

Burson Vs Violectric: Conductor Vs V200+V800

Courtesy: Headfonia <http://www.headfonia.com/burson-vs-violectric-conductor-vs-v200v800/>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike started Headfonia in 2009. He enjoys doing reviews and taking pictures especially when they turn out really nice. He enjoys writing but loathes doing grammar checks. Answering questions people post on the site, though sometimes feel like a burden, is actually something he enjoys doing. It's a good feeling to be able to give people answers to their questions.

Disclaimer: Burson is a site sponsor. Vioelectric is sold at the Headfonia Store.

Here is a comparison we've all been dying to do (me included). I've heard good things about the Vioelectric from Lieven and personally I've had nothing but good experiences with Burson. Both take pride in being a solid state amp, and both are roughly comparable in terms of pricing. The units evaluated here are the Burson Conductor with the new DAC module, and in comparison is the Vioelectric V200/V800 DAC/Amp combo.

During my evaluation period, the Burson wins in terms of convenience. As an integrated one box set up, all I needed was a power cable and a simple coaxial/Toslink/USB cable to whatever transport I'm running (I used a variety of transports from an Olive Opus media player, Astell & Kern AK100-AK120, to my MacBook laptop). The Vioelectric on the other hand was more of a hassle, especially if I'm going to run balanced cables from the DAC to the amp. The presence of a volume control on the DAC also makes things less simple to use as I have two volume knobs to dial in, instead of one. Yes the footprint was smaller and that's always a good thing in my book, but other than that the Burson is more simple to use on a day to day basis. Obviously I know that we are not going to make a purchase based on that, but I thought I'd make a point as a warm-up to the actual review.

Buttons and operational are both extremely easy to figure out. Tactile switches for gain, input, and resampling selections. The resampling options on the Vio give it a plus feature in comparison to the Burson. The Burson has a more convenient gain setting located on the front panel, and while the Vioelectric offers a pre-gain on the back side of the amp, it really is more convenient to go with Burson's front facing switch to adjust gain. On day to day use, I find I use the gain setting more than the resampling options and so again, another extra point for the Burson there.

One more thing before I move on to the sound quality, I'd like to comment on the build. The Vioelectric is extremely well built, but I just have to give the upper hand to the Burson (again). If I were to put the Burson enclosure with a piece of solid brick in a fight, I'd put my money on the Burson. It's just super solid. Three extra points all for the Burson, but the Vioelectric really is just as good. It's like a 4.5 vs 5 stars comparison on Amazon reviews.

Overall Sound Comparison

Evaluated as a whole, the DAC/Amp combination of the Burson Conductor and the Vioelectric V800/V200 each possesses a house sound signature that's unmistakably unique to each brand. Even as I evaluated the DAC or the Amplifier independent of the pairing (say by sending the DAC signal to a different amp, or feeding the amplifiers by a different DAC).

The Burson is fast paced, extremely well articulated, punchy, good PRaT, sounds clearer and more spacious. The Violectric is warm, lush, slower paced, smoother, more mellow, more laid back, relaxed, and has a thicker low mid and low end body. The Burson is fast and engaging, the Violectric is laid back and smooth. Two opposing sound signatures. The Burson is more like the Sennheiser HD25-1 where the Violectric more like the HD650 in terms of sound signature.

For those of you familiar with my listening preferences, clearly the tonality of the Violectric is more in tune for me. Warm, laid back, thick lows, and while the Conductor isn't exactly a light bottomed amp, it does sound the lighter bottomed in this comparison. Also while Burson's sound signature has more treble sparkle and is less sleepy than the Violectric, on some occasion, especially with hot recordings I find the treble a bit too much and my preference falls toward the softer sound of the Violectric.

Ultimately, I enjoy the Vio's tonal balance more, but I do miss the clarity and the articulation of the Burson. Especially with a headphone like the HD650, I feel that with the Violectric I'm adding a slow filter on the already slow HD650.

I do need to emphasize the fact that the amplifier units from the respective brands contribute a bigger part to the sound signature, far more than the DAC units. While the DAC units still has a bit of the house signature, it's not very hard to take the sound to a different direction by pairing with a different amp. However I do feel that the DAC/Amp pairings are seemingly optimized for the same brand pairings and so I recommend using the Burson DAC with the Burson amp and the Violectric DAC with the Violectric amp.

Headphone Pairings

Going back between the Burson and the Violectric, I really can't decide which is the ultimate amp for the Hifiman HE-500/HE-6 and the LCD-2/LCD-3. The same house sound comparison applies here, and if I'm looking for lush and smooth, the Vio is the choice where the Burson is the choice if I want PRaT and punch. With a relatively all rounder headphone like the HE-500 and the LCD-2, there is no which is the better amp for so and so headphone here. Depending on the song being played, it could be the Vio or it could be the Burson. Again, going back to the lush vs PRaT adjectives. The general rule of thumb seems to be that if you listen to a lot of fast-paced Rock, Electronic, then the Burson is the one to go for. While Jazz and Classical tend to be better on the Vio. Some headphones like the Sennheiser HD650, or Audio Technica's W-series are inherently slow and generally sounds better with slow paced music and it would be easier to make a recommendation for the Violectric for these headphones, while inherently fast headphones like the Beyerdynamic T1, T5P, and Grados naturally should be more ideal pairings for the Burson. However I'm

not saying that you can't use certain headphones with one amp or the other, as the two solid state amps are quite well rounded performers capable of driving anything from sensitive IEMs to Hifiman HE-6s.

I do have a soft spot for the Violectric's smooth sound, as my preference lies in smooth tube sound and the Sennheiser house sound. However with fast paced Rock it's quite undeniable that the blurring of bass notes with the Violectric combo makes me go back to the Burson every single time, even with a fast headphone like the Hifiman HE-6 and the Beyerdynamic T1. The Beyer T1 is an extremely fast headphone not only in transients but also pace, and in its case I find going with the faster Burson amp a lot more coherent than trying to %balance+the sound with the slower paced Violectric.

Both amps work well with either planars but with the HE-6 I need to make a special note to the benefits of a balanced source for the V200. With an unbalanced source, the V200 is slightly underpowered and light footed but once I switch to the balanced connection (using the same V800 DAC), low end body and dynamics are improved (though slightly less refined than on single ended connection) and the V800/V200 pairing proves to be the best HE-6 set up I've heard to date.

DAC Quality

The house sound comparison still applies even when I isolate the DAC section from the amplifier of the respective brands. I can hook up the Burson DAC to the V200, or the V800 to the Burson Conductor amp, or both DACs to ALO's Studio Six, SPL's Phonitor or SPL Auditor, Bakoona's SCA-7511MK3 or Bottlehead's Crack and Bottlehead's S.E.X, and still the Burson/Vio sound signature is audibly heard on the headphones.

The design of the output stage on a DAC tends to influence the final sound signature and I suspect this is what's leaving such a strong house sound fingerprint on the DACs. After all, I would imagine each manufacturer designing their DAC output stages similar to how they design their amplifiers. Technicalities aside, the Burson DAC is fast, forward, engaging, and articulate. The Violectric is smooth, warm, and lush. This does affect the perceived technicalities as the Burson's fast transients and articulate DAC tend to push out instruments separations, making it easier to hear the instrument separation than on Violectric's V800.

On the other hand, while the Violectric has excellent separation and in reality is MORE spacious than the Conductor DAC, instruments do blend in together more though not in a congested way, rather in a more coherent way. In another word, the soundstage of the Violectric is more spacious and the instrument separation natural

and effortless, but it doesn't push out instrument separation as in the Burson. I hope that's not too confusing.

Aside from sound signature differences, it's easy to point out that the Violectric, despite the more blended in presentation, is the DAC with the superior technicalities. The sound stage extends wide and deep and is easily bigger than the Burson DAC. The Burson, while quite wide, is quite shallow in the depth. Background is blacker on the Violectric, dynamic range superior, and instruments have better body and definition on the V800.

Of course I'm free to mix and match the DAC and Amp pairings, even with DAC and amps from other brands, but at the end of the day I can't help but feeling that the V800 is best paired with the V200 and that the Burson DAC is best paired with the Burson Conductor amp.

End Words

I didn't think that the comparison would be this clear-cut. I'm talking about the sound signature, they're very different and I think it boils down to the kind of a signature that you like. On the DAC unit I can say with certainty that the Violectric is a superior DAC technically, but as far as the amplifiers, both companies have developed good quality solid state amplifiers within their own house sound signature.