

# NAGRA CLASSIC DAC II CONVERTER



# Analogue DNA

The genesis of the Classic Line goes back to the famous Nagra PL-P phono of 1997, itself inspired by the legendary Nagra IV-S tape recorder of 1971. The famous modulometer cut from aluminium, like the reduced-size case, is the hallmark of this line, which continues its advance into the future with the new Classic DAC version II, which imposes its incomparable musicality.

**An inimitable look sculpted from aluminium. Microfibre "Haute Horlogerie" gloves are even included.**

It is ahead of its time with its Nagra Link fibre optic input/output for the best possible quality link from the future Nagra streamer. The Classic line, Nagra's first historic foray into top-of-the-range high-fidelity, is made up of exceptional equipment: Classic PHONO, Tube DAC, Classic PREAMP, Classic INT integrated, Classic AMP, 300i and 300p amplifiers using the 300B triode. Then there's the separate Classic PSU power supply and the VFS anti-vibration shelves for amplification and sources. They all feature Nagra's legendary build quality,

finely carved from solid aluminium. Despite its compact size, the Classic DAC II is the pinnacle of sound reproduction.

## **PROFESSIONAL-STANDARD QUALITY**

Already present on the 1952 Nagra II and a true precision instrument, the modulometer has 2 hands: one black (left channel) and one red (right channel). It displays the digital input level, where 0 dB FS corresponds to the Full Scale signal. To its left, a toggle switch adjusts the light intensity according to 7 levels. The small



## PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

LED display shows the selected inputs and the resolution of the files being played back. The central encoder-type controller selects the inputs and reverses the phase when pressed, with a visual reminder if the phase is reversed. Symbol of Nagra, the red-striped main control activates 4 positions: OFF, in standby when the rear switch is switched. R for Remote, to switch off the DAC remotely. MUTE: ON but muted with warm-up. ON: fully operational. At the rear are the stereo RCA outputs and 9 digital inputs: USB-B, optical, AES-ABU, 2 x S/PDIF (RCA & BNC), plus 2 Nagra Link fibre inputs/outputs. USB-B and N-Link resolutions go up to DSD246 (x4) & PCM 384kHz; PCM 192kHz for AES/EBU, Toslink and S/PDIF. A 3-pin Lemo allows connection to

the optional Classic PSU using super-capacitors, to which 3 Nagra devices can be connected, greatly improving listening. There is no variable level for quality reasons, as the Classic DAC II requires a quality preamplifier.

### **DSD OVERSAMPLING AT THE INPUT**

It incorporates a new input algorithm, featuring the same NADM (Nagra Audio Digital Module) digital engine used in the renowned HD DAC X and Tube DAC. It supports all high-resolution formats such as DSD256 (4x) and DXD (384 kHz/32-bit), as well as the highly polished Red Book CD format. This version II retains all the strong points of the initial model, while improving on them, such as the new USB input developed for

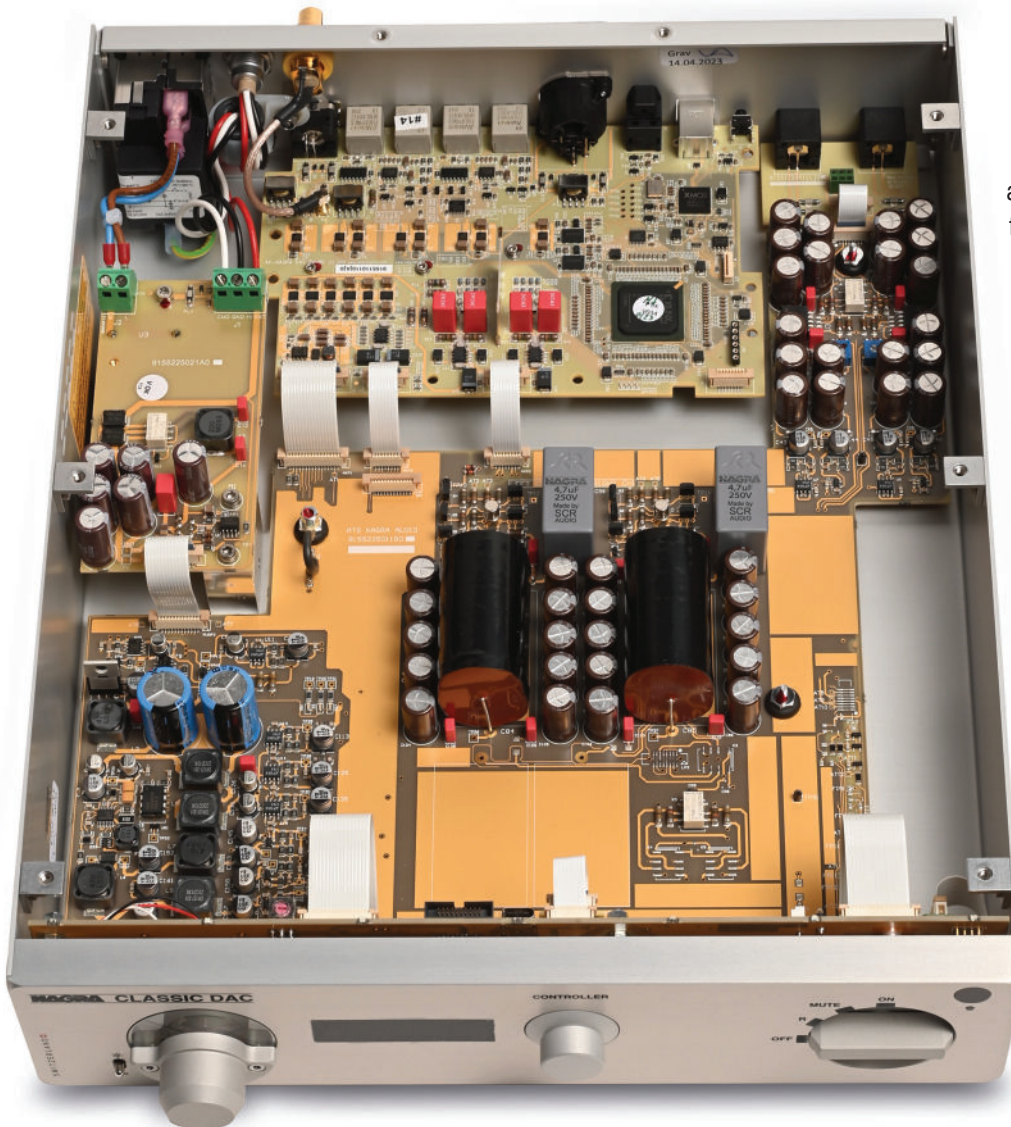


**Close-up of the module-meter with adjustable luminosity. The red-striped switch evokes the country of origin. A pre-heating period of around 15 seconds is applied on ignition, to warm up the components.**

Nagra incorporating XMOS, which offers better results and greater compatibility. The digital inputs feature an isolation transformer, adapting impedance and level. This is followed by proprietary multiple DSD oversampling, the result of work by Andreas Koch and the group of engineers who created DSD. It takes into account psychoacoustic perception and the decorrelation of the musical signal with noise. The conversion is carried out by a programmed FPGA, and the clock incorporates a high-precision VCXO (Voltage-Controlled Crystal Oscillator), synchronised with the master clock. The pure Class A output stages use measured and sorted military JFET transistors in a virtual triode arrangement without negative feedback. The new-generation ultra-low noise switching power supply is medical grade. It is more powerful and quieter on this version II, using very low noise regulators, where each stage is rigorously decoupled from the other. Finally, the Classic DAC II has 2 Nagra Link inputs/outputs for fibre optics, designed for future links with a separate Nagra streamer.







a dynamic river that ripples like flowing water, growing stronger with each slope, always ready to overcome obstacles, to slip between nuances, to thunder in the cascade of a crescendo, then to become calm again in the current of the music.

The Classic DAC II does not impose a monotonous rhythm, but spreads its palette of expression according to the source, as for example on Elton John's 'Leave On', in a high-resolution file, which seems to rediscover the singer's voice, at once delicate at the top and touching in its emotional intensity and sincerity within a vast stage of realistic dimensions. When it comes to note attack, for example, Leon Parker's cymbals have never sounded so pure and sparkling, so lightning fast, on Trio Mirabassi Live In Blue Note in Tokyo.

The network connection is then totally isolated, for exceptional audio data transmission performance.

## LISTEN

**Timbres :** Only a handful of top-of-the-range converters, including the Nagra Tube DAC and HD DAC X, are capable of offering such a rich, extensive, abundant palette of timbres - in a word, natural. The word is out, but it couldn't be more accurate in the case of the Classic DAC II. The elegance, rhythm, lightness and fullness of the textures are dazzling. The Nagra plunges us into the heart of the music without the digital medium

ever getting in the way of this pleasure, even on a simple Red Book CD, provided the recording is good. If you want to know the true nature of the Vienna Philharmonic, go there, or listen to the New Year's concert on the Classic DAC II, for example by Georges Prêtre in 2008, and let yourself be carried away by Johann Strauss's Paris Walzer. The impetus given by the orchestra's fusion unfolds with magical splendour and quality, for a musical moment masterfully revealed by the Nagra. The Nagra really is as close to analogue as you can get, and the conversion here takes place as if by magic.

**Dynamics :** The Nagra delivers

**The interior exudes Swiss quality. The large-value polypro SCR condensers provide good bass response. The military JFETs in aluminium enclosures are of outstanding quality.**

## SPECIFICATIONS

Origine : Switzerland  
 Price: 18 500 euros  
 Power supply Classic PSU : 14 500 euros  
 Finish : natural aluminum  
 Warranty : 3 ans  
 Dimensions (L x H x P) : 380 x 76 x 280 mm  
 Weight : 5 kg  
 Digital inputs : USB Audio, AES/EBU, TOSlink, 2 x S/PDIF, 2 x Nagra Link  
 Analog outputs : stereo RCA  
 Frequency respons : 5 to 40 kHz (+0 dB /-1 dB)  
 Crosstalk : > 100 dB  
 Distortion : < 0.02%  
 Analog noise floor : -128 dB (Lin.)

PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

NAGRA CLASSIC DAC II

The treble of this Nagra reaches heights of subtlety and purity, but Renzi's double bass is just as agile, round and deep, while the piano hammers out its left-hand attacks in a full, powerful and inspired performance. What a delight !

**Soundstage :** On the Telarc CD of the Berliner Philharmoniker playing Glazunov, conducted by Claudio Abbado, where Maxim Vengerov makes his 1727 Reynier Stradivarius sing, how can one fail to be spellbound by the soundstage that spreads out majestically in all dimensions, where the sublime timbres of instruments of noble extraction materialise. The Nagra's ability to paint a landscape in relief with so much detail in the background is incredible, like a Renaissance artist capturing the lightness of a morning mist, or the sharpness of a detail in nature. It's an image to signify that Nagra is not into clinical hyper-realism, but into the subtlety of alloys while always maintaining musical coherence, like an indivisible whole that never loses sight of its goal. The Nagra's strong point is its ability to avoid falling into the trap of a hi-fi system eager for maximum resolution and a sound reproduction that is too artificial to be true. All the details, the tonality and the sound image are there, but without ever letting the music get in the way.

**Value for money :** Swiss quality comes at a price. The Classic DAC II follows in the inimitable Nagra tradition, where form follows function. Its legendary build quality, produced by Audio Technology in Romanel-sur-Lausanne, is unmistakable. Its musical merit propels it into the upper echelons, but its price is a tad steep, having undergone inflation since the first version. If you can afford it, these considerations will have little meaning once it is inserted into your system, given what it is capable of delivering musically, irreplaceable.

VERDICT

Analogue runs through the veins of the Classic DAC II, inoculated by the famous Nagra professional tape recorders. This means that the music is expressed in the most authentic way possible, at once charnel and embodied, never distant or cold, changing according to the infinite nuances, all things that are difficult to express, but that are instantly felt. The Nagra Classic DAC II is a lesson in conversion, and a veritable machine for musical sensations that we never tire of reviving.

Bruno Castelluzzo

TIMBRES	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
DYNAMICS	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
SOUNDSTAGE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
VALUE / MONEY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

