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Perreaux SXD2

Punching above its weight

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Perreaux SXD2 USB DAC.



The Germans have a habit of creating disturbingly useful compound words that have no direct translation in English. A *backpfeifengesicht* is a face crying out to be punched. And *putzfiximel* is a mania for neatness and cleaning.

We're all familiar with the former concept. Many politicians spring to mind. Or people who suggest to audiophiles that a PC or Mac could be regarded as an appropriate audio source for critical listening.

So I'm readying myself to duck when I say that computers can be regarded as... well, you can guess the rest.

Enter the **Perreaux** SXD2, a USB compatible DAC designed and built by a company that actually understands high quality audio.

No marks for first impressions

Opening the Perreaux's packaging brings us to *putzfiximel*. The neat and surprisingly compact DAC is wrapped in a luxurious black felt cloth. Perfect if you have a penchant for polishing. So I took the cloth and quickly removed my own finger-marks from the Perreaux's reassuringly solid, cast alloy front panel.

At the rear, there's an input selector switch, a USB port, a coaxial SPDIF input and two phono sockets for audio output. There's also an IEC power socket, hinting that this hardback-book sized component contains something a little special.

Power that doesn't corrupt

Perreux clearly believes that copious amounts of clean power are essential to fine audio performance. So the SXD2 has been blessed with an extravagant power supply in place of the usual **wall-wart**. A custom toroidal transformer with three separate windings feeds independently regulated power rails for each major stage within the DAC.



Actually getting the DAC to do its job was a doddle. But then connecting USB devices to **Macs** has never presented any problems. It really was just a matter of plugging the device in then visiting the audio control panel to select the USB sound output codec.

Although we use an **iMac** as a background music server at home, I have never really regarded it as a serious audio component. Driving a **Rega** amp and **KEF** speakers it's not nearly as awful as some audio luddites would have you believe, if a lacking a little in detail and drive.

Wipe away the grime

With the Perreux in place, what had been merely acceptable became quite impressive. The soft and inoffensive sound that normally emerges from the iMac was replaced by something altogether more dynamic. Suddenly the detail that had been missing, returned. It was as if that little felt cloth Perreux had thoughtfully supplied had been used to wipe away a layer of filth obscuring the original music.

As you might expect, the Perreux's revealing nature has a downside. It's quite unforgiving of poorly encoded music, exposing compression artefacts ruthlessly. Likewise, one becomes very aware of the soundstage shrinking along with the encoding bitrate.

However at higher bitrates or when using the iMac as a transport playing direct from CD, I was hearing a sound that was different to, but definitely on a par with Rega's Planet CD player.

Almost antiseptic

While the Rega is slightly lush in the midrange, the Perreux is considerably leaner. Not harsh exactly but even-sounding, almost to the point of flatness. This led to a rather uninvolved performance with some music. For some reason, female vocals seemed to suffer particularly; the otherwise fulsome voice of Des'ree on her first album, *Mind Adventures*, seeming strangely distant and lacking depth.



Conversely, the Perreaux's sound worked well with complicated classical arrangements. [John Eliot Gardiner](#)'s particularly astringent approach to Haydn's *Nelsonmesse*, for example, lends itself well to the sparse Perreaux sound. Where the Rega presents a rather showy, but richly layered, impressionist work of smeared brightness, the Perreaux paints a psychotically precise pointillist tableaux.

It's the obsessive pursuit of detail and cleanliness that gives the Perreaux its character. The irony is that the audio *putzfirmel* strikes hard, leaving an antiseptic sound that some may find rather emotionless.

Go on, punch me

So is the SxD2 worth its asking price? The answer to that can only be an unequivocal yes. And no. If you already have a CD player in the \$1,500 price range you probably won't find the Perreaux offers enough. But if you're thinking about buying a CD player up to \$1,500 you'd be foolish not to consider using your existing PC or Mac as a transport to drive the Perreaux.

Whether you like it or not will depend greatly on your taste in music. But if you still think that computers aren't an appropriate audio source, I know a little black cloth that could well wipe the smile off your *backpfeifengesicht*.

For your [nearest Perreaux dealer](#)
