

COMBAK REIMYO DAP-999EX TOKU-S

The art of playing compact discs



Over the years it has often happened to me to write, and perhaps someone has also read about it, about a personal predilection for solid music. With this I do not deny, on the contrary, a now mature coexistence with the world of liquids. It's just that I'm not a fanatic of anything, and I think everything can have a *raison d'être*. As long as the quality of what you hear is at least worthy of being considered high. Some like to divide the world between analog and digital, between tubes and solid state, between *compact discs* and high resolution *files*. By compiling rankings of absolute quality for each of these specialties.

And Well, things are, as usual in life and especially for our audiophile world, a little different than we would like, simplistically, to be so. If there is one thing that has haunted me in recent years, a term chosen with care and attention, it has been to note the many different paths through which we arrive at a satisfying, credible, exciting listening.

What do I mean by this? That music fulfills its task when we listen to it in a physiologically correct way. For each of us.

At the limit touching the so-called my-fi. As long as you can first nourish and then deepen your knowledge of all the music of

quality, almost everything is legal. Naturally, *almost* everything must be understood in a very small neighborhood of the limit constituted by that neutrality, transparency, correctness without which one is outside the very concept of high fidelity. Hence, in this area there are many proposals, all the same but all different for those who know how to listen, the audio industry and music formats.

So you understand why Tizio likes the 2a3 tube and Gaius needs a thousand watts, Sempronio likes creaking vinyl and Mariello listens only on Wi-Fi. This is why everything has a clear reason for existing and it is nice, for a curious magazine like ours, to investigate the questionable.

The compact disc, or music at 44.1 kHz

When, in 1981 or thereabouts, we began to talk seriously, commercially, of compact discs, the tones were those triumphant ones of those who had created something objectively crazy for the time. In fact, in a world accustomed to listening to music scraping plastic with a nail (don't say I don't know how to be raw sometimes), the concept of a laser beam plumbing sequences of points in a spiral as wide as a bunch of human hair, at first something more related to science fiction than to music appeared.

And it could not be otherwise for a product designed by the best electronic engineers on the planet. Except that the sound of that accursed huddle did not *excite*. It works fine, even surprising, but it didn't sound right.

And it could not be otherwise for a product designed by the best electronic engineers on the planet left, however, probably, to work alone, without passionate music lovers.

... there is everything, and everything at the same time, even what should almost be antithetical.

When music lovers, who wanted to listen to it at least as they were accustomed to doing by rubbing those improbable furrows with small plows, raised their voices once again to deprecate the final sonic result, someone realized that the whole silver disk hopefully had to make some effort to improve. It did so, at first slowly, then, with the appearance of the so-called high end products, in a more decisive way. Thus, in the mid-nineties (my personal and immovable was the birth of listenable digital music), we came to have digital players capable of playing. Good.

Sure, they cost a lot, but this time they played. In other words, it was possible to listen to music recorded at 44.1 kHz, a frequency now considered by someone as an intercom, in a satisfying way. The compact disc, that is, had become edible. Thanks to mechanics less and less needy of the error correction circuit (the Prince of Impostors), to accurate power supplies, to high-level conversion chips and, last but not least, fundamental and too often neglected, to analogous output stages worthy of us of preamps of rank.

Then, over the last ten years, excellence has risen to legend with very sophisticated electronics and, above all, with the availability via the network of record works released in high quality but at dizzying frequencies. In my little world, the compact disc has satisfied an unbridled, compulsive, desire for musical knowledge and they have piled up by the thousands. Some of them remind me of key events in my life, how can I ever get rid of them?



The front panel with input selection and information LEDs is very simple.

The art of knowing how to "please"

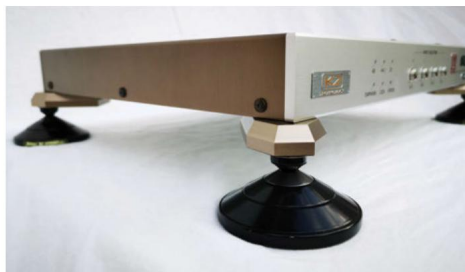
In life you can chase the absolute in every sphere and condemn yourself to the eternal, uncertain search for the sublime. It's a noble way of setting up your own existence, but it can be a nightmare if you don't succeed. Or it is possible to establish, for each of the things that we consider fundamental as a corollary of existence, a minimum that can be insinuated. Or you can opt for a mix of good things and others less, weighing the relative benefits expected from one and the other option. In the case of the writer, liquid music has been invited to my listening room several times since 2005. But initially she did not behave very well. Continuous problems of configuration, very simple for anyone able to tinker with a computer, became insurmountable for a functional illiterate like the one below. Hence the consequent, continuous, imperterrita, compulsive search for physical support. Hence piles of compact discs kept in absolute disorder, not only without taking into account at least an alphabetical list but, often, with discs and cases reversed. Despite this, the increasingly sophisticated array of reading mechanics, among which an astonishing Kalista Signature has been praising for years, served my distrust of the liquid side of music admirably.

But not only. Continuous listening to compact discs (and vinyls but this is not the place to reiterate how vinyl is still my greatest love), in hundreds of tests carried out for the magazine with the most diverse versions produced, instilled in me a irredeemable conviction: listening to the frequency of 44.1 kHz, if recorded and processed as appropriate, if listened to in systems that know how to do their job, well, it can be enough to excite and convince. This is not to say that at higher frequencies the quality of the final listening does not increase but, even if this is not always the case, this is not the point. The point is that whoever wants to listen exclusively to compact discs, or files recorded up to the maximum possible frequency for compact discs, is not giving up *anything* that can be considered, returning to the art of establishing priorities and limits in one's life, the minimum essential to enjoy. At Reimyo I must have made a philosophical journey not far from what I was reminded of from time to time in my numerous plays, something like: however, here we don't even mess with 44.1! And when they have seriously started to think about how to best satisfy listening to music from compact discs (or equivalent files), as you can read in the technical article by Paolo Mattei on this same number of AudioGallery, they they have certainly chosen a renouncing attitude. The Japanese technicians have never considered the compact disc the son of a lesser God, quite the contrary! They have come to the conviction that it is even better to listen to a file at 44.1 kHz of sampling frequency, read and processed in the best way for this technology, rather than a very high resolution file but managed by electronics not yet able to understand and solve its complexities. In fact, indefinitely increasing the size of the music files can lead to some problems related to noise, filters, at the final stage which, they believe, does not pay as much in terms of listening as the effort necessary to produce the files.



There are four possible digital inputs, both RCA and XLR analog outputs.

COMBAK REIMYO DAP-999EX TOKU-S



The trial version is equipped with "legs" to increase the footprint on the ground.

themselves and the machines to read them. The writer is certainly not a technician, but having listened carefully (for months in my personal system) to some of the largest converters on the market, even the most expensive ones in the world, I can write here about an immovable conviction of mine: if the DAC does its job well, if the record is well recorded and produced, well, the performance margin obtainable from the very high sampling rate is small, damn small, as the sampling rate increases. If you listen to MSB's DAC Select II, if you dissect it as it happened to the writer, you would love it even if it only played the files at 44.1 kHz, such is the profuse quality. This is to talk about an electronics (only DAC and related power supplies, excluding mechanics) from 165,000 euros including VAT. Which certainly is capable of taking the reproduced sound to even higher peaks when playing higher density files but it doesn't shock as much as it already does by playing digital files at the frequency of the compact disc. This is it, in my opinion. Now, of course, I certainly don't want to claim that high resolution files are not needed or there is no need of converters capable of reading them. Certainly not. Progress is unstoppable. However, the fact is that a converter designed, like our Reimyo, to read files at a frequency of 44.1 kHz at the highest possible quality can, absolutely can, sound legendary. Although limited by design to primitive frequencies. It can, absolutely can, this is its strength, make it preferable to other DACs that play high resolution files. For the simple fact that the amount of kHz used, alone, says little.



Detail of the DAC placed above the Harmonix foot.

A converter is a machine made up of several parts, in which not only must the incoming data be accepted without afflicting it with jitter, not only must it be converted into voltage, not only must it avoid noise, electromagnetic pollution, ringing, but all these aspects must be interrelated with a large output stage. Because what matters, and this is where I wanted to get to, is the sound we get in the listening room. Yes, that's the only thing that matters. If in an electronics, inside the empty frame, there were only a butterfly, or a hamster, or a pigeon, armadillo, earthworm, lobster capable of converting the sound, I wouldn't care if any of these little animals gave me emotions. Listening.

I know, I am not paying much attention to the technical contents of the products I review. I absolutely wanted to clarify this position once and for all: I really don't care about how electronics are built. Nothing at all. I'm interested in how its na. Regardless. Indeed, the less I know about what's inside, how it got there, who thought it, the better. If it works, you can see it sitting down. In the listening room.

In the case of this Reimyo DAP-999 Toku-S, which is the top-of-the-range configuration of the only converter of the Japanese house, what curiosity about how it was made has managed to appease itself. But only because it seemed absolutely familiar to me the precondition of the project specifications that its creators have placed at the basis of this electronics: to limit the frequency to 48 kHz for reasons of final sound quality. You will understand that for those who have always thought of it like me, this statement sounded disruptive and I wanted to see clearly. Especially after listening to it.

Reimyo DAP-999 Toku-S DAC and CDT-777 TOKU defining mechanism

The Japanese converter can certainly be defined as slim, in the sense that its development in height is particularly small, while the dimensions in width and depth are substantially the traditional ones. Rather light, it is well assembled but certainly does not give much to mere design data. The frame requires that, compared to the less expensive versions, there are *legs* that protrude from the frame to see a wider support surface (on the feet). Therefore the plan dimensions would be those typical of standard electronics but the space it occupies on the shelf, in this configuration, is much larger. It is a prism with holes on the upper panel, in good thickness sheet metal, but there are no exaggerations in this sense. The front panel is marked by four buttons in the center and six LEDs on the left. With the former you select the digital input from four possible, AES EBU, BNC, RCA and optical, while with the latter you are informed about the three possible sampling frequencies linked, namely 48, 44.1 and 32 kHz, on the emphasis, on signal locking, on the presence of errors. In the Toku model, which is the most performing of the three available (DAP-999EX Limited, DAP-999 Toku and, in fact, DAP 999EX Toku-S, with the first at a cost that is about half of the last ...). As regards the technique of this processor, based on the well-known (by the employees, perhaps a little less by the enthusiasts) K2 technology, I refer to the article by Eng. Paolo Mattei in the pages of AudioBoard on this same issue. The mechanics are standardized electronics, top-loading, with a large and heavy clamp, also equipped with the typical legs of the Toku S version, sent with slightly different feet from those of the DAC, to reiterate the fact that it takes a lot of effort to set up. Why do you tell us about it if it's out of production? For two reasons. The first is because at AudioGallery we deal with beautiful and well-sounding things, the second is because the decommissioning of this mechanic is still recent and maybe, somewhere, there is still something recently sold or used. But above all I talk about it because if there is someone listening who still feels, like me, the need for one



The splendid Toku CDT-777 reading mechanism.

mechanics of excellent quality, well, maybe it starts up and gets one. Because this mechanic reminded me a lot of my Kalista Signature, which alone costs three times as much, but, I'll say more, it seems to me that the Reimyo is even more balanced, more refined. The Kalista does not strive for detail, low, control, however it can, in some cases, appear stentorian, sharp, very defined.

Not for all implants. While I challenge anyone to find a situation in which this Reimyo is not right, so delicate, chiseled, compact and very melodious.

Reimyo in Japanese means miracle.

Based on the Philips CD Pro M-2 mechanism, which is accessed from above by manually sliding the drawer towards the back, it needs the not small clamp supplied to work. Characteristic of this reading unit is the only possibility of single ended as a digital output. No optical connection, no AES EBU output.

Single ended only. The RCA connector is also implemented in an elastic mode. So when inserting the cable you have to pay a minimum of attention to make sure that it goes all the way down to the connector that dances on its axis to the point that, at first, I thought I had broken it with my big hands.

This aspect also tells of the various tuning modes carried out by Reimyo in its electronics. And frankly, he also says a lot about which one thinks is the best possible connection between mechanics and converter. There is in fact no connection for jitter reduction, such as the wordlock used by dCS or the proprietary type used by MSB (pro ISL), and there is no I2S type connection, used by CEC or Aqua Acoustics between the others. At Reimyo they believe that the jitter can be eliminated electronically and therefore they just make sure that the incoming signal is as free from reading errors as possible. Manual tuning and large digital cable.



The mechanics drawer, open, and the large clamp supplied.



The rear of the CDT-777, with the coaxial digital output only.

Reimyo & Harmonix

At the head of everything, at least at the level of orientation of the wheelhouse, there is Kazou Kiuchi who has been fighting for forty years (hence the name Combak, who knows ...) to obtain the best possible sound. With top experience in JVC (which, in fact, before and until the production exit provided Reimyo with the mechanics of reading) and a culture-only person in the topics of vibration control and electromagnetic interference, Kiuchi San is an international guru of management of analogue tapes and their digital transfer. Above all, his philosophy based on the exhausting refinement of the listening chain stands out. It may be a coincidence but the big Japanese brands, those definitely oriented towards the high end, all think the same way: everything sounds, everything has a reverberation on the final result, even those inaudible contributions in themselves, if added to the one to the other with wisdom, patience and commitment can lead to make the difference. Therefore, in the land of the Rising Sun does not exist the concept of plug and play if we talk about music reproduction of the highest quality. Over the years, then, inevitably, all audio manufacturers have found themselves in this philosophy aimed at considering every single component, cable, decisive support for the final result which is given by a sum of the parts apparently not determining but which, all together, if well integrated, they make a significant difference. Through the Combak Corporation, the Harmonix and Reimyo brands come into play in creating and fine-tuning the perfect chain. Harmonix, which had a moment of great notoriety in Italy in the nineties, specializes in resonance control systems and cabling, while Reimyo builds electronics and audio, one of each type albeit in different performance levels, as seen above for the DAC. . It is therefore no coincidence that when the Italian distributor sent me the DAC he wanted to send it complete with power cable, digital cable, anti-resonance feet. It also works alone, of course, but its ultimate configuration, the one by which it must be judged, is only the one accompanied by everything with which it was developed and approved in Japan. Explained why it all came together, we could in fact call these digital sources as Reimyo's source system .

I listen

The Reimyo DAP-999 Tokus was accompanied by the his mechanics of choice (the CDT-777 Toku) and, as mentioned, the Harmonix RF-999 T MKII pins, the Harmonix Hijiri Nagomi power cables and the Harmonix HDG Million digital cable. As mentioned, for the mechanics I have been delivered some more suitable feet, and with a surprisingly lower cost than those supplied with the DAC, namely the RF-909



The Harmonix feet placed under the mechanics.

COMBAK REIMYO DAP-999EX TOKU-S



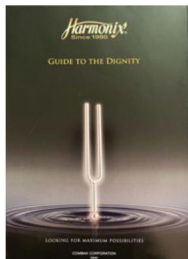
The formidable
Harmonix
HDG Million
digital cable.

X MKII. Let me say that of all the corollary accessories of the digital system under test, the one that struck me most, indeed, amazed, was the Harmonix digital cable. It really is a case of its own. Because while the contributions of the pins and power cords are most clearly noticeable only all together (probably built to spec just for these electronics, although I've used them profitably wherever I've plugged them in), the digital cable is truly a champion. universality as well as good sound. On the fly, as soon as he arrived, he was able to get noticed right away, which for a colleague, digital too, is something quite special. So it came naturally to me to implement it with every digital electronics possible and wherever I put it to work, well, it worked. Providing excellent performance, mainly in terms of noise reduction and distortion. Truly satisfying for that naturalness that it manages to instill in the reproduction, in some way by smoothing the surfaces while enhancing the instrumental color of each sound subject, which stands out against a background of black velvet, very comfortable. I connected it to everything it could be connected to, between the streamer (in my case a fantastic Moon Mind 2, which has been on a permanent basis in my system for a few months) and any converter present (the converter park currently consists of the Naim DAC and Aqua Acoustics Formula xHD) and not just between the amazing Reimyo mechanics and its family converter. So the DAC under test was inserted into a system consisting of the Naim NAC552 preamplifier, the Naim NAP250DR power amplifier, the ProAc Re sponse 3 speakers (an old love that returns, that for the ProAc of the nineties ...). All Naim signal cables and Naim NAC A5 speaker cables, power cables for all Naim Kimber Kable. Magi room treated with dozens of Daads (they should be eighteen, I think) and a Volcano, all of Applied Acoustics, current served by the very solid and very reliable Faber's Cables slipper. Although this system is quite different in composition from those used in recent years here at AudioGallery, it is certainly one of the most musical, reliable, exciting systems ever hosted in this now dated (but glorious) listening room. The digital source used therefore consisted exclusively of the streamer Moon Mind 2, a pure streamer (my favorites, the pure streamers, because I want to be free to choose the converter and because with them it is like using a "liquid mechanics" instead of solid) , and from the mechanics, properly called, that is *solid*, of Reimyo. So we come to the sound. Which is that sound that all audiophiles in the world would have killed thirty years ago for. The mature, reliable, lively and exciting digital. Vibrant, mellow, dense and very solid. With tense colors, infinite shades, unexpected airiness. Frankly

I don't know if the performances I will write about later depend on the specialization that we wanted to give to the converter, thereby limiting it to 48 kHz, and how much of this sound, eventually, depends on that choice. What I can say is that the ultimate meaning of that high-end industry applied to our discipline is here, open to anyone who wants to absorb its deeper meaning. The search for the correct sound, yes of course, but there is something more and better than *simply* correct sound. There is the soul of the music, there is that body, with all the weight, the presence, the gait of the sound subjects spatially reconstructed thanks to the notorious stereo effect, there is such a realistic timbre blown in mid-air in the room that pushes you to deepen your musical knowledge *also* guided by the simple pleasure of listening to sounds that are so satisfying to the intellect in themselves. Yes, what is reproduced by the Reimyo is so true, emotional, pulsating that one would also listen to discs recorded with *any sounds*, even disconnected from each other, that is, produced without that with the cranialty of reciprocal, organized relationships, which we call musical code. It would therefore seem the triumph of pure audiophilia, of love for sound per se. Instead, all this is clearly subservient to music and one feels loud and clear that whoever has developed this electronics has sought first of all to pay homage to music. With the broad term musicality, applied to audio electronics, it is sometimes thought to describe the ability to reproduce recorded music at a more engaging level than other devices of the same type that just work and that's it. And that's damn it. No one in the world has yet managed to explain, measures in hand, why certain objects are capable of involving to tears and others instead only work, maybe even very well, and that's it. I believe that the secret, but I have no certain elements to say it, lies in a combination of characteristics which, only when present all together and in certain relationships between them, can make the electronics that possess them make the leap towards the absolute. that way. I am made to think, after months spent in the company of this DAC, that the essential characteristics mentioned above are those that I have always found in those objects of not very large production, developed by a single man. I think of Audio Tekné, I think of Klimo, I think of Convergent, of Accappella, Thiel, I think of stuff like that. That is, objects that, once created, created with an already excellent base, are incessantly perfected for a lifetime by the same person. Who obviously lies, beyond the technical knowledge must necessarily have an uncommon musical sensitivity. I don't want the hard and pure engineers but when the engineering is to some extent subjected to the refinement, to the modification experienced even outside the s



The Nagomi power cables.



The Harmonix product brochure found in the DAC and mechanics packaging.

I find that it almost always reaches higher ratings. What I mean by higher ratings makes us understand well this DAC that offers chisel and with primacy concreteness, brightness and fragrance, detail and overall view, absolute control, speed, net wit and, at the same time, me praise, heavy bass, medium so verchiante. Yes, that's right, there is everything, and everything together, even what should almost be antithetical: carnal body and strong definition, extreme heat and hallucinatory plasticity, mechanical rhythmic and harmonious tails that you insist. A machine that seems absolutely perfect to me. Did I listen better? I've listened to quieter

digital electronics, digital electronics with a darker background, I've listened to more transparent electrons than digital but, believe me, none of them cost three to ten times the cost of the Reimyo DAC under test, with balance and such an overwhelming general musicality (still ...). The Reimyo, if it were a cartridge, would be a perfectly calibrated MC for its arm and for the phono pre, that is an audio object placed in the best possible conditions to function, where impedance, gain, geometric adjustments, general set-up of the system make listening something unforgettable. If you have had the opportunity to play with an audio system sensitive to tuning, where also the type of fuse downstream of the power supply tray and the forks used in the speaker cables, even if the relative contribution was inaudible by itself, you may have noticed that their interaction leads to an unambiguous general improvement. Some are still smiling but I remember well when, in the mid-nineties, experimenting with power cables, I concentrated on the sonic changes that the various types of plug and socket produced. I decided to solder the power cable, without the plug, directly into the wall box, without the socket. There is no technician in the world who could subscribe to the fact that the sonic result was, as experienced by myself, a reduced general congestion and an increased refinement of the high range. Well, I am ready to do double-blind listening with a panel of tenants who presented perfect audiometry. Just as anyone who has tried to suspend their electronics on one or the other table, or on springs, or on rubber feet or any other damned material, must necessarily have been aware of changes in the response of the system. Changes, not necessarily improvements. But it all sounds, again, dear reader friends. Putting the volume of the Treccani on top of the compact disc player also makes the differences audible. Not to mention, of course, what the right wiring can do for a given set up. Fortunately, there are people who, in addition to knowing how to design superfine electronics, devote as many energies to the development of the so-called boundary conditions or weak interactions, if you prefer. Here, Kiuchi San has probably come to have total control of all those characteristics which, all together, must be placed in a certain relationship. Probably he has studied, and exchanged, exchanged, alternated, started the question so thoroughly that he is able to offer an audio source that most of all gives the impression of being perfected to such an extent as to offer listenings free from any tension. neither digital, without underlining, free from redundancies of any kind yet full of instrumental colors, very rich timbre, airy and compact. A true miracle. On the other hand, I almost forgot, Reimyo in Japanese really means miracle.

Conclusions

Well, what do you want me to tell you? Although by now the undersigned also begins to have a certain familiarity with liquid music, I would definitely prefer to listen to a compact disc played by this duo than the equivalent title played by any other converter connected to the Moon Mind 2 streamer, even if at a higher frequency. high. In fact, I want to repeat it here, the differences to be appreciated are not to be found between two titles at different mechanical frequencies but in the same Reimyo DAC alone. It will then produce the resulting sound. Believe me, the plate data is not really important, what matters here is that this system offers such listening pleasure, such harmonic richness, such respect for tones, timbres, silences, nuances that we do not he wonders more about what he is listening to but how he is enjoying it. Now, having clarified that as mechanics plus converter there are not, to my direct knowledge, many other alternatives in the world of compact disc reading, I am obliged to consider reality. And the reality is that the world is producing ever new titles, and only and only with high or very high definition, at a vertiginous pace. So the question arises: what sense does it make, it would have, to invest in an obsolete DAC by design? Well, after months of fumbling I have come to this conclusion: the Reimyo DAC, being able to afford it, must be bought up to play compact discs with its mechanics (grabbing it on the used market) or 44.1 kHz titles from the network. Everything else, always being able, must be listened to with a second DAC capable of running after the increasingly higher rods of the frequencies used to scan the sound. It is so. Some machines are art and should be chosen only for how they sound, without wondering how they do it, without imagining a reason why they do it. Without preconceptions. Long live the music.

Andrea Della Sala

FEATURES

Combak Reimyo DAP-999EX Toku-S

Type: digital to analog converter.

Sampling frequency: 48kHz, 44.1kHz, 32kHz.

Auto-switching, 16-bit.

Digital inputs: AES (XLR-3P; Hot: No.3) 110 ohm, BNC 75 ohm, RCA 75 ohm, TORX optical.

Signal processor: K2 Technology (K2 LSI; converts from 16 / 44.1k to 24 / 176.4k).

D / A converter: 24 bit -16 x oversampling / multi bit).

Analogue outputs: XLR, RCA.

Signal to Noise Ratio: Better than 114 dB (IHF-A)

THD: Better than 0.003% (1kHz Vo = F / S) (30kHz LPF On).

Consumption: 15W

Dimensions: 43 x 4.4 x 33.7 cm.

Weight: 5.5 kg.

Prices including

VAT: Reimyo DAP-999EX Toku-S converter euro 14,625.00 (version DAP-999EX- LTD euro 8,950.00, DAP-999 Toku euro 12,105.00).

"Nagomi" H-DCH power cable, 1.5 m, € 1,587.00.

HDG Million cable 1.0 m, € 1,220.00.

Harmonix RF-999 T MKII devices (set of 4 pcs.) Euro 1,450.00.

Harmonix RF-999 X MKII devices (set of 4 pcs.) Euro 285.00.

Distributor:

Ethos Via

Della Fonte Meravigliosa 50 00143

Rome www.ethosfineaudio.com