



Synthesis **Roma 69DC £2,500**

The small boutique audio company from Italy specialises in tube amps and has a lot going for it

Started by Luigi Lorenzon in Morrovalle, Italy, in 1992, Synthesis has made a name for itself producing attractively turned-out products in small volumes, with as much attention paid to the sound quality as their appearance. The Roma 69DC epitomises this, with handsome styling and finishes that include lacquered wood. In aesthetics and in feel, this is a world away from the much more functional Benchmark or Pro-Ject offerings.

As with the M2Tech converter overleaf, the designers have taken a common-or-garden pressed steel case and cleverly transformed it in a quirky, attractive way. The fascia, with its backlit alphanumeric LC display, is quite recessed, making it a little harder to use the volume control knob – but it's still perfectly possible. The rear panel, meanwhile, is the most functional aspect of this product, with two optical, two coaxial and a USB-B (for PCM and DSD playback) inputs. There's a single

optical digital out, alongside a stereo pair of unbalanced RCA line-level analogue outputs.

Under the hood, the Roma 69DC uses an Asahi Kasei AK4495SEQ DAC chip, which has become something of a cult design for some audiophiles. It handles up to DSD512 and

Bass is noticeably more gutsy, and the midband is more detailed and organic

32-bit/768kHz PCM via the USB-B input, but 'only' decodes 32-bit/384kHz in the latter case. A dual-mono tube output is fitted, with one ECC88 valve per-channel. The manufacturer claims very low output impedance and a wide bandwidth for this. A large toroidal power transformer supplies the juice, and high-quality metal-ised polypropylene capacitors are employed in the audio circuits. The company is keen to point



▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT
 Synthesis Roma 69DC
ORIGIN
 Italy
TYPE
 Digital-to-analogue converter
WEIGHT
 5kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 260 x 95 x 380mm
FEATURES
 • 32-bit/384kHz; DSD512
 • Inputs: 2x coaxial; 2x optical; USB-B
 • Outputs: stereo RCA; optical; 6.35mm headphone
DISTRIBUTOR
 Henley Audio Ltd.

out that particular attention has been dedicated to the headphone output.

Sound quality

This is the most expensive DAC in the group, and sounds it. But it brings a new level of insight to recordings, relative to the others here. There's an improvement to the way it goes about making music – its rhythmic and dynamic zeal, if you like – and also gains in conventional hi-fi terms. Bass is noticeably more gutsy, and the midband is more detailed and organic. The result is a lovely sounding product that's perhaps just a little on the euphonic side, but is never less than a pleasure to hear.

The ABBA track really comes alive via the Synthesis, sounding really quite emotionally arresting. There's a greater sense of poignancy to the way the Roma 69DC plays *Eagle* than any other DAC in this group – it's as if the recording has suddenly grown in stature and importance. Tonal quality is improved, with the band's unique vocals having a less processed and more natural feel. There's a vibrancy to vocals that's simply not there via any of the others. At the same time, the backing instruments play along seemingly less dependent on what other things are going on in the mix.

Playing the Herbie Hancock track confirms all the above, although does draw attention to one specific area – the bass. The Roma 69DC has a more fruity-sounding bottom end than any other design here. This is an enjoyable plus point, but the downside is that low frequencies can sound too well upholstered on some tracks – especially if you're running large floorstanders. On this jazz classic the double bass seems just a little too strong, with a slight sense of overhang too. This is by no means an unpleasant sensation, but 100 percent tonally neutral this DAC is not. Overall, though, it's a still a superb-sounding product ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Vibrant, immersive, euphonic sound
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★☆	DISLIKE: Not as transparent as some
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Charming, engaging, musical
FEATURES ★★★★★	
OVERALL ★★★★★	