



Denmark :

## Metrum Acoustics Musette

By: Kim Olsen - 2016

Metrum have changed the internals of their DAC but has it improved the sound ?

Metrum Octave MkII, as we previously tested has got a replacement. The casework is the same but what lies within is significantly different.

The new version is an upgraded model but with a different design, so it has been given a new name and we cannot compare with Metrum's previous entry-level model.

It is based on the so-called Transient Dac One modules, which are also used in the top model Pavane. It is a resistance based DAC, a so-called R2R design, where one does not have a chip but a lot of small resistors with very low tolerance, translating the data signal into an electrical signal.

The modules can theoretically operate up to 400 MHz sampling rates running internally but the signal is limited in practice to 384 kHz coming through the USB port. The higher internal sampling rate, according Metrum, provides even better positioning of instruments in the soundstage and good channel separation, where you can obtain a signal/noise ratio of 140 dB.



As with most other DAC's there are USB, Optical Toslink and then two Coaxial / SPDIF inputs. USB drives up to 384 kHz sampling, SPDIF up to 192 kHz and Optical up to 96 kHz. Analog output supplies the normal 2 volts with a very low distortion of 0.007% THD.

Why Metrum still insist on the Optical input, not able to receive 192 kHz signals, makes little sense.

## The Sound of Metrum's R2R DAC :

The first thing you notice is an incredibly quiet and dark background. Like all Metrum products we have tested, the sound is very homogeneous, more analog and natural in its representation than many chip-based DAC's. And Musette seems to have a pure and natural high frequency - if remembered correctly, treble better than the original Octave, which has long been a favourite on the test bench.

And the very special treble reproduction, is perceived against a dark background in comparison with a few others, musical flow well reflected in the Johnny Cash song "Like the 309". Here captured incredibly, much spatial information from the recording, in treble and upper midrange, very impressive for the price. And at the same time great presence.



The DAC has very well defined bass, each little reverb on bass heard clearly on Diana Kralls "Stop This World" and there is the same level of precision all the way up in the register. Room information about each instrument is also really well captured. Notes hit are also very sensible and accuracy in the reproduction is surprisingly good.

Michael Jackson's "Beat it" is well presented - especially with the drive on the bass. For the highest level connoisseur, the choral effects can be somewhat lacking in openness in the lower midrange and there is not quite the separation as also found with the larger Hex DAC from Metrum. Ultra hardcore aficionados may feel less pelvic impact on this number. But for everyone else, it is more than good.

Dizzy Mizz Lizzy and Dire Straits provide a good bottom end that is extremely accurate in impact but a bit subdued in the treble. It does not matter, for notes appear very realistic but the pelvic thrust suffers a bit also and does not have the same openness as is remembered on the larger HEX model.

"Take Five" by Dave Brubeck Quartet featuring a tremendously good saxophone reproduction, actually played here almost on a par with the reference CD/DAC we had standing in with Musette but only almost. Piano reproduction could have been a bit more open in the register but then we could not find more criticism out of the presentation. Drum solo reproduced with undisputed realism in both dynamics and resolution and we are quite happy here to have equipment that can withstand the rigors of realistic sound levels, for it befits Musette to show what it can do with transients, control and detail.



Lisa Ekdahls Papillas Samba offers an openness and especially dynamic sound from fingers plucking of guitar strings. It's pretty good. However, it needed a bit more bite on cello strings in the background. She stands very clearly in the living room and Musette has otherwise primarily featured large open recordings and shows here that it is now quite correct, where you can clearly hear that this is a studio Swedish elf who might just be standing a centimetre or two too close to the microphone. Her voice is quite correctly reproduced.

Queens "slightly food" is a very dynamic reproduction with good transient response and resolution. There's all the airiness needed but without sibilance. There is less S and T emphasis than you are used to - more clean highs if you will.

If playing Rammstein you will experience a very defined and abundant bottom end, with plenty of transient tolerance. It reinforces the image that despite Musette's name, it can deliver something that inevitably sounds like a real bass drum.



The theme to The Pink Panther is clear and clean with a low noise floor. Xylophone reproduction is fine and well-resolved but may lack the ultimate in overtone sensations. Both Hammond organ and the fans come through fine and hi-hat attacks have the right metal sound but we would like to have heard a little more crash in the sound. Otherwise this track appears quite detailed on the fast passages.

Sound output is executed well from the speakers with the Don Turbolento number from Yello. Spatial elements of the enveloping bass are there, while other effects appear natural and vibrant. All benefitting from the dynamics provided.

### **Overall :**

Voice reproduction is one of the areas where many fail. Fortunately Musette does not and whether it's a dry rasp from Johnny Cash or small fine aria stanzas from Stine Mari Long Beach makes no difference, voices are reproduced with the depth they deserve.

Musette DAC has been tested in multiple setups and on first hearing perceived as a bit dark - but each time ending up that it probably was more the absence of noise in the treble. It matters not, whatever the music, a more natural sound is reproduced presenting the recording space really well. Musette seems better than Octave - but also a bit more expensive.