

VIOLECTRIC

VIOLECTRIC DAC V800 REVIEW

Written by Zombie_X
October 2nd, 2011

Courtesy Zombie_X <http://www.head-fi.org/products/vioelectric-dac-v800/reviews/5705>

PRE-REVIEW STATEMENT:

Hi all, Zombie-X here again with another review for the good boys and girls of Head-Fi.org. I've been playing around with this DAC for about a month now and I figured it's time to give you all a nice, straight to the point review of it.

I would like to take the time before this review to give a shout out to Robert at Aphrodite Cu29 for supplying this DAC for review. He's a good guy in the crazy audio world and knows his stuff. I was swayed to get the DAC, not by his words of praise (well maybe a little), but rather by how it sounds.

I would like to say that during this review I will be comparing this DAC to my Music Hall DAC25.2 and Benchmark DAC1. I will be using a variety of headphones and amps in this review and I will make it clear when a certain piece of gear is being used.

On another note this DAC costs \$1,299 USD brand new. That's much more expensive than the Music Hall DAC 25.2 and Benchmark DAC1 (non USB). Is it worth the price you ask well you're going to have to read the review and find out now aren't you?

Also this is my first review of a DAC so I will try my best to describe what it sounds like as best as possible.

ABOUT VIOLECTRIC:

Who is Vioelectric? Vioelectric is a subdivision of Lake People GmbH from Germany. The parent company, Lake People, manufactures a wide variety of electronics such as other DAC's and headphone amps for studio use or for sound engineers. They aim to produce very accurate equipment and everything is built very sturdy, just like all German engineering. All their gear is incredibly rugged and sturdy.

Even though the Vioelectric line is aimed at consumers, the performance and behavior of the gear is still very studio quality. Clearly their studio roots couldn't be lost but is that good or bad? From what I have heard in this DAC this is still very much a studio unit and is not far off from their professional offerings. Well you're going to find out soon enough on how it actually sounds and compares. Brace yourself!!

The following text is quoted directly from their website:

Quote:

Established in 1986, we have since become your partner for professional audio electronics. Following our motto %ools - not toys+, we achieved highest reputation during the past years amongst our customers. These are private studios, broadcasters and TV companies. Also airports, congress and exhibition centres count on the reliability of our products made in Germany. This all began under the roof of Rosgartenstrasse 13 in the city of Konstanz. Here, three young guys started with the development and manufacture of limiters and noise gates but not too success-fully ð The commercial survival on a very low level was made possible by the production of headphone amplifiers. From 1989 on, the production range was extended to level matching and balancing amplifiers such successfully, that it came essential to move to larger premises.

Since 1991, the new address read: Haidelmoosweg 52. Due to the developement of the first german 20-bit A/D and D/A converters in the beginning nineties, the name Lake People re-sounded throughout the land. Suddenly, the company was regarded as a high-tech brand, with a highly positive effect on its public reputation. The growing know-how led to many new products in the analog and digital domain during the following years. Although some pro-jects turned out to be flops, most devices met the customers' re-quirements, with the effect of continuous growth of the company. By the end of the nineties, the number of employees had in-creased to ten, and the 140 m² of Haidelmoosweg 52 went cramping. Again, a move to new premises came necessary. As it was obvious that rental facilities would not meet the demands, we decided to put up our own building. The company site was constructed in 2000 in a new industrial park in Konstanz, Turmstrasse 7a, just a hundred metres from the lake. Also in 2000, Lake People was transformed into a Ltd. company.

During 2004, nearly the entire production range underwent re-engineering. This concerned both circuitry as well as mechanical design. At the same time, new digital converters were - now being the 4th generation. Another ambitious unit is our innovative digital peak meter, with its new and sophisticated detail solutions. A very speciality of Lake People is the development and modification of audio processing units according to customer specifications.

GEAR USED:

AMPS:

- SPL Auditor
- Audio-GD Roc
- Woo Audio WA3+
- Musical Fidelity X-CANV8P

DAC:

- Vioelectric DAC V800 (What else whoud I use?)

HEADPHONES:

- Beyerdynamic T1
- Sennheiser HD600
- AKG K702
- Grado SR-80i

OBSERVATIONS:

Upon getting the DAC from Robert at Aphrodite Cu29 I was awe struck by the build quality of this little guy! The chassis is made of thick aluminum and has a special coating on it that prevents any interference from creeping in. The inside of the case has tiny ridges, almost like those of a heat-sink. The unit has some heft to it and is much heavier than you would think from looking at it. Buttons have a nice "click" to them and the XLR's are sturdy and XLR cables lock in perfectly and are snug. The volume dial is nice and smooth with no resistance whatsoever. Ultra smooth is more like it and it does feel oh so nice!

When hooking up the DAC to a PC you get a USB Audio TE7022 Interface with S/PDIF in the the audio output device list. From here you could choose the sample rate, bit depth, and channel balance as well as volume. When hooking up the the PC I would suggest leaving the Windows volume setting to max and then using the music playback software to adjust volume as needed. I would also recommend that all the sampling settings are checked off and have the bitrate set to 24 bit in the device options tab. Make sure you give the unit "priority" access via the options as well.

Signal lock on with the DAC is instantaneous and you are able to use the front panel to select from Optical, USB, Coax, and XLR. You can also choose to mute the music via the "Mute/Error" button and even select from no resampling all the way up to 192hz. All the buttons have a nice feel to them and click nicely, but wait I said that before, didn't I?

In my opinion, I would leave the sampling off as resampling the sound does nothing at all. From what I understand it would just add more noise and artifacts to the data stream or even further attenuate them. Not good if you want the purest sound.

The insides of the DAC are populated by capacitors, resistors, operational amplifiers, and a over sized transformer. Wait did I say an over sized transformer? Well the description of the DAC from Vioelectric states this but all I see is this tiny transformer. Well it doesn't mean it'll sound bad so we will wait in see. Now you can also adjust the gain from the inside of the DAC via the internal dip switches, which can be seen in the last image below. The stock unit comes with the settings set to +15db but can be adjusted to lower such as +6db and higher being +18db and +24db. I currently have my unit set to +18db.

PERFORMANCE:

Before we get into the performance of this DAC I will take briefly on how it sounds. You'd think from a major manufacturer of studio gear that this DAC would sound clinical, thin, or even bright sounding. Well toss those notions out the window because this DAC is none of that. It has a very neutral sound that is not clinical at all nor is it warm sounding. It's a flat sounding DAC, as one should be. Giving no attention to certain frequencies and staying true to the source material is what this DAC does. No more, no less. Just pure uncolored or tweaked sound reproduction. After all the DAC, IMO, should be the most neutral piece of gear in ones set-up, then use amps and other gear to color the sound from there.

For this I'll be using my PC via the USB input on the DAC. Since we are going to be using USB you should know that you won't need any special drivers. It installs the needed Windows drivers right away. You could always get ASIO USB drivers but they are not free at all and I find them not to improve over the ASIO output from foobar2000. Free bit perfect is better than not free. So I will be

using foobar2000 for this review along with the WASAPI output with the buffer set to 1000ms and have the sound set to 24 bits at 96Hz.

I find no need to use a S/PDIF converter with this DAC as the amount of jitter is low enough. I suppose if you were to use a high end converter such as the Audiophile or SonicWeild Diverter the sound would most probably improve much more but for this review it will just be the plain USB input. On my Music Hall DAC25.2 I had to sue the Pop-Pulse USB -2-S/PDIF II because the DAC itself had too much jitter and gave the sound a slight "edge" to it. So without the converter on the Music Hall the sound was brighter and also thinner sounding.

TREBLE:

The treble on the DAC is very clean and very extended without added grit to it. Some perceive the added "grit" as more detail but it's just noise and tends to add more garbage to the sound. I know with the Music Hall DAC25.2 there is this added "grit" but not much of it but enough to make the amp sound brighter. I should define grit more so you know what exactly it is. Grit, as I call it, is added distortion to the treble and can sound like added detail but really it's just distortion. But moving on back to the treble. Like I stated earlier it is very clean and detailed. Much more detailed than what my Music Hall DAC25.2 was and certainly more detailed than the Benchmark DAC1 that I demoed. It's highly transparent and dare I say slightly sweet? Yeah I would say it is ever so slightly sweet. I found that on poorly mastered recordings that the treble could become a problem but I believe that the DAC is converting the music better and as such the treble can seem more distorted. On material that is mastered good (such as the MTV Unplugged series) the treble can be smooth and articulated with no hint of brightness or any sibilant behavior at all.

MIDRANGE:

The mid range, in comparison to my Music Hall DAC25.2, is a lot cleaner and transparent with more detail. There is no added midrange body but the midrange can sound a tad withdrawn on some material. Such material is some metal, old recordings, or recordings that are overly compressed. When fed with quality stuff the midrange will be so revealing and transparent it's like going from looking through a lead/glass window to no window at all. It really is that much better. You can clearly hear more stuff in there. An example would be from Alice in Chains "MTV Unplugged" album. On my DAC25.2 you could hear them plucking the strings on their acoustic guitars but on the V800 you can hear the pluck more easily and it's sharper as well. You can now hear the leading edge of the pluck (if that's how it's described) a lot easier. Vocals can sound eerily surreal and crisp. I tossed in Rick Wakemans "Return to The Center of The Earth" CD as it has a lot of narration. Patrick Stewart's voice is so defined and clear. You can hear him back away from the mic, take a breath, and come back to speak some more.

BASS:

Now the bass. I would say compared to my DAC25.2 the bass can seem to have less body but in fact it is much tighter and defined. I found the bass to sound very firm and present but not overbearing. I will admit this DAC does have less bass than either the Music Hall DAC25.2 and the Benchmark DAC1, but it makes up for it in how tight the bass is and how deeply it can extend. The bass is much more extended and the texturing is well beyond that of both of the other DAC's. Rage Against The Machine's first album, entitled "Rage Against The Machine", has some of the most visceral and hard hitting bass I've heard from rock and metal music that is still produced nicely. The song, entitled "Take The Power Back", has so much slam and the bass is so tight that it's eye popping good. The bass is also fast and has a more realistic decay as the other two DAC's seemed to either have too little decay or too long of a decay. Bass notes hang in the air for just the right amount of time.

SOUNDSTAGE / IMAGING:

Well well well what do we have here? I thought I was sitting at home but from what I hear it sounds more like a concert hall. Yes the sound stage is much better than on the Music Hall as it sounded slightly compressed in comparison. The ADC1 was close but seemed to have less depth to it as well as the imaging was kind of compressed. So this test I fired up some binaural music (the album was "Explorations in Space and Time" from HD-Tracks) and WOW were both of those DAC's lacking! Before the imaging was just off on both of them (though like I said the ADC1 was close) and now I can clearly pin-point where sounds are. on the song "Wind" I can hear where the instruments are and can also judge the depth of the sound better. Really there is more depth now, especially with music recorded this way.

EDIT:

As an update I did try this DAC's other inputs and they all sounds very similar. They have a slight edge over the USB input, but it's still very good. I was quite surprised at how well the USB stacks up. I also have gotten an Audio-GD Digital Interface USB audio converter and it further improved the sound by quite a bit! I guess the sound from the USB input was good already, but after that signal was converted to Coax/Optical/XLR it really came into it's own. It's liek all my descriptions before hand but more fleshed out and detailed!

CONCLUSION:

All in all the DAC is a great performer at this price. I find it to be superior to the Benchmark DAC1 and Music Hall DAC25.2 in every way. It has more extension on both ends of the frequency range, a lot more detail than either of the other DAC's, much better PRaT, and even tighter and defined bass. I find no reason to choose the Benchmark over this. Even the Benchmark DAC1 USB can not compare. Really I didn't find any major faults with this DAC other than it sometimes being slightly thin sounding but other wise it's exceptional. Really it trumps anything under \$1,000 quite easily in many regards. It's hard to find such a good performer in the category and the V800 DAC by Vioelectric company, a subdivision of Lake People GmbH. Great works guys and I am looking forward to the rest of yuor gear in the future. This DAC is a knockout! Feed it good material and you will be very pleased!

RATING:

