

HIFI-STARS

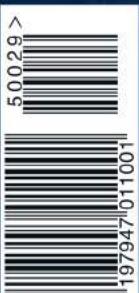
Ausgabe 33
Dezember 2016 -
Februar 2017



CEC D/A Converter - USB Sound System DA 5

Finally it is here!

“...You should make a note of the name DA 5. The new D/A converter of the well known Japanese manufacturer CEC makes an excellent all-round impression, it scores with inner values, such as the built-in exception-DAC chip ESS ES9018K2M and can function with its innovative volume control and the headphone amplifier as the heart of a high quality audio system. The new CEC DA 5 is simply a very strong statement in digital playback.” *Review from HIFI STARS - 2016*



CEC D/A Converter - USB Sound System DA 5

Finally it is here!



In the issue number 29 of HIFI STARS, I was testing the CD drive CEC TL 5 which had just come out. And now I have the brand new CEC DA 5 D/A converter in my listening room. To accompany it, I have the already well familiar CEC TL 5 belt drive. And add to that a base device called CEC Wellfloat, which is said to bring the TL 5 a little further in sound quality.

The heart of a modern audio system

However, our main subject is the CEC DA 5. On the front of the 43.5 cm wide, 33.5 cm deep and 10.4 cm high unit, at the bottom left you will find the power button, as in usual with CEC. From left to right,

this is followed by a button with the label „Filter“. With this the digital filter used in each case can be changed to either “Flat“ or „Pulse“. However, I will come back later to the importance of this filter. The display is in the center of the unit, with illuminated blue letters and numbers. It indicates the desired digital filter, the selected input, the digital format and finally the sampling frequency of each input signal. Also, the remote control sensor is housed in the display. Its brightness can be adapted or even shut down completely. The button for input selection is on the right - USB for connection to a PC and COAX (RCA), TOS (fiber optical) or AES, the balanced XLR Digital connection



according to the AES/EBU standard. Next there is a headphone socket for a 6.3mm jack. On the far right, there is a slightly larger knob that allows you to adjust the volume of the connected headphones. On the back - also starting from the left - are first of all the analogue outputs, with the choice between a balanced XLR or unbalanced RCA/RCA connectors. CEC recommends giving preference to the XLR connection. In the center of the unit, the digital terminals are arranged. The selection ranges from AES/EBU, RCA/Cinch, Toslink with compatibility of up to 24 bit/192 kHz to the USB port - compatible to PCM 32 bit/384 kHz and DSD 256/11.2 MHz. The network connections are on the far right. The CEC DA 5 has a remote control of course, and features such as the desired input, the volume, the aforementioned digital filter or screen brightness can be set. And if you, like me now in my listening room, have a CD drive connected to the DA 5 from the same brand, you only need the remote control of the DA 5 for both units. This also controls the CD drive. Practical, isn't it!

The new CEC DA 5 has therefore the stuff to be the heart of a modern audio system. You can not only enjoy the music from the CD drive through it, but also from a Music Streamer or a PC - and at the highest resolution level DSD 256/11.2 MHz. But that's not all. The CEC DA 5 has a newly developed digital volume control, which can adjust the analogue volume level in extremely fine increments from -99 dB to 0 dB. This is not only useful because the D/A converter acts as a headphone amplifier, but also because it can be used just as well as a preamplifier. The CEC DA 5 is easily connected to a power amp or powered speakers - and the high quality audio system is ready to go!

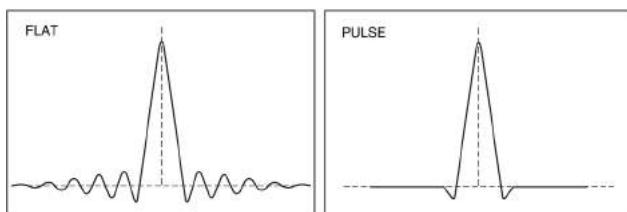
New exception - DAC chip built in

Far from high quality - what then makes this entirely built in Japan D/A converter so good? That's right, it's the new exception-DAC chip called ESS ES9018K2M which converts all digital signals into analogue. According to the manufacturer, this chip provides an exceptionally high channel separation



and extreme dynamic range. And also in terms of electronics, the CEC DA 5 is a completely new development.

And then there's something more, which should be explained a little more at this point. I have already mentioned the selectable digital filter. This can be switched between "Flat" and "Pulse." For the vast majority of CD players and D/A converters, "Flat" is a fixed setting and in this way a nearly perfect



frequency response is achieved. A disadvantage, however, is that it is accompanied by what is called "ringing," which occurs as pre- and post-vibration in pulse signals. This can be avoided with the "Pulse" setting, but at the same time with minimum loss of high range. According to CEC, this loss amounts to only about minus 2 dB at 20,000 Hz.

I personally prefer the "Pulse" setting anyway, because in my opinion it represents the musical structures better and has a better overall harmony. But finally, this decision has to be taken by everyone for themselves. Work comes before listening enjoyment. This work consists of first setting up the units and wiring them correctly. That's right - that also means paying attention to the quality of the cable connections used. I begin with the digital signal connection between the CD drive and D/A converter. Both devices are equipped with XLR connectors for balanced connections according to the AES/EBU professional standard. For the analogue cable connection from the D/A converter to the amplifier, CEC also recommends the balanced variant. However, my Symphonic Line RG 14 Edition doesn't work here, as it can only be used for unbalanced connections. I therefore connect an RCA/Phono connection, namely a HiDiamond 7 from the Italian manufacturer with the same name, that I am also just testing. It fits well, as the speaker connection comes from the same manufacturer too. Since I take the recommendation of CEC seriously,

I connect my headphone amplifier to the balanced analogue outputs of the DA 5, which should show how good the integrated headphone jack really is.

So let's get going. Or not yet, because first we need to do some warming up. Different program material with the repeat button pressed - hearing countless hours and without consciously listening. Then I put on a CD that I haven't played for some months - "Mi Buenos Aires Querido", Barenboim/Mederos/Console, Teldec 0630-13474-2. This recording made in 1996, is a musical declaration of love from the world-renowned conductor Daniel Barenboim to his native Buenos Aires. The trio on this CD consists of Barenboim at the piano and his colleagues Rodolfo Mederos (bandoneón) and Hector Console (bass). The three play well known and lesser known compositions by Astor Piazzolla, Carlos Gardel, Horatio Salgán and others. And how

they play! The piano piece lets you imagine the powerful body of the grand piano. At one point, the reverberation of the inspired steel strings still vibrates, even after ten seconds. Wonderful! The bandoneon transmits through the acoustic converter an almost physical pressure and the plucked bass sound structures are characterized by a clarity which I have not yet heard. You have to have heard it, to know just how authentic recorded music can sound. I put my headphones on, and compare the rendering of the DA 5 integrated headphone jack with my separate headphone amplifier: No difference!

In 1991, the Oliver Stone movie "JFK" got many of the people who in 1963 had followed as contemporaries the assassination of former US President John F. Kennedy in the media, into the cinema. John Williams wrote most of the music for that movie and in the prologue on the soundtrack CD the



“Royal Scots Dragoon Guards” gave a drum concert with impeccable precision. Through the Combination of CEC TL 5 and CEC DA 5, not a single drumbeat goes under. It’s almost scary to see just how real this performance is reproduced. I have often heard this cut though good reproduction systems, but never with such exactness.

Fantastic tone and spatiality

In the CD compartment of the belt-driven CEC TL 5 is now a silver disc from the classical repertoire. It is the „Pictures at an Exhibition“ by Modest Mussorgsky in the original piano version, played by the American pianist Byron Janis. This Mercury Living Presence production had been recorded in 1961, however the first publication on CD was in 1994. It is one of my favorite recordings, and impresses me through excellent source devices due to its beautiful tones and exemplary spatiality (Byron Janis plays Moussorgsky, Mercury 434346-2). That’s just how I feel even when playing it on the CEC duo. In my Classic collection I have the ninth Symphony by Antonin Dvorak - “From the New World” - represented by countless orchestras and conductors. My personal favorite, however, is the recording from 1961 with the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Karel Ančerl (JVC JM-XR24206), which was digitalized a few years ago from the original master tapes and was released as an XRCD. With great ease I can identify the instruments of the great symphony orchestra in all its breadth and depth - just perfect!

CEC Wellfloat Board

This device base from the Japanese manufacturer has been designed for CD players, CD drives, amplifiers, speakers and analogue turntables and dampens vibrations such as foot steps, other vibrations and microphonics, using a patented pendulum-damping

system consisting of a U-shaped and a straight stainless steel spring. Both springs are connected by a piano string made of special steel. At a certain load the piano string stretches and acts like a pendulum working against vibrations. In my experience, the Wellfloat is a meaningful support for the TL 5 drive, it leads to more quietness in the sound pattern, meaning that some details are a little more clearly identified. Yes, good things take time - but the wait for the new CEC D/A converter has paid off for me as an author, because the CEC DA 5 is simply a very strong statement in digital playback.

In a nutshell

You should make a note of the name DA 5. The new D/A converter of the well known Japanese manufacturer CEC makes an excellent all-round impression, it scores with inner values, such as the built-in exception-DAC chip ESS ES9018K2M and can function with its innovative volume control and the headphone amplifier as the heart of a high quality audio system. Harald Obst | HIFI STARS | 2016

Specifications CEC DA 5

DAC	ESS ES9018K2M
Digital Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none">AES/EBU x 1: PCM up to 24bit/192kHzCOAXIAL x 1: SPDIF 24bit - 192kHzTOSLINK x 1: SPDIF 24bit - 192kHzUSB 2.0 x 1: 32bit/384kHz, DSD 256 up to 11.2896MHz
Digital Filter	Switchable between FLAT and PULSE
Analog Outpus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Balanced XLR (2pin: hot) x 1: 4VrmsUnbalanced RCA x 1: 2Vrms
Headphone	6.3mm - digital+analog volume controls
Dimensions	435(W) x 335(D) x 109(H) mm
Weight	Unit 8 kg
Color	Silver or Black

more Information: cec-international.com

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