

Review Metrum Acoustics Jade dac - preamplifier

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ALPHA-AUDIO
APPROVED



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Intro

Alpha-Rating
★★★★★

The best!

Tested by: Jaap Veenstra

€ 2999

Building quality ██████████
Employability ██████████
Display ██████████
price ██████████



The Review System :

Metrum Jade, Pass Labs XP-12, Pavane, NAD M50, AVM M30 Monos & Daudio SI Dipole Speakers

Metrum Acoustics we know at Alpha Audio. The Dutch company has been making converters with the NOS principle for a long time : Non Oversampling. It is a technology that does not apply oversampling ; no filtering. 'What goes in, comes out'. The Metrum Acoustics Jade (and Onyx) is the last in this series. The Jade has - just like the Adagio - the latest Transient DAC-2 chips for even more accurate digital to analogue conversion. We will take a closer look at this newcomer.

Metrum is rapidly expanding its range and business. And that's a good thing. The market not only demands good products but also affordable products, an ecosystem and streaming. In short : it is a good thing to have both a Pre-amplifier and Dac plus a Power Amplifier and possibly a streaming bridge in the range. And that is exactly what Metrum is doing now. It is therefore possible to put a complete Metrum set together.

Well ... apart from Cables and Speakers.

Anyway, who knows, that may happen - even though we are always in favor of the 'stick to your knitting' principle. A manufacturer who is good at converters - or digital audio in general - does not always have to be good in speakers.

Mini Adagio

The Jade is in fact an Onyx with volume control. And a 'half' Adagio. The - lossless - volume control is taken straight from the Adagio. And the Dac chips are also the same. However, the Adagio has eight and the Jade four.

So we see four DAC-2 - Transient Two chips inside. Chips that are actually stereo in themselves. So there are simply eight Dacs in it. However, they work together. Each module has two 16-bit ladder Dacs where only 12 bits are used. The bottom four bits are not used. Twice 12 bits form one 24-bit Dac.

How Cees does this is quite fascinating. In the Transient Two module there is an FPGA that splits the incoming digital signal (loud/quiet) and divided over the two 'upper registers' of the internal Dacs. After the conversion, the whole is merged again - and *fielded* so that the volume is corrected - and we have a complete signal.

Bizarre...

The reason that Metrum does this is to stay away from the lower regions of the Dac because these - relatively - have more noise than the middle and higher segments. Because of this division, more layer definition is achievable and more detail available in quieter passages.

The inputs and outputs

On the back of Jade we see a number of inputs : USB, AES, Coaxial and Optical. The USB input can be exchanged for an 'Ethernet' connection with a Rune endpoint from Metrum : the Ambre. It is also possible to apply an MQA module. The question is how much sense does this make for a NOS Dac - since there are no filters ? But well : it can ... We test without it though. Although the M50 can do the first unfold and thus send a semi-corrected signal to the Metrum.

On the output side we see both XLR and Single Ended connections. Finally, some trigger couplings to automatically switch on a Power Amplifier (Forte) for example. So wonderfully complete.

On the front it is sober and tight : an input button. Point ... Yeah ... nothing more to see here. Switching on just goes on the back and standby goes via a few presses on the input button until it shows the light in standby mode. Nice solution. We have already mentioned the volume control in the video (not favoured). So we do not have anything further to say on that, except that we find this a point for improvement.

However : there is a perfectly functioning Remote control. In short : no deal-breaker in our opinion.

Set-up

We test the Jade in our standard set where this time we also incorporate a pair of Daudio S1 Speakers. Monstrous performing Speakers are behind us. Very sleek and very detailed. Great to be able to hear differences. Furthermore, of course the Pass Labs XP-12 (we also used directly), the NAD M50 (also controlled via Roon), the Pavane (for comparison) and AVM M30 Monoblocks.

Cables come from Audioquest (Oak, Diamond Coax, NRG-1000 net cabling), Grimm TPM and Kemp (PowerStrip 8Plus + reference).



Music Maestro !

We have already mentioned it in the video : the Metrum Acoustics Jade comes very close to the Pavane and Adagio. There is a difference. However, in our opinion and in our System, the difference is rather small ... It is mainly about authority (especially in the lower regions), a bit of focus and imaging. We hear that the Pavane focuses somewhat more tightly ; slightly more in proportion and slightly sharper. But to say ... WOW ... what a difference ! No. Certainly not.

For example, the sound balance is exactly the same : tight and deep lows, nice open and fast middle and sparkling highs. That actually means that every genre sounds good. As it should be of course. Because the only thing a converter has to do is convert digital to analogue. No extra salt, pepper or mayo ... just play.

Without Pass

If we use the Metrum Acoustics Jade directly with the AVMs, we hear an audible but small difference. That says a lot about the Pass Labs (it adds almost nothing - which is a positive feature) but also about the Metrum : it is therefore capable of good control of the AVMs. The stereo image remains completely intact. And the timbre identical. Although it seems to lose a little warmth (less coloring ?).

That does not surprise us because the Pass always makes things a little bit more ... a little bit *smoother* ... but without making the overall sound thick or colored. We love it ... but well. That is not relevant.

What is more beautiful now depends entirely on taste, wishes, requirements, Speakers and space. We find ourselves open to both options. Directly cost-effective it is a lot more interesting. And with a less open, Critical Speaker - the Daudio is really a kind of window on things - it can be excellent.

For whom ?

The Metrum Acoustics Jade is a perfect Pre-Amp Dac for those who want to play at a serious level without paying the big price. Yes : the Adagio is a bit tighter in imaging and has a tad more authority in the lower frequencies. And of course the casework is a lot more upscale. But whoever stands on the ground with two feet will not be able to deny ... that the Jade has a better Price : Quality ratio.

The icing is : more devices are coming in this series. Think of a Power Amplifier, Ambre Roon endpoint and a module for connection to Ambre. MQA is also possible (insofar as this makes sense in a NOS Dac).

In short : Plenty of possibilities.

Conclusion

The Metrum Acoustics Jade really is a beauty. A converter with lossless volume control where everyone who owns digital sources will enjoy. The sound is fair, open, fast and engaging. A musicality that lets the artist do the work ... not the converter. And we like that. Fat Alpha Approved!

<https://www.alpha-audio.nl/2018/02/review-metrum-acoustics-jade-dac-voorversterker/3/>