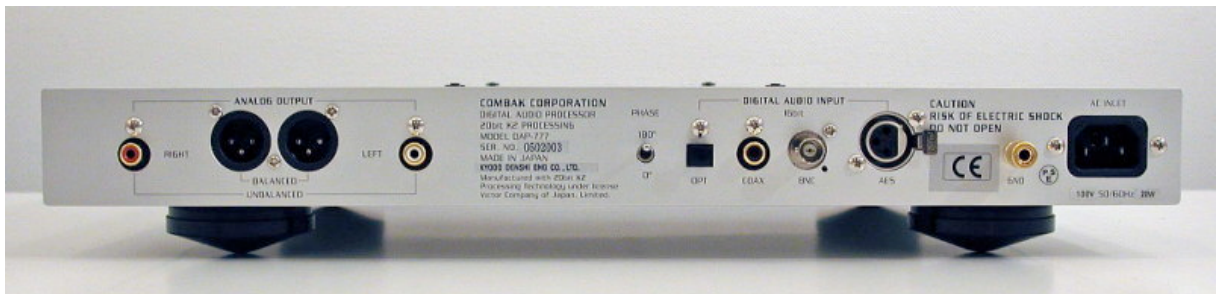


# THE *ART* OF *CONVERSION*

Turning bits and bytes into sounds and musical zeal is the job of digital-to-analog converters. STEREO tested three different D/A converters and discovered a whole range of interesting phenomena regarding their “data processing”.



DAP-777



Every time the drive was changed on one and the same converter, different sound characteristics emerged, whose qualities shifted horizontally – different diction at the same level – or vertically, i.e. taking on a better or poorer direction. Nothing of course matches the Esoteric VRDS drive. The DVD drive in the Classé CDP-202, supplied interestingly enough by Teac as well (Esoteric is the luxury line from Teac), made the tested pieces appear much more spatially compact, paler and sober. For this reason alone a CDP-202 will never achieve the standard of an X-01, regardless of how high grade the integrated converter might be. After all, there comes a certain point where the converter simply draws the line against any further possibilities and potential.

What seemed totally droll in the face of all this gusto was that at first not-too-far-fetched idea of using the Aqvox to lift ones MP3 files to high-end levels. It's all digital anyway, right? Forget it! Sure, depending on the data rate, it might sound a bit more appealing or alienating. However the computer, even with the "afterburner" from Aqvox, will never pose a genuine threat to the CD or sophisticated players. In fact, the system's weaknesses were exposed all the more by this at times. That's the way situations in life work: You've got to put something into it, before you can get anything out of it. What a shame, it would have been so wonderful

**There is no better way of listening to MP3 files than through the Aqvox USB port. We played these over from Apple's iBook. The outcome was, however, rather sobering.**

## Source Studies

**What are we actually hearing? The converter or the data feeder? A brief excursion.**

Know what a high-ender's dream is? If you could buy an economical and superbly functioning CD player like Harman/Kardon's HD970 for 400 euros, throw in something like Reimyo's top DAP-777 converter, and have the ultimate replay system. The fact that right from the get-go this isn't going to happen is one of the big mysteries of high

fidelity, and almost seems to be a dirty trick on the part of the gods of HiFi. It's the old adage: no ticket, no entry.

We put this and other combinations to the test. The bottom line: The Harman and the Reimyo make an ill-matched team that is simply not compelling. The combination of the large VRDS drive in Esoteric's X-01 reference player and the Aqvox sounds better. The best set was certainly the Esoteric and Reimyo, keeping in mind that the attainable results depend in great part on the quality of the

data provider. It doesn't matter how good the converter is, it cannot generate a high-class sound image with simpler, more modest drives.

Admittedly, you can upgrade basic equipment somewhat with the help of a good D/A converter. In our test the previously mentioned HD970 did sound considerably more resonant, robust und powerful in expression with the Aqvox and Lavry, than it did through its integrated converter/output amplifier. Still, it never moved beyond a certain level.

**They all transfer digital music data, but there were drastic differences in the converted sound material: Esoteric X-01 (left), Harman/Kardon HD970 (above) and Classé CDP-202.**