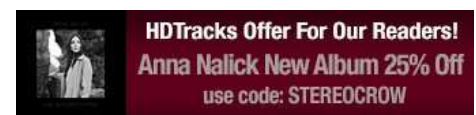




DIGITAL PROCESSOR REVIEWS

Jadis JS1 MkV Reference D/A processor

Alex Halberstadt | Dec 22, 2021



"Resolution can be a tricky thing when it comes to digital," my friend Michael Lavorgna recently told me. "Too much, and my focus shifts from music to sound; too little, and I become less engaged." Lavorgna, a visual artist and proprietor of the online audio-and-music publication *Twittering Machines* (footnote 1), is one of my favorite people to talk to about records, books, art, and hi-fi. We've been doing it for almost 20 years.

What Michael said about resolution mirrored my own experience but nagged at me. If resolution is a good thing, then how can there be too much of it? After thinking about it for a while, I realized that he was on to something. Designing an audio component is less like building a suspension bridge and more like cooking a pot of chili: You balance ingredients in an attempt to create something enjoyable. To put it differently, audio components have to be *voiced*. This means not just achieving good sound but prioritizing the listener's ability to enjoy music, since we use our systems to listen to humans making us feel things and not to the whistles of tube-nosed fruit bats.

Enjoying music at home is the sole purpose of this pastime. That's really it. Measurements may provide a starting point and show us why the component sounds the way it does—or not—but designing a piece of audio gear that will enhance your love of music requires the application of aesthetic discernment, experience, and many hours of listening. If you



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later go through. upgrading to a component that promises more performance and ends up delivering less engagement.

When I was in my 20s, I saved up for a large, impressive-looking turntable with a sprung suspension; it was intended to replace my comparatively spartan [Rega Planar 3](#). I just knew it would deliver deeper bass, a bigger soundstage, and more silent silences—and it did. But when I listened to it for the first time, I found myself having trouble enjoying—and eventually even paying attention to—the Thelonious Monk record I was playing. I could hear the sonic improvements, but now Monk sounded bored, or maybe mildly sedated; soon, that's how I felt, too. I sold the turntable a month later. Has something like this ever happened to you?



The Jadis JS1 MkV Reference

I thought about my conversation with Michael a lot during the several months I spent living with the Jadis JS1 MkV Reference DAC, a two-chassis fantasia in chromed and gold-plated steel that retails for \$20,900. Taking it out of its box reminded me of how, as a younger audiophile, I pined for Jadis amplifiers reviewed in these pages; with their gleaming metalwork and rows of tubes, they looked both opulent and steampunk. Handling the JS1, I wasn't disappointed: The input selector knob elicited a distinctly luxurious *thunk*, and instead of the pinprick LEDs found on most audio gear, the French DAC sports multicolored lamps that shine through tiny portholes, which make it easy to find in the dark. This nautical detail and all that polished metal made me think of Jules Verne; occupying two shelves on my equipment rack, the 66lb Jadis processor resembled a piece of navigation gear scavenged from Captain Nemo's underwater ship, the Nautilus.

Despite its majestic weight, size, and price, the JS1 offers few concessions to modernity or convenience: no volume control, no network connection, no selectable filters, no MQA, no wireless anything. On the front, you'll find power switches for the analog and digital sections, as well as the input selector and those bright lights, which indicate whether the unit's on, the file type, and the sampling rate. On the back are four digital inputs, balanced and unbalanced analog outputs, jacks for the two umbilical cables that connect the two chassis—separate connections for the digital and analog circuitry, with independent grounds—and an IEC receptacle for your favorite power cord. That's about it. The message seems to be that the hot-running JS1 is all about listening, not tinkering.

What makes this a Jadis component—and distinct from most other digital gear—is tubes, which are used in the output stage of the analog section and for regulation in the massive outboard power supply. Digital conversion is accomplished with a pair of AK4497 DAC chips from Asahi Kasei

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provided, these top out at 24/192 except for the USB input, which allows sampling frequencies of up to 384kHz and the playback of DSD files.



J.C. Calmettes, the JS1's designer, explained that the S/PDIF, AES3, and optical inputs rely on a digital transceiver to convert the signal to the I²S format before it is routed to the DAC chips, whereas the USB input sends the signal to a decoding board that's connected directly to the I²S bus. This may explain why I strongly preferred listening through the USB input, which sounded more open, dynamic, and colorful than the others. In my experience, DACs that rely on delta-sigma conversion often tend to sound slightly better when playing back DSD rather than PCM files. The JS1 proved no exception, and during my auditioning I got the best results by setting Roon to convert and upsample PCM data to DSD256.

Listening

When first listening to an expensive DAC, I expect to hear playback that's composed, well-sorted, insightful, and maybe a little buttoned down. What I don't expect to hear is sheer fun. Which is why my first listen to the JS1 floored me. It didn't sound like any DAC I've heard; what it *did* sound like is a great 7" record minus the groove noise. Okay, that's overstating things a bit, but the Jadis took almost no time in establishing its expansive, easy-to-listen-to, celebratory personality. It allowed the music to flow with not a trace of the edginess, glassiness, and grayness that plagues some digital components, allowing me to forget whether I was listening to a record or a digital file and focus on the performance.

Footnote 1: Lavorgna is also the former editor of *AudioStream*.

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