being developed and their implementation pushed to the nth degree.

The Rossini Clock, which complements the dCS Rossini Apex Player, aims for absolute precision in timing by implementing these features:

- Two crystal oscillators with microcontroller temperature correction.
- The new dual-frequency output and auto-clocking mode used in the Vivaldi and Rossini series improves usability and minimizes jitter, especially with computer audio sources
- Multi-stage regulation ensures that sensitive clock and PLL circuits are not affected by digital interference.
- Aerospace-grade aluminum enclosure with tuned acoustic damping plates reduces magnetic effects and vibration

The one million dollar question, of course, is what this means sonically and how it affects the music!

With the Rossini APEX Player, there is simply no going back to the experience without the clock. The addition of the dedicated clock brings further order to the music, finer detail, greater density, and an expanded measure of acoustic nodes.

I have spent a lot of time in the studios over the years, and among the many improvements that the dedicated master clock brought to overall performance were unmatched stability of sound and a smoothness that correlates closely with the refinement of the analog domain.



Rossini Clock connects to Rossini Apex Player via two supplied BNC digital cables. One input is for multiples of 44.1kHz and the other is for multiples of 48kHz.

The Rossini APEX player benefits from the Rossini Clock in a similar way. In retrospect, I am talking about the studio master clocks, which alone can cost up to 100k.

With Rossini Clock engaged, the music immediately feels more structured and cohesive, and the dCS digital duo provides a deeper focus that can be felt with every fiber of the music.

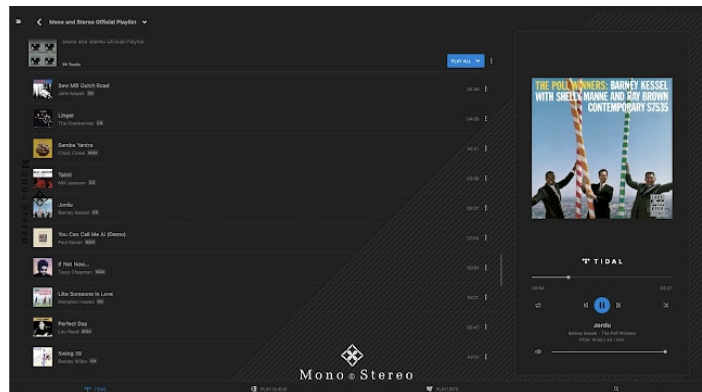
In addition, the entire sound sphere has been better mapped, allowing for a much greater extension and inhabitation of focus points and thus a more believable and factual sense of acoustic space.

Operational

The dCS Rossini APEX Player is compatible with all high-resolution music formats, from DSD to PCM, DXD, and MQA, most if not all streaming options, it can play CD disks and easily connect to external devices and storage drives. Playback is easily managed via the dCS Mosaic Control App, which allows to enjoy and experience music from multiple platforms - including Roon, TIDAL, Qobuz, Deezer, Spotify, Internet Radio, and Apple Airplay.

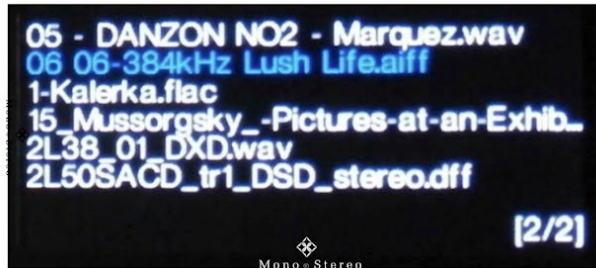


I really liked the Mosaic app because it allows full control of all the settings from a single, intuitive interface. Now that Apple computers with Apple Silicon processors also support native apps for iPhone and iPad, the first thing I did was go to the App Store and check out if there is a dCS Mosaic native app. Not every manufacturer lists their apps or makes them compatible, but kudos to the dCS team.



Not only was the Mosaic App listed there, but it worked with a few clicks of engagement.

So the Rossini APEX can be controlled with a full-screen app on the Mac, doing all the tasks of an iPhone or iPad, but with a super large screen and even without wifi.



With Airplay and its simplicity, virtually anything from the Apple ecosystem can be played. For yours truly, that's a perfect combination and a match made in heaven!

Linking the Qobuz and Tidal as well as other services is as easy as can be (login & password), as is browsing the USB media and the other inputs via the Mosaic App or directly from the dCS Rossini APEX front panel. In network mode, the spacious, well-laid-out Rossini remote also controls play/pause and forward/backward tracks from the play queue. A very nice feature.

Each of the numerous digital input or playback options provides state-of-the-art high-end audio reproduction. Yet... I never thought I'd get enticed to dig out my CDs and take them for a spin. It turned out that what the Rossini APEX Player can do and derive from the Redbook format was not only encouraging but a fascinating discovery.

The familiar albums I own on both CD were, even more than expected, uplifted with analog qualities when compared to my records and copies of master tapes.



A giant grin on my face was a sort of cut & paste of what you'll catch me doing with ritual associated with the replay of vinyl or tapes. But not just because of the ritual. Because of the sound!

The icing on the cake to the dCS Rossini APEX Player's mindboggling connectivity is the internal upsampling, mapping, and filtering options that allow a considerable manipulation of the sound and performance in a way that will entice the minds of more explorative audiophiles and music lovers.

And as with the streaming or replay of the files, the music Rossini APEX played via transport also allows the conversion of the data from CD to high-resolution DSD, DSD/128, or DXD for even higher resolution and more detail, along with spinning the CDs in their native formats.

All in all, with multiple inputs, a variety of formats, streaming services, and programmability, the dCS Rossini APEX Player is a stunning digital hub that not only represents the current state of the art but has demonstrated over time through software/firmware upgrades and the latest APEX hardware upgrade, is a future-proof investment.

I would not say that about many of the not exactly affordable or even far more expensive high-end digital audio solutions on the market.

And last but not least. The dCS Rossini APEX player also features a full-featured state-of-the-art preamp stage. With its flexible and selectable 6V, 2V, 0.6V, or 0.2V RMS outputs, it can either be used with matching outboard preamps or drive the power amplifiers directly. This is something that many purists want and demand, and the Rossini APEX player delivers a premium, top-notch audio signal in spades via selectable gain.

The volume control can also be adjusted between -10dB and -30dB to achieve the optimal setting. The difference between the two adjacent settings is about 10dB.

The Music

The dCS Rossini APEX Player does not use artifices to deceive or trick the listener. On the contrary, it has the unique ability to engage the listener in prolonged and recurring listening where the music comes first and details, balancing act, coherence, richness of detail, and holographic sense of space are inclusive but always subordinate to the music and emotional bonding.

At the upper level of high-end audio DACs, the ongoing challenge is to maintain aural coherence with added and newly introduced drive, detail, faster timing, and emphasis on the sharper attacks of leading edges of notes.

Each high-end audio DAC manufacturer tries to achieve such ultimate balance, but with mixed results.

The dCS Rossini APEX Player does not have to try hard to achieve the above-pointed attributes, because they come as standard from the ground up.

A great reference track that can easily demonstrate the ability of any DAC to capture a variety of top attributes is Amon Tobin's "Vipers Follow You" from the album *Fear in a Handful of Dust*.

What at first glance seems like a chaotic kaleidoscope of sounds is a masterpiece by one of the most fascinating experimental electronic musicians with a long and impressive track record of creating various musical adventures.

The dCS Rossini APEX Player and Rossini Clock reproduced "Vipers Follow You" unimpeded, and I was amazed at the level of unreserved dynamics, the expansion out of the speakers into the room, and the extraordinary augmented narrative of "Vipers Follow You."

As always Tobin's hybrid electronic world is filled with sublime and mysterious aural effervescence. To fully unfold it needs a medium that can cling to distinctive physical motion that is full of vigorous and

fiery dynamic multitudes that can too quickly sound discontinuous if the digital front end cannot follow the utterly complex and demanding dynamism.

The dCS Rossini APEX Player initiated and set in motion "Vipers Follow You" far more unremitting than I would ever presume and with a grander sonic superposition.

The infectious thrill continued with Karate The Bed Is In The Ocean, the band's third album.

There is something fundamentally intoxicating about most of Karate's releases. Eclectic and with plenty of drive!

I have used the Karate cover of "A New Jerusalem" by Talk Talk singer Mark Hollis as a reference in many of my reviews and for many reasons.

It's all about the whole and undivided focus this Boston jazz-rock band displays in the harmonic-distorted sonic escapades that so seemingly pulse across the album.

Making a connection in disconnection is a confusing juxtaposition, but it's something that some people want to emotionally grapple with and has omnipotent charging power.

Many DACs can diminish the kinetic quality of The Bed Is In The Ocean and take the life out of the music. With the dCS Rossini APEX, not only did the Karate spirit remain intact, but the particles fundamental to the music's movement were rejuvenated in a positive, energetic way, giving the music a more complete form without downplaying the necessary variables of motion.

When music playback reaches the threshold where the thought process stops and the sensory guards are bypassed, the true magic and art of power of music sets in. This is a rare thing in the digital domain, but dCS Rossini Apex with Rossini Clock has managed to bring about this rare spectacle, made even more evident with another masterful piece of music by the cult DJ Krush, "Day's End" (After-dusk Mix) featuring Japanese trumpeter Kazufumi Kodama.

Two different types of masterful dexterities are fused into one timeless track that is both musically and sonically unique and also challenging to reproduce properly.

Sharing some affections with the early music of DJ Shadow, DJ Krush comes with a sense of mysterious rapture that slowly builds and captivates the listener to let go and dive deeper into the enchantment. The dCS Rossini APEX Player and Rossini Clock transcoding of "Day's End" was invigorating, to say the least, and I found a moment of inner equilibrium and contentment at being so surprisingly struck by the music.

I did not pursue the usual merits of lower register extension, midrange weight, and treble expansion, nor the dynamic capabilities of what component under review goes through. The music just blew me away, so only after repeated listenings to "Day's End," did I write comments in the listening notes. This is not the process I even remotely associated with the evaluation of the digital front end.

Regardless of genre, if a high-end audio component, especially a front end, is properly engineered, it should translate into emotional binding. This was brought to the point and fixated with Alarm Will Sound Performs Aphex Twin: Acoustica.



Here, one of my favorite artists, Richard D. James aka Aphex Twin, is "decomposed" by acoustic instruments and illustrates just how underrated Aphex Twin's music is.

With the dCS Rossini APEX Player, the Stockhausen and Boccherini-inspired qualities are easily derived. Alarm Will Sound strives to faithfully reproduce the original melancholic ambient acid masterpieces. dCS Rossini APEX Player makes sure that the orchestral arrangement keeps the mindset and spirit intact and the hectic tempi of the rhythm section can be followed without any hiccups.

Music is the only medium that can escape time and space and overcome the everyday mortal limitations of the senses. That is why it is so important that there is no alienation, no alternation in the sculpture of the fragile signal. And this can happen in numerous ways.

Regardless of the genre played, the dCS Rossini APEX Player and Rossini Clock proved their ability to adapt to the variety of musical variables from album to album, with the music always coming from the pitch-black background. Exactly as firmly established and presented with Alarm Will Sound.

With the dCS Rossini Combo, the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Carlos Kleiber (Musikvereinsaal April 1974) was rendered in all its majesty and sonic complexion.

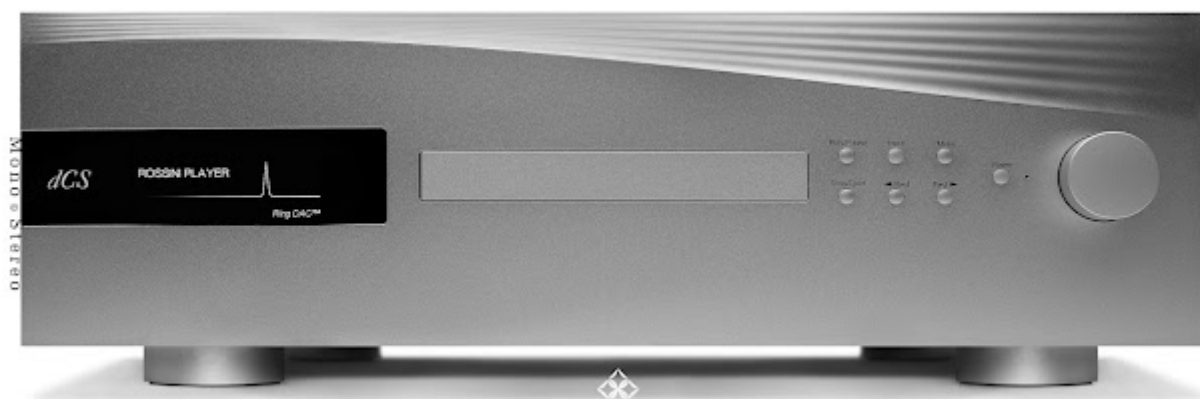
Regardless of how the music in question is to be reproduced, certain false digital artifacts must be avoided during playback. Here the Rossini APEX Player and the Rossini Clock have once again proven their outstanding quality in the absence of digital side (d)effects that can occur during decoding.

In the case of "Symphony No. 5 in C minor op. 67", many DACs, again regardless of price, cannot avoid the music being present for more than a single moment.

To fully develop, "Symphony No. 5 in C minor op. 67" must be propagated spontaneously, but with a firm, fixated momentum, without random modulation of the various dynamic facets, which is as sonic degradation too often, closely associated with many DACs, regardless of the architecture (ladder/Sigma-Delta).

As with other music used for evaluation, the dCS Rossini APEX Player reproduced the Vienna Philharmonic with a unified feel, where both the uniqueness and singularities of the instruments and notes and the completeness of the music have their place. And on contrary to many digital front ends these two seemingly opposing sensations blend seamlessly.

It is quite amazing how in/between silences, encoded in the streams of zeros and ones, the spatial information is hidden, the change of which quickly becomes audible by experimenting with filters and especially upsampling.



Here, time and phase are altered, affecting the perception of acoustic space, the sense of three-dimensionality, and the layout of the holographic acoustic environment, facilitating three-dimensionality.

Among many other advantages, the dCS Rossini APEX Player also differs in this point. The dCS Rossini delivers outstanding purity and faithfully mirrors music as standard, regardless of the medium or format being played and in absence of echoing or ring debris, which can thoroughly alienate the music.

But for audiophiles and music lovers who want to explore the possibilities of sound shaping, especially in the realm of psychoacoustics, the dCS Rossini APEX player offers a sophisticated playground.

And why would anyone want to get involved in this pursuit? One of the biggest challenges for any high-end audio system is to properly tame the sound coming out of the speakers. Every listening room has its particularities and challenges when it comes to acoustics. The manifested sound in the room (and how it is handled) is just as important as what comes from the source. Again, time, phase, first

reflections, room modes, etc. are critical to creating an acoustic illusion that closely resembles the originally captured music.

And this is exactly the reason to experiment with Rossini mapping, filters, upsampling, and yet gain/volume setting. The spatial changes can vary from minuscule to very obvious, but this takes time and, most importantly, hands-on experimentation in a dedicated listening environment. Since no two rooms or audio systems are alike, there is no hard and fast rule, but the result can be shockingly surprising and the dCS Rossini APEX player offers this possibility at its core.

Conclusion

Most of you enjoy daily mono and stereo reports on various systems from all over the world, and in most cases, the chance to notice Bartok, Rossini, and Vivaldi is greater.

Thankfully I still share the same enthusiasm for high-end audio products as many of you. Of course, I could not resist trying out the Rossini Player and Clock Combo as soon as it arrived.

I have been doing what I do for a long time and have heard numerous DACs and digital front ends over the course of nearly three decades of constant evaluations.

Despite the great digital advances made in the last decade, not all DACs and digital front end deliver what the marketing material promises. Many DACs aspire to be special, but in reality, they are only adequate.



dCS is anything but the usual affair or Déjà vu. It has a deep foundation with a sign of unforeseen firmness to decode music, regardless of genre, with fundamental objectivity. Period!

The nub of the dCS essential inner locking is rooted in reality, providing uniquely focused attention and reproduction of music without the effect of information scattering too often associated with digital technology. The dCS Rossini beat is relentless. It jolts the senses and has a far greater density than ordinary and features replay attributes that are fundamental to the objectivity of music.

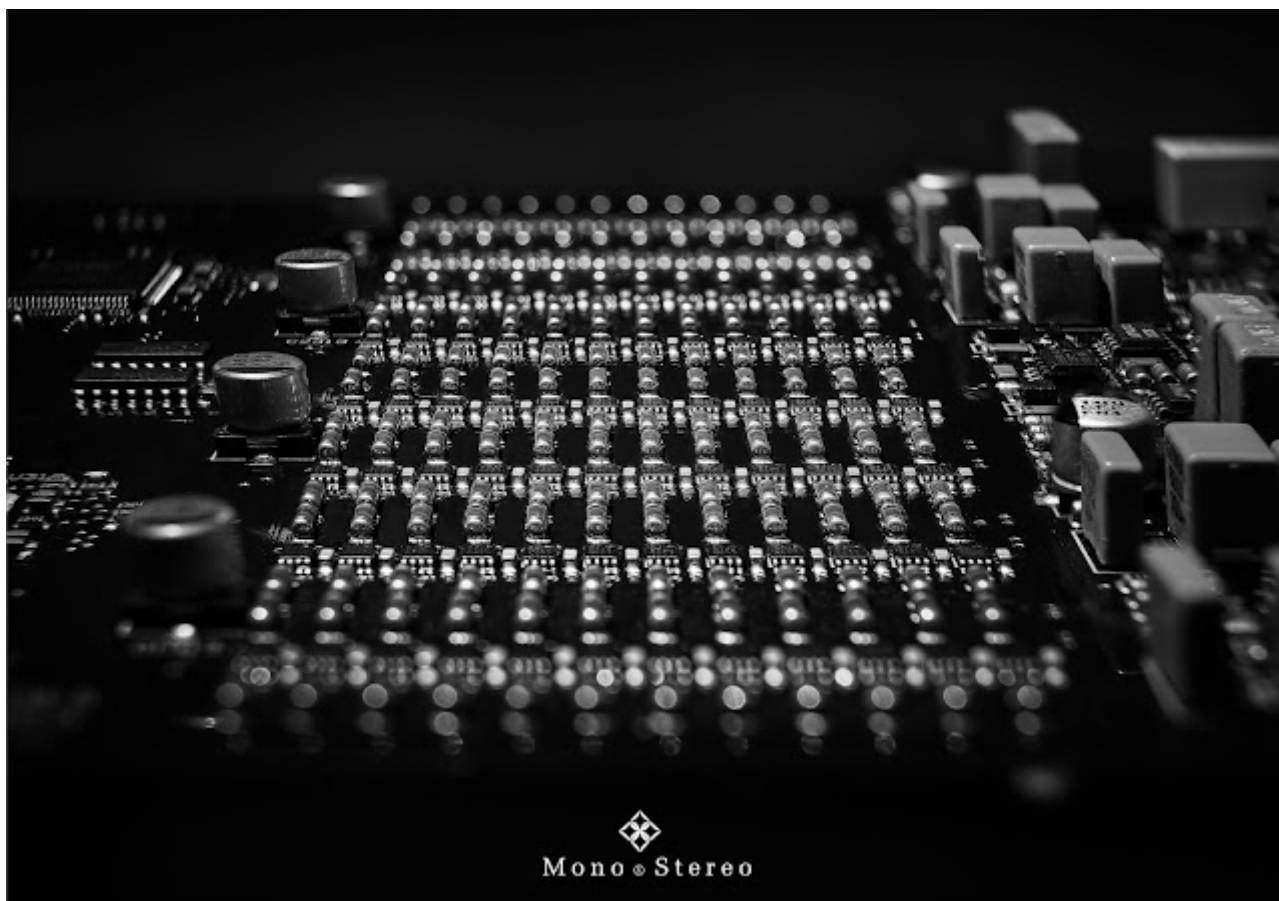
On familiar tracks and albums, Rossini displays a chameleon-like nature that allows it to quickly transform the various sonic ornaments of different genres so that the music remains varied yet emotional.

dCS Rossini has the rare ability not to sound as if the notes have been inserted into the music, but to be an integral part of it and create a spellbinding universe where music continues to exist and continues to be exceptionally distinctive.

Coming from an analog and early digital background going back to the '80s, I have somehow always been confronted with analogue and digital antipodes.

Besides my passion for studio gear, DAWs, converters, recorders and synthesizers, high-end audio has always been a direct result of my almost fanatical obsession with music and sound.

My deeper attachment to the digital music reproduction shifted considerably with the breakthrough of commercial R2R DACs, and I have sort of stayed on that path, which is immediately apparent from my reference system. To my great surprise, I was quite taken with and caught off guard by the Rossini Player and Clock combo.



Rossini Player and Clock offer a rare tactile quality to the music that I usually associate with analog, eliciting an emotional response from the listener that is rich in detail.

Underneath the beautifully crafted case, there is an essential spirit that enriches the perception, permitting the music to evolve into endless soundscapes with impressively calculated results that are always sonically translucent and as such allowing the music to come at forte.

Unlike many other DACs, Rossini manages to intoxicate with a focus on the music rather than artificial bloom and saturation.

Rossini brings out a range of emotions, a refined movement of the music without a scattering of time and phase, which are extremely fragile and of utmost importance in the digital domain.

But the ability to do deliver these two attributes right or follow various tempi is not enough in this era, and dCS Rossini extends its virtues with an invigorating and unique ability to render the illusion of reality beyond expectation, with an immediate commitment to the music that is both compelling and triumphant.

I certainly expected a certain level of reproduction, but not such a well-tuned and organized sense of time and place, followed by lavish details.

What I didn't expect was this kind of impact. The dCS Rossini allows you to venture far into the submarine depths and the Vanta black realms, boldly and proudly cementing the ground rules of the 21st-century digital playback with elegance and uncommon suppleness.



There are many products on the market that simply exist for themselves offering merely a vague presentation of music and that can be too commonly associated with even more expensive digital front ends. As opposed dCS Rossini attains a one-of-a-kind music haven facility and has all the qualities for being and becoming an unmistakable high-end audio icon. Upgrading the Rossini Player to the APEX level improves music playback in every way, and that's no small feat for any product upgrade. Especially in the digital realm. Like all dCS upgrades, APEX is an evolutionary step up, but with a strong leaning towards the revolutionary. The dCS APEX Player simply lets the listener dive deeper into the mysterious realms of Ring DAC technology.

A good DAC makes music lively, a great DAC makes music experienceable beyond the medium. And that's exactly what the dCS Rossini APEX Player and the dCS Rossini Clock do. They transcend the medium. I am deeply fascinated by what the dCS Rossini APEX and the accompanying clock are capable of sonically and musically, providing unique emotional involvement, transparency, and rare back-and-forth communication with the music.

Many have thought about how to make the digital music sound right, engaging, emotionally appealing, natural-sounding, and true to the original, and despite all the efforts, research and development, and the participation of talented people, for most the result is unattainable.

Combined with a balanced system that allows it to perform at its best, dCS Rossini APEX Player is one of those rare examples, the extremely rare digital gems, where the music is decoded by the Ring DAC hippocampus nucleus to the level where the essence remains intact, unchanged from track to track, album to album.



Many DACs in this price range and above are features packed and are more in the realm of sonic probability than sonic consistency and fixity. dCS Rossini APEX Player goes far beyond functional connectivity.

The dCS Rossini APEX Player in connection with the Rossini Clock is a rare example of a DAC that does not tamper with the intricate timing of the music, which can completely destroy the very essence and core of the music and alter one of the many fragile attributes of the digital domain such as phase, delay, and so on.

For what they represent musically, for the giant leap the APEX upgrade makes, and for how much the dCS Rossini APEX Player and Rossini Clock can connect the listener to the crux of the music, I wholeheartedly grant the rare 2022 Mono & Stereo Editors Choice Award to both. The contemporary, stylish, and superbly crafted organic exterior of the dCS Rossini APEX Player is matched with the similarly organic fluidness of the sound it can reproduce. The exterior design cues mimic the flow of organic lines in nature and are mirrored on the inside, where the ones and zeros are decoded with a rare soul and spirit that allows the digital inner heart to surpass the often clinical remnants and echoes of technology and allow the music to fully unfold and remain emotionally infectious.



MATEJ ISAK