

NuForce

uDAC5 headphone amplifier/USB DAC



FITTING COMFORTABLY INTO the palm of the hand, the compact uDAC5 headphone amplifier/DAC will handle most audio formats available to the highest possible resolutions. It measures just 68 x 21 x 45mm (WxHxD), weighs 100g and claims to offer a high-quality audio output when used as a desktop audio controller to an external amplifier as part of a hi-fi setup via the stereo RCA output or via the 3.5mm headphone jack on the front, and NuForce says it's just as compatible with life on the move. Completing the output socketry lineup is a coaxial digital output socket to connecting to suitably-equipped amplifiers.

There's no dedicated power inlet and the uDAC5 gets its audio signal input and power directly from the USB connection of a PC plugged into the USB Type-B input at the back of the NuForce. It supports DSD content and is able to process the highest PCM sample rate of 384kHz. The circuitry of the uDAC5 offers twice the power of its predecessor and is specified as providing 2.0Vrms into a 4.7ohm headphone load, thus giving a power output of 850mW RMS. So, can something this small really deliver on sound quality?

Ready to rumble

Before I can test the device on my Windows 10 PC, I need to install the Windows driver, which is downloaded from the NuForce website. Once installed I connect the uDAC5 to the USB socket of my PC, it recognises the DAC and I am able to set it as the default sound output device in PC's control panel. For playback of a wide range of file types, I use the freeware Foobar2000 program that has the DSF plug-in installed so that it can play SACD-format DSD files. I plug in my Sennheiser HD600 (HFC 300) headphones and throw the uDAC5 in at the deep end with a DSD256 file of the Allegro from Mozart's



Violin Concerto in D major. The volume control needs to be at the 3 o'clock position on the NuForce to get a good listening volume on my Sennheiser headphones, but the quality is really excellent. The sound is full and spacious with super imaging of the orchestra and precision placement of the solo violin in front. As expected from this format, the dynamic range is huge and the uDAC5 really conveys this beautifully. The attack of the crescendos is fast and powerful and the double basses really pack a punch.

Next, I connect the line output RCA phono to my preamp and listen to the same track through my audio system. I note that the volume control also affects the line output and so I turn this to maximum and this gives me a satisfactory output that matches the rest of my system. The same recording doesn't have the clarity and refinement that I experience with headphones, but it is nevertheless very commanding and energetic.

Changing to a PCM source, I switch back to the headphones and use a

24/88.2 recording of Vivaldi's *Cantata Elvira* performed by the soprano Mhairi Lawson and La Serenissima to check out the uDAC5's handling of vocals. It certainly doesn't appear to have any trouble with the vocal excursions of soprano Lawson and I am really impressed by the authority and realism of the performance.

Breath of fresh air

To test out the bass response, I turn to an MP3 recording of Jean-Michel Jarre's *Oxygene 2* from his 2004 *Aero* album. The bass is really powerful and clean and the uDAC5 is not in the least phased by the complexity of the synthesised sounds.

In conclusion, the uDAC5 can deliver a really refined performance, especially with the higher resolution formats. Given its price, portability and ability to handle a wide range of up-to-date formats, this headphone amplifier/DAC is perfect for those that don't want to compromise the quality of their music at home or on the move. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£199

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OUR VERDICT

