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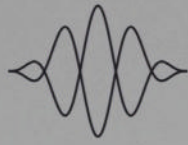


Product Focus

34 YAMAHA YH-C3000 WIRED HEADPHONES

Following its boldly ambitious re-entry into the audiophile headphone market in 2023, Yamaha will solidify that return with two new pairs later this year — and we've been ears-on with one of them.





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VITUS AUDIO SD-025 MK.II

Reviewer Greg Borrowman

STREAMING DAC



Take a long, hard look at Vitus Audio's SD-025 Mk.II streaming DAC and you would be hard-pressed to differentiate it from many other of the Danish brand's products. The company's founder and head designer, Hans Ole Vitus, uses exactly the same chassis for many of his models, which not only ensures visual continuity for those wanting to, say, use an SD-025 Mk.II with one of his amplifiers but also makes the chassis less expensive to produce as he can order them in greater quantities. Indeed, when a chassis costs as much to build as the one Vitus uses, we're talking about a not-inconsiderable saving.

When the very large and heavy (31kg!) carton containing our review sample arrived, we initially thought someone had made a mistake and sent us one of Vitus Audio's power amplifiers instead.

The SD-025 Mk.II's power supply must be massive because it took two of us to safely extricate the DAC from its packaging and position it on our equipment rack.

The SD-025 apparently earns its 'Mk.II' status by incorporating a new streamer board that supports gigabit network streaming, but it isn't the only thing that's new: Vitus says that everything in the unit has been redesigned around the new board. You can choose any UPnP streaming software to play from whatever and wherever you like, or use one of the hardwire options if you, like us, prefer to source your audio locally.

MYSTERY MANUAL

As with most Vitus Audio products, six push-buttons adorn the front panel, arranged vertically, with three on either side of the display. The buttons





The SD-025 Mk.II supports Mconnect, UPNP/DLNA, Tidal and Spotify Connect, V-Tuner and Qobuz, amongst others

to the display's left are 'Input', 'Menu' and 'Standby'. You can switch between USB, optical, AES/EBU and S/PDIF inputs, plus Ethernet and wi-fi. (Wi-fi connectivity is provided by plugging the supplied 'Dual Band USB Adaptor AC1300Mbps' dongle into the USB-A socket on the rear panel. We think this dongle approach is far superior to having wi-fi built-in because if a repair or upgrade becomes necessary, it can easily be done by the user simply replacing the dongle rather than having to take a trip to a service centre.)

These buttons also select which of the two analogue outputs you wish to use — XLR for a balanced output voltage, or RCA for an unbalanced one. You also have AES/EBU and S/PDIF digital outputs, but we couldn't figure out how to select these because no manual is supplied with the SD-025 Mk.II — or if there is, we couldn't find it.

You see, like many manufacturers

these days, Vitus Audio provides consumer information on a USB stick (in the case of the SD-025 Mk.II, it is a very handsome stick!) However, upon browsing the stick (the root directory is titled 'User Manuals and Brochures'), we discovered that it's a bulk repository for all Vitus Audio's consumer information, with directories for the Masterpiece, Reference and Signature Series components, plus one containing all the USB drivers required across the three series. Opening the 'Signature' subdirectory revealed deeper subdirectories for 19 different Signature Series models, but not one for the SD-025 Mk.II. There was indeed a subdirectory titled 'SD-025', but it did not contain a manual, just two files titled 'SD-Remote explanation.pdf' and 'SD-025 Streamer Guide.pdf'.

Although we worked out most of the Menu functions intuitively, exiting the menu using the front-panel controls wasn't easy. When the menu screen reads 'Exit' (with an accompanying arrow presumably pointing in the direction you should go), none of the three buttons seemed to complete the process. This information is, presumably, in the missing manual! (We didn't ask Vitus Audio to supply one because we shouldn't have to: it's not as if the SD-025 Mk.II is a new product, having been released at the 2023 High End Munich hi-fi show.)

The buttons on the right of the display are 'Volume Up', 'Volume Down' and 'Mute'. The maximum volume is shown as '0.00dB', the minimum as '-60.0dB'. Adjustment between these two extremes occurs in 0.5dB increments.

A fairly bright 'VA' logo at the bottom

of the front panel illuminates all the time, even when the unit is in standby mode. And the display colour is a rather nice orange (on a black background). We didn't much like the display's old-fashioned dot-matrix design, though, not least as very tiny dots create the matrix. It's also not very bright, making it quite difficult to read for those with imperfect eyesight. It appears the brightness is adjustable via Vitus Audio's optional remote control, but one was not supplied with our review sample. Brightness may even be adjustable using the front-panel controls, but without a manual we just couldn't be sure. From the information on the USB stick, it appears that this remote is an OEM design, and only some of its controls can control SD-025 Mk.II functions, including volume, mute, input selection, power on/standby and display brightness.

The digital inputs can accommodate digital data across a wide gamut of formats, courtesy of a pair of 1955 multi-bit delta-sigma DACs made by Analog Devices in combination with an Engineered Q8 sample rate converter — we're talking USB-Type B up to 384kHz plus DSD128; AES/EBU up to 192kHz; S/PDIF up to 192kHz; optical up to 96kHz; and Ethernet up to 192kHz plus DSD64. The digital outputs, meanwhile, are fixed at 24-bit/192kHz.

The SD-025 Mk.II supports Mconnect, UPNP/DLNA, Tidal Connect, Spotify Connect, V-Tuner and Qobuz, amongst others. It is now also certified as a Roon Ready endpoint, although Roon is not built in — you still need a separate Roon Core to manage your music collection and stream audio to the streaming DAC.





Your Vitus Audio retailer will be able to help with the specifics.

We would call the SD-025 Mk.II a 'take it or leave it' type of DAC because nothing at all is adjustable — you can't switch between different digital filters, adjust oversampling rates, invert phase, and so on. Basically, what you see is what you get. Although we don't usually fiddle too much (if at all!) with such variables available on a DAC, we rather like having the option to do so.

As we love handwritten inventory cards and warranty forms, we were naturally enamoured with the ones supplied with our review sample, which were hand-penned by one Britta Mogensen, who assured me that everything was A-OK with the product and that all the accessories required had been included with it. (Hey Britta, what about a manual?!)

Vitus Audio's written warranty has some interesting provisions, such as that the initial two-year purchase warranty (only valid if you purchase from an 'Authorised Partner') can be extended to six years by registering your purchase with Vitus Audio within 30 days, and that should you sell your SD-025 Mk.II, any period of time remaining on the warranty

can be transferred to a new owner, providing the sale is arranged via an Authorised Partner.

We aren't sure how this would play out under Australian Consumer Law, which states that it isn't necessary to register an extended warranty in order to qualify for coverage, and doesn't mention second owners at all. But it's probably all moot anyway: because of the way in which Vitus Audio builds its components, you are unlikely to ever make use of the SD-025 Mk.II's warranty.

Although our review sample was finished in silver (described as 'Warm Silver' by Vitus Audio), the streaming DAC is also available in two other 'Standard' colours — 'Pure White' and 'Jet Black' — while 'Unique' finishes such as 'Titanium Orange', 'Dark Champagne' and 'Titanium Grey' (pictured overpage) can be specially ordered. Your dealer can explain the other available unique finishes, plus the application lead times and pricing.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Though the front-panel display and absence of a manual were sources of mild frustration, all that was immediately forgiven once we started listening. The Vitus Audio's sound quality was clearly su-

perior in every respect. It was immediately obvious from the get-go that we would have to dip deeply into our bucket of superlatives to aptly describe its performance here.

If you want to be super impressed by the SD-025 Mk.II's bass delivery, spin up Lady Gaga's latest album, *Mayhem*, from the very beginning. Opener *Disease* is just wonderful — for not only the bass from a real bass guitar but also the bass delivered from the synthesisers, synth pads and even the drum machine.

But that is just a teaser for track two, which was peeled off as a hit single — the incredible and appropriately named *Abracadabra*. Ms Germanotta has really pulled one out of the hat with this pop masterpiece, a song so strong it forces listeners onto the dancefloor. The beat is hypnotic and the chorus is sing-along perfection. It also highlights Lady Gaga's astonishing vocal range and her ability to inflect the tonality of her lyrics. The drumming (including real drums, as well as a machine) is machine-gunlike in its impact. All this detail is revealed with total accuracy by the SD-025 Mk.II.

The following tracks don't reach the same heights, but don't bail before you've heard the closer, *Die With A Smile*, her



collaboration with Bruno Mars, to admire not only his terrific tenor voice but also her pianism and, once again, vocal. The synergy of the duet is enchanting.

To hear how the Vitus Audio delivered sonic complexity, we turned to British Bahraini trumpeter Yazz Ahmed's fourth (and newest) album, *A Paradise in the Hold*. The music is essentially jazz improvisation inspired by her Arabic heritage in which quarter-tone scales play a significant part. Amongst the many sonic highlights are the sound of George Crowley's bass clarinet and Ralph Wyld's vibraphone, but the polyrhythms that

infect almost all the tracks are like earworms to the soul... you can't *not* listen to the music. This is some of the most outrageously difficult music we have ever been privileged to hear, and the SD-025 Mk.II's delivery was as pitch-perfect and rhythmically accurate as the musicians themselves. The title track is probably the go-to, but *Her Light* and *Into the Night* are unmissable, as is opener *She Stands on the Shore*. Note also that hand-claps are incredibly revealing of sound quality that's true to life, and you will hear plenty of these on *Paradise*.

To check high-frequency delivery and also to reprise female vocals, it was time for an album that to some might seem a strange choice, *Arcadia* from Alison Krauss and Union Station. Not strange so far as the female vocal is concerned, because Krauss has a gorgeous voice, but if you're wondering about high frequencies, just listen to the sound of the dobro, fiddle, lap steel and mandolin on this new album, all of which are beautifully recorded. The acoustic guitar, banjo and piano also stretch into the upper reaches. Plus, there's the lovely baritone of Russell Moore. It's a strange choice of an album for us also due to its country and bluegrass genre, but we were initially intrigued by the album's title, which is the same as one of our all-time favourite plays, written by Tom Stoppard.

CONCLUSION

Forgive its quirks and the Vitus Audio SD-025 Mk.II is a superb streaming DAC, performing at the highest calibre. If you are in the market for a component of this quality, you should certainly add it to your 'must audition' list. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Vitus Audio SD-025 Mk.II

Price: \$48,000

Warranty: 5 years

Outputs: RCA, balanced XLR, AES/EBU, S/PDIF

Inputs: USB Type B, optical, S/PDIF, AES/EBU, RJ45

Impedance: 80Ω (XLR, RCA)

Frequency response: +800kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio: > 110dB @ 1kHz

THD: < 0.01%

File support: up to 24-bit/384kHz PCM, DSD128 (USB)

Dimensions (HWD): 13.5 x 43.5 x 42.8cm

Weight: 26kg

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