



Musical Fidelity **M6x DAC £2,100**

We've come a long way since Antony Michaelson unveiled his Digilog DAC back in the Eighties...

Musical Fidelity's Digilog DAC was an early design that shared the limelight with the now-legendary Arcam Black Box in the late-Eighties, it offered 16-bit/48kHz digital conversion and few other features. In direct contrast, the M6x DAC has a welter of inputs and outputs, plus number crunching up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512 through the USB port and up to 24-bit/192kHz via the optical and AES/EBU inputs – plus MQA decoding.

The M6x DAC brings with it a sense of being more engulfed in the music

There is no network functionality. Musical Fidelity is now owned and run by Pro-Ject's Heinz Lichtenegger, who argues that the M6x DAC gives the best possible sound at the price, thanks to its purist design. To this end, two ES9038Q2M DAC chips running in dual differential mode form the heart of this product. All inputs are reclocked and there are eight switchable digital filters, plus upsampling with oversampling bypass.

The front panel is crowded with blue LEDs, which don't offer a user-friendly way of figuring out what's going on. The Pro-Ject DAC Box II, for example, does better here with its large and informative display. The control buttons are tiny and fiddly, although they do have a nice action to them. A 6.3mm headphone socket is fitted. Round the back are USB-B, twin optical and single coaxial digital inputs plus an AES/EBU in. Fixed and variable analogue outputs are offered in RCA and balanced XLR guises, all of which are switchable from the front panel. Build quality is excellent and as good as anything else in the group.

Sound quality

Never let it be said that all DACs sound the same! The Musical Fidelity is clearly a fuller-sounding performer than the Benchmark, and various others here. The M6x DAC brings with it a sense of being more engulfed in the music, yet at the same time it isn't quite as communicative in terms of detail retrieval. It is not as crisp and delicate in the midband as the Benchmark, for example – it's more about the heart and less about the head in terms of the way it makes music. That's not to say it doesn't sound as good, it's just different.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
 Musical Fidelity
 M6x DAC

ORIGIN
 EU

TYPE
 Digital-to-analogue
 converter

WEIGHT
 6.9kg

DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 440 x 100 x 390mm

FEATURES

- 32-bit/768kHz; DSD512; MQA
- Inputs: coaxial; 2x optical; AES/EBU; USB-B
- Outputs: stereo RCA; XLR

DISTRIBUTOR
 Henley Audio Ltd.

Indeed, some will think it is better, due to its more propulsive and plump bottom end.

Despite ABBA's *Eagle* not being the most hi-fi-sounding recording, it comes over with great gusto. It's a sweeping, uplifting classic and the M6x DAC shows why. The sense of movement and motion is rather life-affirming, turning this pop song into an emotional experience providing you're in a receptive mood. In strict hi-fi terms, though, the Musical Fidelity lacks the more defined and precise sound of the Benchmark and Synthesis offerings, falling back slightly in relative terms.

The Herbie Hancock track underlines this DAC's character. It doesn't quite have the forensic detail retrieval of the Benchmark offering, but that doesn't seem to matter and the listener is more intricately involved in the music as a result. Although it's clear that the M6x DAC is a tad more fulsome than most in the group, the delicacy of this recording shows its slight opaqueness. Hi-hat cymbals for example, don't have the bite of some others here; they're tonally sweeter, but lack metallic rawness.

Spatially the M6x DAC puts the listener more up close and personal, rather than giving them the sensation of being a spectator from far away. This makes the Supertramp track come over in a more emotionally engaging way – but whether it's more accurate is up for debate ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
 ★★★★★
LIKE: Crisp, detailed, enjoyable sound

VALUE FOR MONEY
 ★★★★★
DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY
 ★★★★★
WESAY: Great value all-rounder

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★