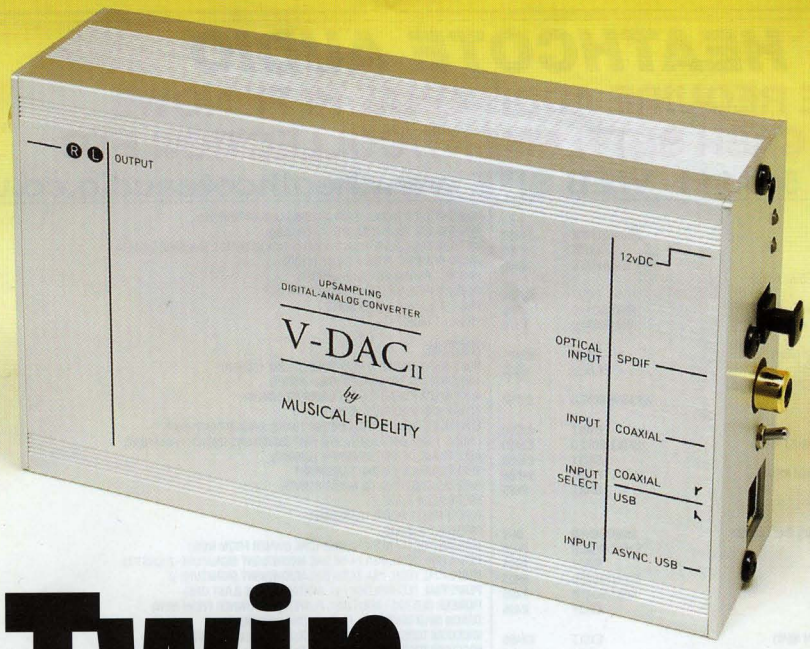

V Twin

Rafael Todes samples the new, updated V-DAC II from Musical Fidelity...

VERDICT
Super value entry level digital convertor with a clean, crisp and engaging sound – plus worthwhile asynchronous USB.

MUSICAL FIDELITY
V-DAC II **£199**
Musical Fidelity
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www.musicalfidelity.com

FOR
- spacious, airy treble
- midband insight
- asynchronous USB
- build and finish

AGAINST
- nothing at the price

To say the original V-DAC wasn't beautiful is an understatement – it looked like it could have been made in a former Soviet republic. But it was however, one of the best sounding DACs around for the money. This new V-DAC II is a classier looking device. Where its predecessor was a black box with bizarre graphics, the new arrival is constructed from machined aluminium, which is thicker than before, with Musical Fidelity's more usual typeface. Whilst proportions are virtually the same, there is a huge difference to the 'perceived' quality.

It has the same inputs as before, S/PDIF and TOSLINK, with a toggle switch to change between USB and the other inputs. There are a pair of LEDs, one for power, the other to show active digital connection. Power is via a wall-wart, which can be upgraded to a V-PSU for £150. The other significant change is that the USB input is now asynchronous, and capable of handling 24bit/192kHz. In other words, it does technically in one box what a combination of the first V-DAC plus the V-Link do.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to Wagner's 'Götterdämmerung', the 'Tagesgrauen' and orchestral interlude from the 'Ring Cycle', using a Bel Canto CD2 as a transport, the V-DAC II shows that it means business. It throws out a fine soundstage, and there is more detail than with the original V-DAC – more texture, more shine to the sound than before. When the big climax arrives with brass blazing, it keeps good order, and manages to differentiate the contrasting orchestral textures well. Compared to the previous model, stage depth is improved and there seems to be more polish to the sound – it sonically glistens in a way that its predecessor didn't.

Listening to the last movement of Mozart's '39th Symphony', on the Linn Records label, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras, on the High-Resolution USB input from my laptop, the DAC produced a bouncy, energetic performance with good separation of instruments. It captured the boisterous sense of fun of the piece in a thoroughly unrepressed way!

The Scherzo of Beethoven's '4th Symphony' (Sir Colin Davis and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra) is the height of maverick rhythmic invention, and illustrates the difference between the new and old V-DACs. There is a hint of grain around the strings on the old, the new version having a cleaner sound, slightly deeper soundstage, and I am aware of how the new unit copes better with the massive Beethovenian crescendo that occurs and makes it all the more terrifying!

The original V-DAC was a fine product, and Musical Fidelity have advanced its cause significantly with this new iteration. And of course, sartorially speaking, it's a giant step forward too!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our analysis shows the V-DAC has flat frequency response to 10kHz with just a very slight roll down above this frequency. This characteristic will ensure the DAC does not sound unduly 'warm' but at the same time it should lack brightness or glare.

Distortion levels were as low as they get from 16bit PCM, measuring 0l.18% at -60dB and this resulted in a very good EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 101dB. With 24bit resolution distortion dropped to a very low 0.02% at -60dB, and this is as good as it gets from 24bit PCM, so the V-DAC gets the best from high resolution audio as well as CD.

Output measured a normal 2.25V and noise a low -116dB.

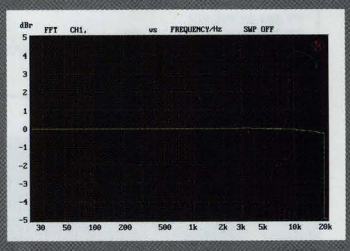
The V-DAC II measured well in all areas and should give excellent sound quality. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	
CD	2Hz - 21kHz

Distortion	%
0dB	0.0003
-6dB	0.0005
-60dB	0.18
-80dB	4.6

Separation (1kHz)	118dB
Noise (EC A)	-116dB
Dynamic range	101dB
Output	2.2V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION