

Low-res data, high-res sound

Reimyo's DAP-999 EX Limited, developed by Combak CEO Kazuo Kiuchi, is set to squeeze every last bit of sound out of the ubiquitous CD. And then some more.



This sleek D/A converter presumably wouldn't stand a commercial chance, were it not made by one of the most highly reputed manufacturers of high-end audio gear. Its predecessor, the DAP-999 EX—reviewed in STEREO 3/09 and recipient of high praise, as well as a number of awards, from international audio enthusiast magazines—already made us sit up in our seats. The new version, with a chrome plaque saying “Limited” being the only thing to distinguish it from the previous model, is poised to do even better than that.

So why would we be sceptical? Well, in a sense this DAC is a bit of an anachronism: not for it the USB jacks for PC connectivity or high-bitrate capabilities of upsampling up to 192 kHz/24 bit of modern DAC competitors. The “Limited” offers hardly any features you couldn't have had ten years ago: its front panel sports four input-selector buttons for AES, BNC, coaxial, and optical inputs up to 48 kHz. With respect to PC connectivity and high-bitrate sources, that is indeed “limited”.

Which is quite by design, too. The Japanese sound wizard Kiuchi, who made his name with esoteric-seeming but effective Harmonix brand resonance control devices, has chosen a different path. Since high-bitrate files are still as conspicuously rare as CDs are abundant, the

The DAP-999 EX Limited comes with a high-quality, phase-marked Harmonix power cord included

outspoken Kiuchi has put his mind to squeezing the best possible sound out of the 16-bit/44-kHz CD format.

Virtual bandwidth via K2HD

Reimyo, which translates to “miracle”, continues to put its trust in the sophisticated algorithms of the K2 mastering process, developed by JVC in the late 1980s and continually improved ever since.

While XRCDs had long been the crown jewels of the CD product range, the new K2HD format has made considerable inroads into that share of the market. Its most prominent feature is to encode high frequencies such that the human ear is fooled into detecting a higher frequency bandwidth than a CD with its 20kHz cutoff can actually deliver. And that's how K2HD CDs have been able to impress with their as-



The unit's interior is well equipped and boasts a new central multi-chip K2 processor/upsampler board

tonishing detail, musicality, and spatial resolution, while at the same time sounding homogeneous and natural. Usually, they are head and shoulders above their conventionally mastered counterparts.

Now, Reimyo's thinking is, if that process works in the mastering stage, why not try to build it into DAC signal conversion? So the DAP-999 EX Limited was furnished with specially modified K2 code optimised for D/A conversion. Admittedly, the previous model could do that too, but the algorithms have been honed even further and have been integrated into the 4x upsampling that e.g. converts 16 bit/44.1 kHz into 24 bit/176.4 kHz. Looking under the unit's hood, you can't miss the new multi-chip board handling the complex computations, which the previous model didn't have.

Perfection in every detail

Apart from that, the unit's level of attention paid to details and build quality are exemplary. The thing with Kiuchi is, he just isn't going to compromise. The unit rests on Harmonix TU-600 feet (a set of four will usually set you back about € 680), a high-frequency filter keeps the power supply noise-free, and a parallel "Enacom" filter, supposed to have a harmonizing effect and to be specially configured, is also included.

Reimyo deploys high-end fuses by HiFi-Tuning Berlin, two substantial, well-shielded C-core transformers drive the analogue and digital sections, respectively, separated by opto-isolators.

How serious is Reimyo about power supply? Well, a specially adapted version of the excellent-quality Harmonix X-DC2 power cord (with a solo price tag of a hefty € 1050) is already included.

And this seriousness is showing some impressive results: the DAP-999 EX Limited produces a sound that is at once delicate and homogeneous, with a



Kazuo Kiuchi,
Combak Corporation

»Our K2 processor produces higher sound quality than other manufacturers reach with high-bitrate data. We are looking to audiophile customers with large CD collections, which we can now make sound so much better.«

finesse that never lacks in substance and power. The intro to "To Vals Tou Gamou" (Sounds and Silence, ECM), with its delicate ambience vibes, was reproduced with ethereal accuracy, lending it life-like reality. The choir in "Mitt Hjerte Alltid Vanker" (on STEREO's test sampler number VII) emanates from deep within the nave, with perfect contours and sonic perspective.

In fact, the DAC exhibits the openness, soundstaging, and differentiation we have become accustomed to from K2HD CDs as well as actual high-bitrate recordings, but it never descends into analytic superficiality or harshness of sound. Its performance is rather life-like and, above all, natural.

With its superb tonal performance comes a high degree of musicality, too—not least thanks to its careful timing. Whether it is restraint or attack that is called for, this K2 DAC handles it beautifully. The very agile "Credo" from Ariel Ramirez' "Misa Criolla" (Philips) was conjured in all its rhythmic shadings and showing an excellent sense of depth and placement, clearly separating the choir from the soloist. An astonishing and deeply moving experience. This kind of emotional competence, if you will, is very rare even among top-notch DACs.

GLOSSARY

Upsampling: Higher sampling frequencies allow narrower filters to be used, reducing phase problems.



Four digital inputs, Cinch and XLR outputs, phase shift switch – that's all the back panel has to offer

Those qualities are on full display in Arvo Pärt's "Da Pacem Domine" (ECM), with the choir hovering between the speakers. No other DAC can produce this feeling of spiritual transcendence as competently as the outwardly unimposing DAP-999 EX Limited.

But is what it does actually "real"? Or are we being bamboozled and seduced by the algorithms of the K2 processor? "K2 brings back to life what was lost during production and due to the restrictions of the format", as Kichui argues. The similarities in his DAC's sound to true high-bitrate recordings is unmistakable, so it's a pretty safe bet the DAP-999 EX Limited makes your CDs sound better than they are. *Matthias Böde (tr. Peter Monnerjahn)*

REIMYO DAP-999EX LIMITED

ca. € 10500
Dimensions: 440×60×370 mm
Warranty: 2 years
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The Limited edition of Reimyo's DAC promises to make CDs sound like high-bitrate discs. The comparison is by no means far fetched. The new version of the DAP-999 EX has excellent soundstaging and produces an astonishing level of detail.

SPECIFICATIONS

Frequency response	1,3 dB ~ 20 kHz
S/N Ratio	94 dB
Linearity (~90 dB)	0,7 dB
Output Resistance (Cinch/XLR)	146/213 Ohms
Output Voltage ~ 0 dB (Cinch/XLR)	2,65/5,3 V
Power Consumption	
Off Standby Idle	0 - 13 W

LAB NOTES: Since the K2 processor influences measurements, we haven't been able to reliably determine THD. The spectrum was free of noise.

FEATURES

Four digital inputs (AES, BNC, coaxial, optical), one symmetric and asymmetric output each, phase shift switch.

STEREO-TEST

SOUND VERDICT	100%
VALUE FOR MONEY	
★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	
VERY GOOD	