

'One way to improve your stereo' (Review on Xindak DAC-5 on Norway Magazine Hjemmekino 3/2008)

Text and photo by Rune Offerdal for Hjemmekino 3/2008

Many people have ditched their CD-player and use a DVD-player instead. Can the Chinese Xindak improve the stereo sound from an average SACD/DVD-player?

Earlier a separate DAC was looked upon as a bit weird "C something for the serious enthusiasts only. Then the SqueezeBox was released - a smart gadget that can receive music from wireless networks and at the same time also gives very easy access to huge amounts of music. But the sound was in best case average, and a separate DAC became an alternative. Xindak DAC-5 offers outputs with and without tube amplifying, which means exciting possibilities. The importer in Norway, Audiofoni, also sent an extra Siemens NOS tube for tube-rolling. A screwdriver is all you need to tweak the sound by tube-rolling.

Tube VS Transistor

I chose to use a Marantz DV6001 SACD/DVD-player as digital source for this test. This is a quite alright player, but the sound is perhaps a bit thin from the analogue outputs. Could this be improved?

At first I tested the original Electro Harmonix tube - definitely improving the fun factor through a better soundstage. But at the same time it seemed as if some sibilants (like s- and f-sounds) were a bit husky and clouded. Still the increased focus in the bass reproduction gave more life to the music and the vocals became fuller, while the bass guitar and bongos appeared well in the soundstage. Mark Knopflers voice was perhaps a bit over-the-hedge raw and macho though.

Tubes need both burn in and warm-up before they give their best performance. After cooling, tube change and another warm-up period the Siemens NOS tube was allowed to play with the music. The original tube had more bass, but too much some times. With the far more expensive Siemens NOS tube installed the tonal-balance became more natural. The most important thing though was that the husky sibilants were not present anymore and the soundstage therefore became more defined. It became possible to pinpoint every instrument, even in large symphonies, and every instrument appeared more realistic - in other words a huge improvement.

Finally I tested the transistor output and was caught off guard resulting in me sitting gaping for a while - because now the soundstage became even wider, with even more warmth. Every instrument sounded more open and was more present in the room. Perhaps the tubes had more fun-factor, and I guess it became clear to me that I preferred the tubes on raw music like Rage Against The Machines. Still I preferred the transistor output on acoustical and classical music and this is to me the best output the DAC-5 has.

When less is a lot

The differences are many, but small. Dire Straits, Bo Kaspers Orkester, Katie Melua, Kari Bremnes and Cincinatti Pops Orchestra were chosen as test music because I think they have qualities which reveal differences. You have to really focus to detect them, and often they are easier to feel - because these small improvements give huge amounts of wellbeing. It is as if going from irritation to joy, the feeling of involving into the music increases more than the audible differences.

Conclusion

You have to, as always, take into consideration matching with your other equipment, but anyway the Xindak DAC-5 is a very good DAC at its price range. Especially the transistor output impressed me, and for those who like tweaking tube-rolling is always an exciting possibility. The DAC-5 is a clear upgrade for regular DVD-players and network players.

Pros:

Easy to upgrade the tube

Balanced outputs

Very good transistor output

Cons:

The original tube is not very good

Total judgement: 5 of 6 stars

Ps. Thanks for the translated text from Audiofoni.