Impressions of the sound of Audiophilleo2 (AP2) vs high qulity CD transport (R Murakami 2011.5.4)

One of the greatest concern of audiophiles who consider to use PC audio components would be whether the sound quality of USB-DDC is comparable to that of decent CD transports. After reading reviews of Nicholas Bedworth at 6moons audio and that of Kamil at computeraudiophile.com, I decided to order the AP2, and got it a few months ago. AP2 is now an essential component of my system. Followings are my impressions of the sound of AP2, comparing with my CD transport.

Main audio sytem:
CD transport: Esoteric X-50W (equipped with a Wadia DAC. But, here I used it only as a CD transport to get S/PDIF signal.)
DAC: Chord DAC64mkII
Amp: Primar 301L integrated amp
Speakers: Harbeth HL-15
Headphone: STAX 007A with SRM-007tA amp

PC-AP2 configulation:
Windows XP, wav files, StealthAudioPlayer (a free music player)/ASIO4ALL, Audiophilleo2, EL Sound USB cable whose bus power line is replaced with external DC power supply.

Impression

My main audio system sounds quite nice (for me, of course). Especially, female vocals and baroque strings are luscious and elegant. When I first listened to CDs of Diana Krall through AP2, I felt the vocal is somewhat strong with a slightly larger and closer sound image. Sound texture was real, but, smooth. It was clear that the sound quality of AP2 is excellent, but, it was bewilderingly different from the sound through X-50W. I repeatedly compared the both sounds, asking which is right? I think most audiophiles would have the same question and take the same behavior as I did. After playing several jazz and baroque strings, I realized that the sound through AP2 is more “full-bodied” than that through X-50W. I have long believed that the X-50W is sturdy and faithful, but, its sound is somewhat faint when compared with that of AP2. If the sound of X-50W CD transport is likened to a faintly-painted elaborate drawing, AP2 sound is a beautiful, realistic full-color painting. Excellence of AP2 was absolutely obvious when playing Ono Lisa's “Carnaval” which begins with beautiful overdubbing of guitar tremolo. Dazzling and juicy.

All these characters of Audiophilleo may simply come from its ultra-accuracy, since in case of some CDs, traces of sound manipulation, reverb etc. become too revealing. I cannot really understand electrophysics of the “jitter”, but, the sound of Audiophilleo may be talking something about it.

Reputation of my favorite Dac, Chord Dac64, mostly came from its comfortable sounds

obtained through its RAM buffer. But, when feeding S/PDIF signals from AP2, I found the sound with no RAM buffer is more excellent. Clear and sculptured. On the other hand, when listening to internet radio, or old jazz files, RAM buffer of Dac64 is quite effective. Adding smooth and mild texture. It might be a seasoning of well-tuned jitter added through RAM buffer.

Simply stated, S/PDIF output of AP2 surpasses that of an expensive CD transport that costs about $ 5K. I have been using handmade monstrous iron insulators sandwitched with sponge, weighing over 50 kg, for my X-50W. I think, Audiophilleo will raise a serious issue as to significance of the CD transport and CD player, suggesting that digital devices used in these components may not be so good in terms of the jitter. What would happen if ultra-low jitter Audiophilleo is coupled with some ultra-low jitter Dac?

Ryutaro Murakami, Japan
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