



From Greece :

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Metrum Musette Μέτρον Άριστον [review]



From Holland comes Metrum Acoustics, a manufacturer that is famous for their own view on how to convert a signal from Digital to Analog. The Netherlands is the home of Philips, where they developed a few decades ago the CD player that obviously ... includes a DAC. In those years Philips manufactured DAC chips, such as the well-known TDA series - through which the TDA1541 and TDA1543 later stood out. Today they do not rule anymore in this area and the ESS (Sabre), Burr-Brown (PCM), Cirrus Logic, AKM and others monopolise.

The above chips are almost ready solutions, each manufacturer can create their own DAC, providing their own take on the power supply and the output stages of the device. Some companies such as the MSB, Playback or dCS transitioned into more complex conversion solutions, no ready-made chips. They succeeded but cost a fortune.

Metrum could have followed this path with ready-made chips but being Dutch and influenced by Philips, dusted off the old books and "made" their own ... as with the old masters.

The Musette, that we experience here is different, thinking NOS (does not mean New Old Stock at first sight) but Non Over Sampling - 'no resampling'. It is a voltage DAC device implementation that does not use industrial chips but the traditional technique that we learned in school with R-2R type ladder resistances. It accepts the input digital Word and gives the output a voltage proportional to the numbers of bit input.

This fits perfectly with the doctrine of non-oversampling, something that Metrum's DAC's espouse, since we don't want to use digital filtering, or involve modulation noise and other technical correction. Here the "chips" are called Transient One converters, manufactured by Metrum itself and in Musette we have one per channel. The Transient module is large in size and mounted on special bases which can be removed, perhaps for some new Dac Two modules (about half credit card size) as an upgrade.

As with one bit converters, although Dac One is 16bit, it can manage sound formats with 24bit analysis because of their high speed. At the forefront of the NOS movement we have Ryohei Kusunoki, a Japanese engineer, who has fought against oversampling because he believes it removes the feeling and naturalness of music - where rival camps have strived for super-resolution. This non approach existed until the late 1990's, mainly to solve the problems of bad Sigma-Delta converters back then. Today they have evolved significantly.

Non Over Sampling

The Musette is representative of this trend and the basic 'gate' entry into the wonderful world of traditional electronics with modern features. The entry-level Metrum, has two even bigger brothers such as Pavane, plus a headphone amplifier is also manufactured. The Musette comes in black or silver finish to choose from and has compact dimensions. It's not just a DAC but a demonstration device of NOS virtues. On the front panel there are five buttons, one on/stand-by and four for the choice of input.

The only indicator is the LED showing the signal lock and stand-by. There is no screen to see the elements of the signal that "locks". The device has two Coaxial inputs this time when most just have a DAC and a Visual. Musette also has a USB port for use with a computer. In the package there are drivers for installing the device on PC, developed by Italian company M2Tech utilising XMOS. The Coaxial inputs accept signals 192KHz/24bit and 96KHz/24bit Optical in. The USB can climb even higher to 384KHz/24bit. It is understood it plays only PCM and there is no native DSD.

In short the Musette is "essential minimalism". Internal quality of construction is high, with toroidal transformer based power supply and good componentry. We tested the device with all inputs, both laboratory and sound. The best performing was "caught" by the Coaxial inputs.

And USB fared extremely well in tests with files 192/24 and smaller resolutions.

Listening is pleasant and flooded with proportional analog elements, that you will adore if your primary source is a turntable. Strict complexions and correct dynamic expression in the sound stage is what we found. There is a vitality and energy in the music, elements that come effortlessly and without difficulty. Musette has the ability to correctly focus the stereo image, without blurring or any "deformities". Beautifully recreates the scene in front of the listener, making a three-dimensional sound, with good transients and purity in "agressive" passages, whilst avoiding any slight hyper extension with high frequencies.

Sound is not tight or constricted, but ripe with many harmonics reminiscent of "liberation" from control. Although an intermediate device, it nevertheless portrays the feeling of space and air. It presents instruments and voices with spatial accuracy, while the details are all there, especially when our music is ultra-high resolution. From USB, the dynamics are there but not as perfectly focused stereo images, as from the Coaxial inputs.

Not an expensive DAC, nor the size of an MSB.

Musette expresses the NOS viewpoint and supports with a "lampato (fine Italian wine ?)" sound.

It is different and we recommend listening !



HYPER

- Two Coaxial inputs
- USB DAC
- Analog audio with substance
- Asking price

KATA

No XLR output
No DSD

COMMENT

From a different school, the Musette is a converter without competition, given performance, as it does not resemble anything else out there.

No, not another Sabre !