

HIFI ZINE

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WHO WHY WHAT

CYRUS 8 QX DAC

Equipment Reviews

In: [June 2013](#)

Peter D'Amario

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I have a confession to make: When it comes to amplification, I have always been a power freak. Back in the golden days of the receiver wars, during which I came of age in audio, my fondest wish was to own a Marantz 2325 or—be still my beating heart—the 300 watt per channel Marantz 2600. In those days I had to be content with a 40 wpc Pioneer integrated amp, which drove my very efficient ElectroVoice speakers quite well, thank you. Alas, as one might lust after a bigger boat, or a more powerful car, I desired more power.

Over the years, and with the assistance of eBay, the Marantz 2600 finally arrived in my house, along with a variety of other high-powered amps and receivers. When we moved from the Boston area to London a couple of years ago, I brought with me my Yamaha MX-D1 power amp (500 wpc!) and McIntosh preamp. That's when the reality of city living struck: moving to a small house in central London meant giving up the man cave and shoe-horning my gear (which appeared to have grown exponentially in size) into a rather small study. It became pretty obvious pretty quickly that my existing amplification was overkill. That's when Audyus, a hi-fi distributor that is the parent of Cyrus, intervened: They distribute my speakers (Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand SE), and of course they also distribute Cyrus electronics. The next thing I knew, I had received an e-mail from the owner of Cyrus, Peter Bartlett. We determined that the appropriate Cyrus integrated amp for my listening space might be the 8 Qx DAC, featuring the upgraded DAC module.

This suggestion appealed for two reasons: First, the power output of the amp (at 115 wpc into 4 Ohms and 70 wpc into 8 Ohms) nicely suited the 4 Ohm impedance of the Haydn Grands. Second, the almost unbelievably compact size of the 8 Qx DAC suited my limited real estate. I decided to give the amplifier a try, and shortly thereafter a parcel arrived at my house.



Functionality and Setup

My first observation when presented with the amp was that it really *is* small. While a relatively substantial 14" deep, the 8 Qx DAC follows the form factor of most of Cyrus' offerings, with the front panel a modest 8" wide and less than 3" tall. The black-painted aluminium chassis (silver-painted is an option as well) acts as a heat sink; an ingenious solution to the need for large internal heat sinks. My second observation was that the amp is jewel-like in its size and build quality. A simple front panel features only a pushbutton on-off switch (with an LED that changes from red to green when the unit is switched on), a green LCD screen, a large knob for volume and setup functions and—arrayed along the bottom edge of the panel—buttons to control source selection, muting, headphone control, a second speaker zone control and the setup menu access. The Qx badge on the right lower corner indicates that the unit includes Cyrus's top level DAC, differentiating this amplifier from its similarly-sized but less well-endowed brethren. The 8 Qx DAC also ships with a remote control, which appears to be the only means of adjusting balance. No tone controls are provided.

The rear panel is a rather more crowded piece of real estate, with a remarkable number of inputs and outputs. There is accommodation for two sets of speakers (using proprietary Cyrus connectors that are

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relatively easy to fit to cables), pre-in and out, and a series of six analogue inputs (you'll need an external phono preamp). There are also outputs for the zone two speakers (which can play from a different source than the primary pair) and input/output jacks for the Cyrus MC BUS controls, which enable the owner to control a "stack" of matching Cyrus components (amp, CD player, music streamer, etc.)

On the bottom row are an additional five digital inputs—two each for coax and optical cables and one for USB input. You'll also find the AC power input (230V for Europe, 120V for Canada), a mini headphone jack and a socket for Cyrus's PSX-R external power supply (an optional piece of gear that I did not audition). In sum, an astonishing set of connections for a modestly-sized integrated. I had no problems connecting my interconnects (even some fairly chunky-sized ones) to the 8 Qx DAC.



Once I had connected everything, I plugged in the amplifier, putting it into standby mode: the power LED is solid red in this mode. When switching on the amp the power LED changes from red to green, and the display briefly shows "8 Qx DAC" and the Qx logo, indicating that the unit has Cyrus' upgraded Qx digital to analogue converter installed. Setup is the first order of business: labeling the inputs with the array of options allows the owner to identify inputs without resorting to memory (or for me, a piece of paper). The user can scroll through the inputs, some of which are pre-labeled at the factory, and specify the type of input represented (there are 42 such possible labels). Usefully, another function allows the user to choose input sensitivity to ensure that changing inputs does not result in louder or softer source material. Yet another function allows tweaking of the LCD display. Those of us who like to tape source material will appreciate the 8 Qx DAC's tape monitor controls.

Clearly quite a lot of thought has gone into the amp's controls. For example, the mute button fades sound in and out, as does the headphone control (the amp senses whether or not headphones are connected, and disables the front panel button if they are not). The volume control adjusts in 1dB steps... if you have been listening at high volume (greater than -15dB) and switch the amp into standby mode, the volume will automatically be attenuated when you come out of standby. Those of us with compulsive tendencies really appreciate this kind of attention to detail.

As noted above, Cyrus provides a remote control for the amplifier. It's a standard remote that is designed to function with most or all of Cyrus' electronics, and as a result it contains many functions that are irrelevant to the 8 Qx DAC. Most of the remote's functions are achievable from the front panel of the amplifier (aside from balance).

Listening: Analogue and Digital

After a burn-in of about 100 hours, I put the 8 Qx DAC through its paces with a variety of source material, primarily jazz, classic and modern rock, and classical (ranging from chamber to full-on orchestral music). Formats ranged from vinyl to CDs to SACDs to a very large hard drive connected via the Squeezebox Touch server. Given the (relative) inefficiency of the my Haydn Grand loudspeakers—and in recognition that they had been driven previously by a very powerful amplifier—I was most interested in hearing how the more modest output of the 8 Qx DAC would fare.

The sound of this integrated amplifier is fundamentally neutral, with a shading toward the lush. By this I mean that I characterize the sound as natural, rather than clinical. This is important: regardless of the source that I threw at this amplifier, and whether it was digital or analogue, the sound was consistently true to the original. This was true across the audio spectrum: from the lowest bass notes that my speakers could reproduce (around 46 Hz) to the most delicate high frequencies, the Cyrus never sounded artificial or stressed. Midrange is a strength, as you may imagine: voices, whether that of Johnny Hartman, Astrud Gilberto (or John Lennon for that matter), sounded full, natural and realistic.

While I am a vinyl junkie, the Cyrus managed to make digital sound as good as I've heard it in my system. The integrated DAC is a glorious piece of engineering, and manages to make digital inputs sound marvelously analog. In comparison to my Cambridge Audio DacMagic, the Cyrus DAC sounded slightly smoother and with greater resolution of complex orchestral and instrumental passages.

As for adequacy of power, I need not have worried. With my reference speakers (mounted on dedicated Vienna Acoustics stands) and in my relatively small listening space, the 8 Qx DAC played both loud and clean.

CHANNEL D

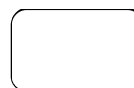
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Likes and Dislikes

After living with the Cyrus 8 Qx DAC for some time, and getting used to its sound and its controls, I have the following thoughts about what I like and dislike about the unit:

Likes

Sound: Natural, unforced, balanced. There is little sense of “hearing” the amplifier; the music comes first.

Size: Remarkably compact yet without giving up performance. Fits well into a tight space.

Build quality: Like an ingot of gold, this amp is not just well-designed, but is put together beautifully.

Controls: Basic, sensible, well thought-through and executed. I would like it to have offered tone controls, but rarely missed them.

Inputs: Remarkably varied for such a small piece of equipment: Massive array of analogue and digital inputs.

Upgradeability: The power source, DAC and so on can be subsequently upgraded as Cyrus further develops its components.

Dislikes

Headphone jack: The headphone output is via a mini-jack located on the rear panel of the amp. The cable on my Grados was too short to reach to my listening position, and I hated having to use an adaptor to plug in. I would prefer a normal, full-sized headphone jack on the front panel.

Remote: Perfectly functional, but cheap and plasticky (the antithesis of the amplifier itself). The Cyrus 8 Qx DAC deserves a nicer remote than the one supplied.

Price: This is not a cheap piece of gear, and if the buyer is willing to give up build quality he or she can find a cheaper amp with more power for less money. But it won't be built in the UK nor, I suspect, will the component parts be of equally high quality. You get what you pay for.

Conclusion

The Cyrus 8 Qx DAC is a terrific piece of kit. It is compact, sounds fantastic, is extremely flexible with regard to inputs, and it is clear that a great deal of thought has gone into its design, development and manufacture.

The efficiency of this unit pleased me: in one step, a separate preamp, power amp and DAC were condensed into one modestly-sized box. (If only there were a built-in phono preamp, yet another box could have been sent off to retirement!) If space is at a premium in your listening room, seriously consider this amplifier. In fact, even if you have plenty of room on your shelf you would do well to listen to the 8 Qx DAC. Let's be clear on this, though: this not some kind of bijou, desktop computer audio device. This is a full-on, serious audiophile integrated amplifier that deserves consideration in a well thought-out primary system.

I'm not a fan of a highly clinical, etched sound in amplification, and if that is what you are seeking then this amp may not be for you. However if you like your music to sound like, well, music, you desire efficiency and you want a device that dispenses with frills and gives you what you need, then this little Cyrus may be the ticket to happiness. Highly recommended.

Note: The Cyrus 8 Qx DAC is widely available in the UK and in Canada, and can be found without too much trouble in Continental Europe. The amp is not sold in the US due to the expense of obtaining regulatory approvals, however I believe that a call to a “North of the border” vendor would be well worth considering.

Specifications

- Continuous Power – 115 W/CH (into 4 Ohms) 70 W/CH (into 8 Ohms)
- Burst Power – 320 W (IHF, one channel driven into 1 Ohm)
- Distortion – 0.002%, 1kHz (into 8 Ohms) 0.005%, 1kHz (into 4 Ohms)
- Frequency Response – -3 dB, 0.1Hz and 100kHz
- Damping Factor (1kHz) – 150
- Input sensitivity (70W) – Line: 237mV
- Input impedance – 40kOhm (RCA).
- Output voltage – 237mV (Tape out), 480mV (Pre out)
- S/N Ratio – 105dBA (ref. 40W)
- Channel Balance – ± 0.2 dB (0dB to -63dB)
- Volume control accuracy – ± 0.1 dB (0dB to -63dB)
- Dimensions (H x W x D) -73 x 215 x 360 (mm)
- Weight – 5.9 kg
- Finish – Quartz silver or Brushed Black

Digital audio performance, 8 Qx DAC model Pre-out

- Input voltage – 500mV pk-pk
- Input Impedance – 75 Ohms
- Sample rate range – 32k – 96k
- Audio formats – PCM stereo only
- S/N ratio (Pre out, 0dBFS) – Better than 100dBA
- THD+N (Pre-out, 0dBFS) – Less than 0.004%

Qx DAC module

- Input voltage – 500mV pk-pk
- Input Impedance – 75 Ohms
- Sample rate range – 32k – 96k
- Audio formats – PCM stereo only
- S/N ratio (Pre out, 0dBFS) – Better than 100dBA
- THD+N (Pre-out, 0dBFS) – Less than 0.002%
- Three additional high performance regulated power supplies,
- Up-samples to 192kHz,
- Factory trimmed quartz master clock for accurate re-clocking

Price: £1,700 (UK)

Manufacturer: [Cyrus Audio Ltd](#), Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom

Reference Equipment

- VPI Classic 2 Turntable with SDS power supply
- Benz-Micro Glider SL cartridge
- Musical Surroundings Nova Phenomena phono preamp
- Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand SE speakers
- McIntosh C712 preamplifier
- Yamaha MX-D1 stereo power amplifier
- Sony XDR-F1HD tuner
- Shanling SCD-T200 SACD player
- Logitech Squeezebox Touch music server
- Apple iPod Classic, 160 gb
- Grado SD125 headphones
- APC H15 power conditioner
- Mapleshade speaker wire, Blue Jeans speaker cable and interconnects, Ultimate Cables, AudioQuest, ProSolutions and AR interconnects

Readers' comments

Roland
September 19, 2014
[Reply](#)

Greetings , Thanks for your review . I have read quite a lot about cyrus and am wanting to buy an integrated amp to play a pair of 70 watt speakers outside near the pool and alternatively or together also play through a pair of Monitor Audio PL 200 .

I like to party often and this usually happens unintentionally .

I live on the beach so noise is no probs .

Listening to music while in the pool with friends ..music to be soft and clearfew drinks and lunch ..few glasses of wine and volume increases ...go down to pool area and now all 4 speakers playing and we danse .

Can the Cyrus Qx DAC handle music that I have on my Ipod and drive these speakers so we can danse away ?

Thanks for your opinion .

Roland

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