Review: Weiss DAC204 Digital to Analog Converter

July 20, 2023 | Michael Lavorg

The little DAC that could.

You could say I was predisposed to falling for the Weiss DAC204. After all, I really liked the Weiss DAC501 (review) for its sound and DSP'd feature-richness and I love the look of the little DAC204 with its retro toggle switches and no fuss no muss approach. Wouldn't it be fabulous if the cute little DAC204 kept the DAC501's sound in its stripped down form?

Truth be told on a personal level, I'm pretty much a no fuss no muss kinda guy even when it comes to digital. I'm not a fan of complication or inconvenience even if that means sacrificing some iota of performance. My thinking goes that even if some crap interface to my digital music playback sounds a skosh better than Roon, something I've not heard for myself, you can keep it. If I was itching to improve the sound of my system I can always change a cable and keep Roon's
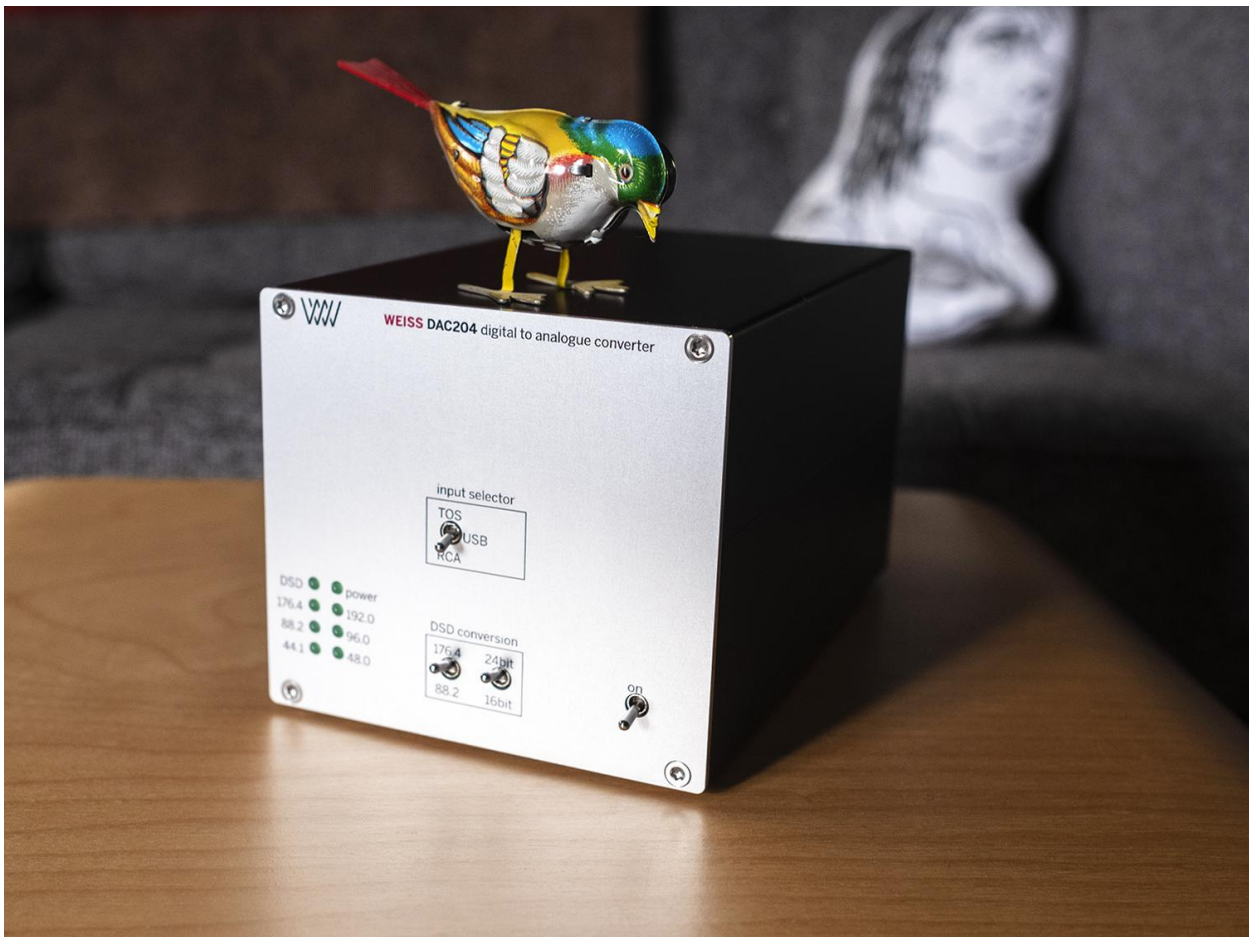
convenience. While the notion that hifi is limitless in its ability to improve sonically, we really do have to stop somewhere and focus on things like the full experience, enjoyment, and music.

So let's talk about what the Weiss DAC204 does and doesn't do. The DAC204 maxes out at 24-bit/384kHz via USB for PCM files and it converts incoming DSD up to DSD128 to either 16- or 24-

bit/88.2 or 176.4 kHz PCM. Your choice. Weiss recommends 24-bit/176.4 kHz which is what I set it to even though I only played one DSD album during the DAC204's 2-month+ stay.


Around back you'll find a bunch of digital inputs (1x USB, 2x AES/EBU or S/PDIF on Toslink or RCA connectors), single-ended RCA and balanced XLR outputs along with digital outputs if you choose to use the DAC204 as a digital-to-digital converter. There are also two toggle switches, did I mention I love a toggle switch, to attenuate the output gain by 10 or 20dB to match your system's gain. Lastly, there's a connector to attach the included barrel terminated external switching power supply.

Cute as a button. You can connect up to three digital sources at a time and move between them using the top Input Selector toggle, while a series of little green LEDs light up to indicate the incoming sample rate or flavor of the music in play.

There's no volume control, headphone amp, display, or remote control as the Weiss DAC204 is mostly just a DAC, which is exactly how I used it, that employs *several signal reclocking schemes…combined for a high jitter attenuation* and *4 oversampling sigma delta D/A converters per channel …operated in parallel for enhanced signal to noise performance*.
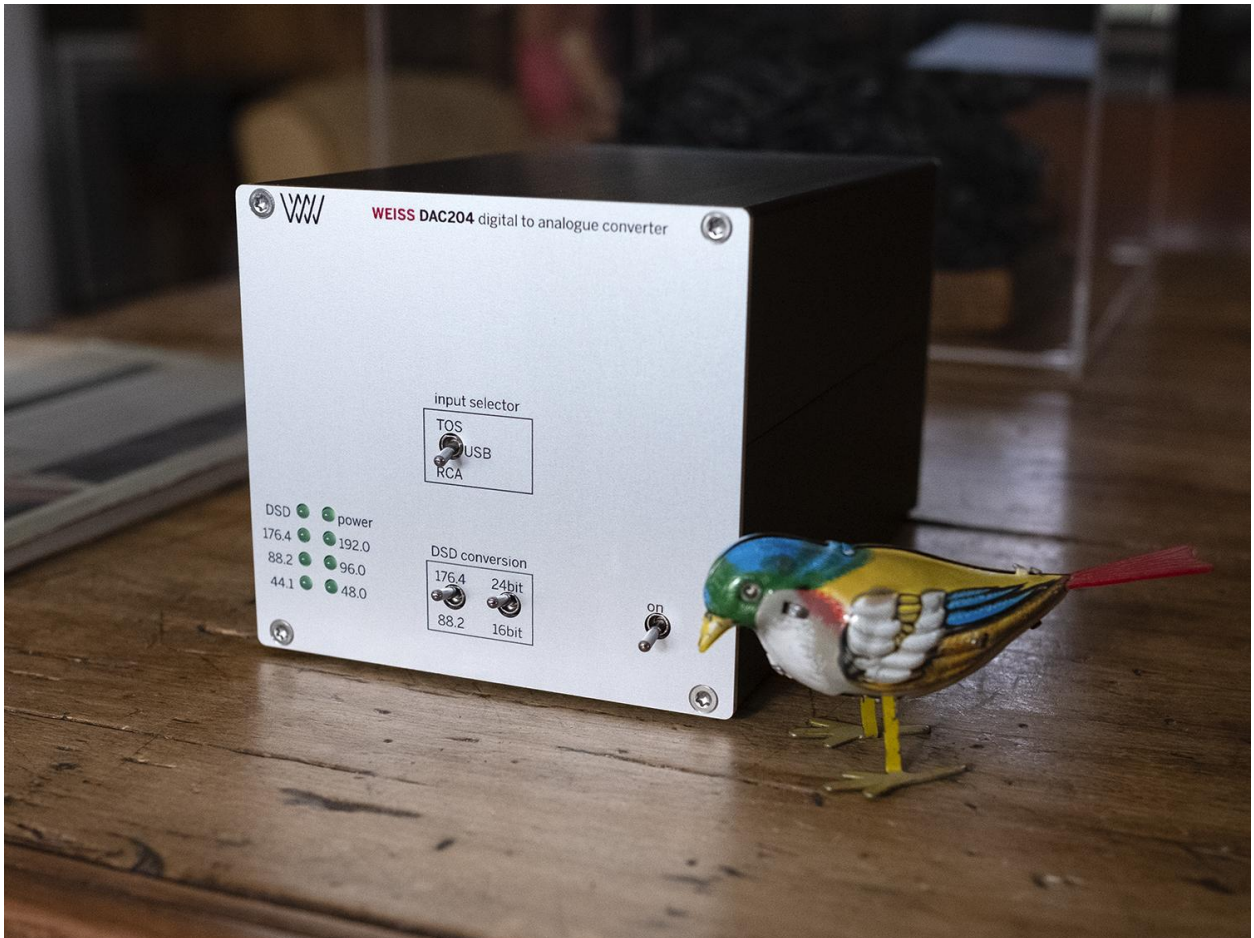
As I've mentioned countless times, I play music according to the meandering path that music naturally makes without concern for bit depth, sample rate, or format. So there's nothing about the DAC204's specs that put me off in the least, even if the Flute Quintet of Singapore's version of "Whole Lotta Love" was recorded in quintuple DSD using one mic and an angel sent from hi-res heaven to hold it.

I started listening to the Weiss DAC204 on my desktop where it fit so perfectly you might think Daniel Weiss or I scaled it or the plywood stack that raises my iMac to eye level to match. Perfectly. Paired with the ADAM A3X powered monitors that have lived on my desktop for more than 10 years—I've owned and used the same speakers for more than 10 years and nothing bad has happened—music played with superb clarity as if it was being made inside my head. Only bigger.

The Weiss DAC204 paired with the Barn resident ADAM A3X powered monitors made beautiful music together, sounding superbly resolving without even a hint of sharp edges, capable of revealing fine levels of micro-stuff while never loosing its grip on macro stuff. Some standout qualities here, in this system context, were nuance, texture, tone, and scale. From the tiniest pluck to a churning orchestral maelstrom. Nice. Very nice. Compared to the loads less expensive (and HiFi Bargain) AudioQuest DragonFly Cobalt DAC that typically resides in this simple system,

the Weiss DAC204 brought with it more of everything making music sound more present, more physical, and more engaging. No real surprises there considering the price delta.

ANOHNI & the Johnsons latest *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross* is beauty incarnate. Taking inspiration from Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, *My Back* grooves and moves with Anohni's trembling vocals sounding perfectly angelic in all her forlorn grace. Listening in the nearfield as is the case on my desktop does a few things but the most interesting thing is it takes the room out of the equation (and we all know that rooms are hifi's greatest enemy). With the ADAM A3X we can add a nearly eerie sense of sparkling clarity that seems to originate inside my head. With the Weiss DAC204 running this show, I was absolutely submersed in *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross* feeling fully enrapt without any barrier to complete entry. I could, very easily and very happily, live with this system for another ten years as its level of resolving power revealed music's full emotive force. Stunning.

Next up on the Weiss DAC204's Barn tour was a stop in the big system—DeVore Fidelity O/96 (review), Leben CS600, Auralic AIRES G1.1 (review), with cables and power conditioning from AudioQuest (full system details).

Purity. That's the word that sprung to mind when I sat for a focused listen in front of the DeVore O/96 with the DAC204 in control of bit-to-wave conversion. Adrienne Lenker's *Songs* from 2020 remains one of the loveliest records in recent memory and through this system Lenker's vocals and guitar sprung to life in vivid relief. Finely detailed and as sweet as honey, the Weiss DAC204 proved to be more than up to the level of refinement this system has to offer and the main difference I noted between the $2895 Weiss and the > $12k totaldac d1-unity was one of body and weight—the totaldac imbued music with a greater sense of dimensional structure making everything sound a bit more full figured, more fully formed and fleshy. While this difference wasn't huge in ultimate terms, I find when I'm in the listening zone even minor differences can be important.

That being said, we are of course talking about comparative differences which is not the same as talking about how engaging the Weiss DAC204 is or isn't. On that note, I had no trouble falling deep into this sweet gem of *songs* as far as I cared to go with the Weiss DAC in control.
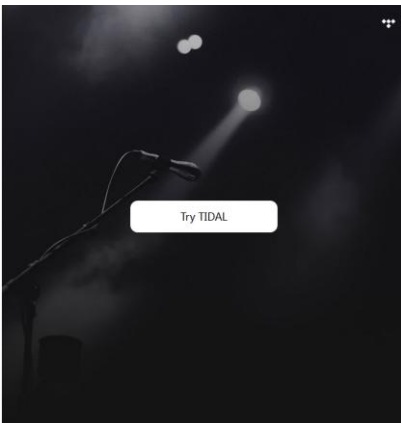
Natural Wonder Beauty Concept is Ana Roxanne and DJ Python (Brian Piñeyro) and their self titled debut album, released on Mexican Summer earlier this month, is a twitchy, glitchy ethereally mesmerizing haunt. The songs that form *Natural Wonder Beauty Concept* act like soft, dense clouds lifting the listener to nether regions. The little Weiss DAC204 grabbed all of the magic contained herein, acting like an expert groundskeeper tending to a lovely garden leaving things feeling natural, groomed, and blossomed. I could nearly smell the atmosphere wafting into the Barn from these slow, steady dreamy beats.
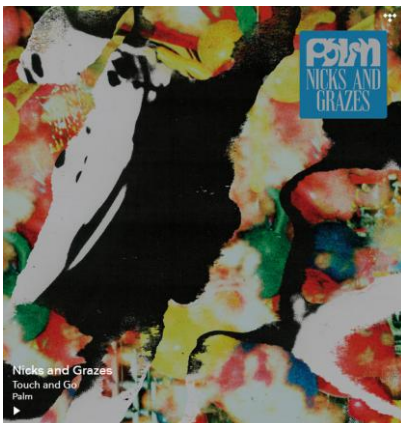
Philadelphia-based quartet Palm is guitarists/vocalists Eve Alpert and Kasra Kurt with Gerasimos Livitsanos on bass and Hugo Stanley on drums and on 2022's *Nicks and Grazes*, their third studio album, make tenuously restrained hyperactive processed indie rock (kinda kidding about the genre thing). Sounds explode on *Nicks and Grazes* exploring the full fun stereo has to offer with sounds whizzing through space in Barn as if they were tied to skittish hummingbirds. Lovely.

From the liner notes:

> *"We wanted to reconcile two potentially opposing aesthetics," Krasa Kurt says. "To capture the spontaneous, free energy of our live shows while integrating elements from the traditionally gridded palette of electronic music."*

The Weiss DAC204 in this system created a big, lush, and finely detailed sound world that felt at once perfectly resolved and fully free, with no sense of the rigid confines that some digital can impose.

While it's been way too long since the lovely Weiss DAC501 departed the Barn, I am very confident that the sense of superb smooth clarity coming from the DAC204 is a Weiss family trait. If you've longed for a stripped down DAC from Daniel Weiss that retains the house sound, your wishes have been fulfilled by the DAC204. And it's cute as a button (with toggle switches).

I f you got the sense that this review could have been even shorter, I wouldn't argue the point. The Weiss DAC204 is a D/A converter for people looking for a no frills DAC with a small footprint that sounds as finely nuanced, fluid, fit and full as your music demands. It worked wonderfully, damn near perfectly, as part of my simple desktop system paired with the ADAM A3X powered monitors as well as in the Barn-filling DeVore/Leben/Auralic rig.

Sometimes things do work out fabulously and the Weiss DAC204 doesn't sacrifice one iota of performance in its stripped down form. The DAC204 positively leaps onto my Favorite DAC List and I wouldn't let its price fool you into thinking its limited in any significant way. Bravo!

In an interesting twist on timing, stay tuned for a follow up review where I'll dig into a full desktop super-system featuring the Weiss DAC204 and Enleum AMP-23R (review) driving a pair of DeVore Fidelity micr/Os (more info). Yea I know—it's a tough job but someone's got to do it.

Weiss DAC204 D/A Converter
Price: $2895
Company Website: Weiss Engineering
North American Distributor: Bluebird Music

Technical Info

The DAC204 has a total of three digital stereo inputs: 1x USB, 2x AES/EBU or S/PDIF on Toslink or RCA connectors
Accepted formats: PCM 44.1kHz up to 384 kHz, DSD 64x / 128x
Analog Outputs: XLR, RCA
Digital Outputs (AES/EBU): XLR, RCA, BNC
Two toggle switches for output level setting
External power supply connector
An external power supply is included. All sensitive voltages have their own linear regulators.

Dimensions

Depth: 16.5 cm / 6.5 inches
Width: 10.5 cm / 4.2 inches
Height: 9.5 cm / 3.8 inches