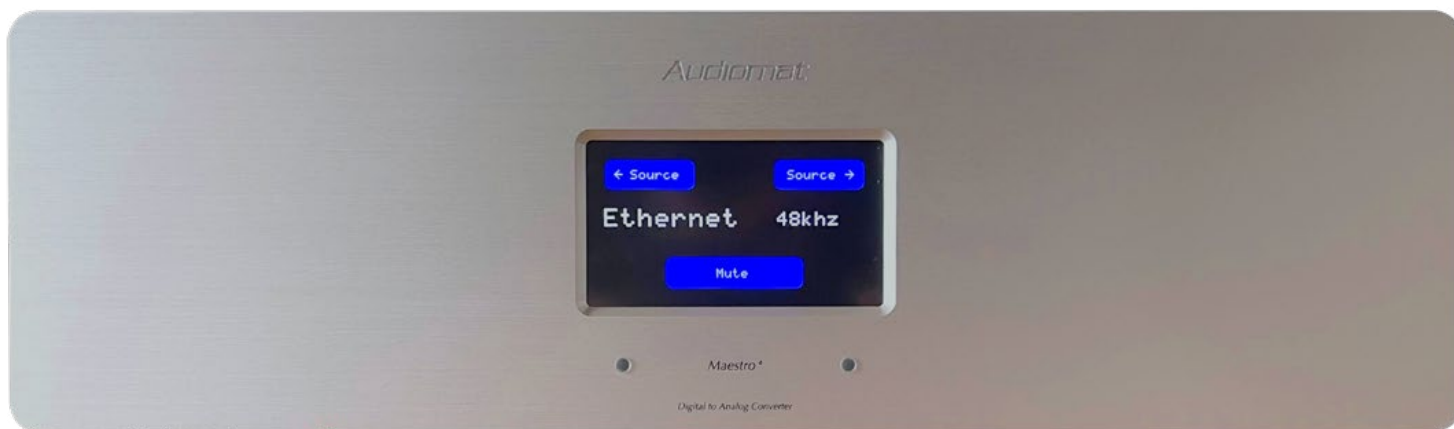


# FAVORITE

## DAC STREAMER AUDIOMAT MAESTRO 4 (NETWORK OPTION)

### The master of time



David Cayuela

To say that the listening of this DAC was expected by the faithful after the success of the Maestro 3 is an understatement. However, the release of this ultimate evolution of the reference converter, from the discreet, but perennial French brand, was not trumpeted. Audiomat is one of those rare companies that have the merit of having built their reputation on products recognized essentially by the ears of demanding music lovers, then by word of mouth without really taking care of its communication. Let's be clear, we were the ones who had to insist with Denis and Norbert Clarisse to test this new Maestro at length. We were thus able to keep it on loan for more than a month. Unusually, the range of DACs has been redesigned this time starting from the entry level: the Tempo C, which very quickly found its public in 2020, followed by the Tempo 2.9 which we liked a lot. The Maestro 4 was not released until October 2021 and the first units produced went directly to the international market. Just for the record, even in Montreal stores that do not distribute the brand, Audiomat DACs are considered with great respect, as we were able to verify in situ! Even blaming Mutine, the importer, for shaking some of the price hierarchies in the very high-end market of DACs at more than twenty thousand euros.

#### DESCRIPTION

While the Maestro won't win a glamour award, it has the discreet charm of the reassuring references. Only the small inscription of the number 4 signals the new generation.

three conical feet on their small cups ... The laminated bamboo board is not included but it is well known that it is a good match for Audiomat DACs. The touch screen that appeared with the previous model and from which you can select the outputs and filters is not surprising either. Even if we may regret the blue diodes and the aviation type switches which, in our opinion, are part of the brand's identity, this screen proves to be very practical in use and almost gives it, through the old-fashioned charm of the typography, an endearing neo-retro touch.

#### KNOW HOW TO TURN BACK

Sometimes it's while working on another product that we find a new avenue for progress and it's more precisely while doing research for the Sophos preamplifier and their new dual mono amp, that Denis Clarisse had the idea of re-evaluating a schematic solution that had been abandoned when the Maestro 3 was created. In the meantime, the progress made on certain components, notably very high precision quartz, allowed him to re-study this first, more expensive option, which had been his intuitive preference in terms of naturalness and emotion, but which the analytical and energetic power of the Maestro 3 had eclipsed... Well, when you listen to it, you think that knowing how to go backwards in order to go forwards is good... When you open the Maestro 4, you find the impressive oversized polypropylene capacities made especially for Audiomat. The long experience in the manufacturing of amplifiers is obviously not unrelated to these meticulous choices.

We were able to compare the latest engineered network card, integrated in several streamers costing more than five thousand euros, with a careful connection, sometimes coaxial, sometimes USB (Ayon/Melco/Innuos/3d lab), which we had already done with the Maestro 3, and this confirms the following point: quality has progressed and a direct I2S connection can be one of the most judicious choices in streaming today.

#### A FINE TUNING

The Clarisse brothers do endless listening tests over several sessions and several months to fine-tune their equipment, but when it comes to validating a modification, we must get the "goosebumps" when listening. It would be wrong to neglect the anecdote: as music is not made to be listened to by robots, we find this deeply reassuring. A Maestro is not only the result of Denis' scientific expertise and the hours spent searching for the best components, it is above all the fruit of a long culture of listening and exchange between the two brothers. "We can always get more resolution, but we mustn't lose the emotion," he says. This emotion that every designer is looking for, we will try to define a little further on what objective basis it can be born.

#### WHAT'S NEW?

The famous "big can" capacitors have been redistributed in a different way thanks to more efficient voltage regulators (CMS).

The clock board is also new, but for Denis there is another key point: the use of output capacitors has simplified the signal path and they have been patiently compared by the Clarisse brothers to the best Mundorf references.

## LISTENING

We start with a simple guitar-voice, Emma Peters, a Canadian singer who sings Richard Cocciante and his "Coup de soleil". A simple recording, quite raw but with dynamics. Even on such a minimalist recording, you can feel the air around the strings, the material that is sculpted in 3D and then the voice imposes itself, making the system disappear. Of all the DACs we have tried, this Maestro 4 is the one that gives the most this feeling that there is no filter. This seems to come from the absolute accuracy of the timbres and textures. The fluidity is in line with our references in this field, the latest Baudio DACs in particular. But what perhaps distinguishes the Maestro from the competition is his sense of rhythm, legato, and his ability to transcribe dramatic climbs in their intensity.

Even on an old recording from 1953, Arthur Fiedler and the magic of the orchestra operate immediately. It is a matter of exceptional dynamics, but also of absolute respect for the musical discourse through the transmission of tempo and respect for transients, because the notion of timbres is indissociable with time; a piano heard in reverse on a magnetic tape sounds like an accordion. The credibility of a timbre depends on the appearance and extinction of the notes, thus on the respect of the transients.

“*The Maestro 4 is the one that gives the most the feeling that there is no filter.*”

John Lewis' "Django" by Oscar Peterson is masterful in expressing the micro-dynamics. On a Sarah Vaughan concert, we get the qualities of the best tube DACs with a holographic material and scene, but without the slight "flesh effect" sometimes a little systematic that we find on some Ayon DACs. You have to listen to this Maestro to notice how much all this, however extremely detailed, "plays together" with a not surgical but sensual precision. The aporia of character, resolving opposed to fluidity, seems finally resolved.

The energy seems to be better distributed than on its predecessor which, although excellent, could be qualified by some as analytic and more demonstrative. The exploration of the low register appears even more natural and subtle due to the better tonal balance. It is striking that, while scrolling through the pieces, one does not notice any signature other than that of life. We did not manage to find faults.

## VERDICT

The Maestro 4 seems to us to combine all the qualities that we have been able to celebrate in other DACs.

Associated with a quality switch for the streaming part, it becomes a tool for cultural discovery. It's simple, it will be from now on our reference DAC to carry out our tests.

It's an absolute favorite, this Maestro has never been so well named.

David Cayuela

### Titles used :

- « Le Coup de soleil », Emma Peters (Live@home. Local 2022).
- « Rhapsodie hongroise », Arthur Fiedler, 1953.
- Tracks, Oscar Peterson – (MPS. 2014).
- « September in the Rain », Sarah Vaughan (Reborn recordings. 2018).

### Components used

- Amplification blocs mono Mastersound 845
- Préampli Mastersound Spettro Phi 7
- Enceintes EBM L5-C
- Switch Innuos Phoenix NET
- Câbles EBM

### ORIGINE : FRANCE

### FORMATS AUDIO COMPATIBLES :

Tous formats, jusqu'à 24 Hz/192 kHz

**ENTRÉES NUMÉRIQUES :** 2 x Toslink,

1 x coaxiale et 1 x XLR. USB 2.0 Asynchrone

**SORTIE NUMÉRIQUE :** 1 x coaxiale

**SORTIES ANALOGIQUES :** 2 x RCA, 2 x XLR

**DIMENSIONS (L X H X P) :** 445 x 130 x 345 mm

**POIDS :** 11 kg

**FINITIONS :** Boîtier en aluminium de 3 mm  
Montage sur pointes pour l'écoulement des vibrations

Boîtier d'alimentation séparé pour pallier les problèmes de rayonnement et de vibrations

Peinture absorbant les vibrations

**DIMENSIONS (L X H X P) :** 230 x 60 x 110 mm (alimentation)

**POIDS :** 3 kg (alimentation)



DR