

On Sunday, July 20, 2014, the monthly meeting of the Audio-Video Club of Atlanta was held at the Virtual Properties Realty offices in Duluth. This meeting featured listening to various DAC's ranging in price from \$190 to \$2400, with all other equipment remaining the same. It was kind of a DAC "shootout". There were more than 40 folks present at the meeting, including at least four guests and a couple of new members. Our monthly meetings are getting better and more informative, and as they do our attendance remains high. We may outgrow this meeting space sometime soon, although it is a great place to meet.

Up first was John, president, with some quick announcements. As always, "Jets" pizza was supplied to those who help set up before the meeting (around 12:30 pm). Regular refreshments will still be available during the meeting, assuming members volunteer to bring them. John thanked all those who brought their personal or loaned DAC for us to listen to, and to others who supplied equipment for this meeting. These included Mike Lyles, Horton McCurdy, Nick Arroyo, Lee Scoggins, Darren Censullo, and Scott Hicks. Also, he thanked the equipment managers who brought the club's equipment to the meeting.

John introduced Darren Censullo, owner of Avatar Acoustics which distributes iFi equipment. Darren announced the new iDSD Micro DAC/Headphone amp which retails for \$500 and is just starting to ship now (it was one of the DAC's we were going to listen to). Darren also described some of the other products from iFi which were used in our listening, including the Gemini and Mercury cables, the iUSB Power unit, and the iPurifier unit. Darren also told us that some features of the iDSD Micro's design were "crowd sourced", where potential buyers had a voice in what they wanted to see in the Micro. The Micro has a battery headphone amp, six different digital filters, "3D" headphone output, and decodes all ranges of PCM and up to 8 times DSD formats.

John then described how we were going to listen to all these different DAC's. Along with these minutes on our web site should be the Equipment Roster and Program information sheet, which also describes the program format and "test cases". This lists all the equipment used in the listening. Due to time constraints, only Test Case #1 (listen to all the DAC's) was completed. In summary, we had a Windows Laptop, Astell and Kern AK-120 (\$1200), and Fiio X5 (\$350) as players (source). The DAC's were the Benchmark DAC-2 (\$1800), Chord Hugo (\$2400), iDSD Nano (\$190), iDSD Micro (\$500), the Matrix Mini IPro (\$520), and an Oppo HA-1 (\$1200). The internal DAC's of the AK20 and X5 were also listened to. All the listening was through an iFi USB "string" which consisted of an iUSB Power, Gemini and Mercury cables, and the iPurifier. The club's 2-way speakers and dual subwoofers were used, along with a 15 watt per channel custom tube amplifier supplied by Sam Papadas. The same tracks were used for all the DAC's, including classic rock, classic jazz, female vocalist, and classical big orchestra.

John asked me to write down comments made after each DAC was listened to. I was able to capture some but not all of the comments.

Benchmark DAC-2: Good solid DAC, multiple "thumbs up".

Chord Hugo – More resolution, fuller bass, some thought brighter than Benchmark, others did not.

Matrix Mini IPro – Brighter, a little "harsh", not quite the resolution as others, but more clarity.

iDSD Nano – Great bargain, wider and deeper, clean high end.

Oppo HA-1 – Very impressive, scary how good it was for the price, lots of audience "oohs",

A&K AK-120 – Sounded flat, then discovered we were at MP3 setting. On par with Fiio X5 at hi-res.

Fiio X5 – Seemed to drive our system better than the AK-120.

iDSD Micro – Wow, awesome sound, about the same as the Oppo at less than half the price.

The club gives many thanks all those who brought their equipment to this meeting, but special thanks to Darren Censullo for giving club members special pricing on the iFi products. Thanks again to Sam Papadas for the amplifier and preamp. Also, once again thanks to everyone who helped set up and break down for this meeting and to the members who brought the refreshments.

Thomas Horner  
Secretary, A-V Club of Atlanta