Rockstar with MQA!

Manunta named this DAC after Neil Young: With Hi-Rez PCM, MQA and DSD, he would certainly like the old rocker and Hi-Rez pioneer.

The compact DAC from Italy is already in the third generation on the market. He premiered in 2010, and in 2014 he had been reissued as "Young DSD". So now "Young MkIII" with another new sound format: MQA. This is not a slimmed-down "MQA renderer" that relies on an upstream core decoder in Tidal or a player software decode, but a "full decoder". It can also decode locally stored MQA files from any player software. It then unpacks the files up to their original resolution of up to 384 kHz.

Of course, this only works via the USB port of the PC. The MQA decoder is not accessible via the S/PDIF inputs. This is not updatable via update, says Marco Manunta, because that was not feasible with the hardware used. The MQA encoded CDs, which now come from a larger selection from Japan, can not unfold the Young MkIII to HiRes resolution (actually, if the CD is read by the CD-ROM in a PC via the player, then the Young MkIII is able to decode the MQA in it – yours truly).

The original display rate always appears in the Young display. However, the short "MQA" is only displayed if the Young is working as a full decoder. If a software decoder is connected upstream, the display simply reports "PCM". The Young is operated via a single rotary pushbutton. It regulates the volume - which can optionally be preset to a fixed level - and after a print the input is selected. After a long press the menu appears in the display. All this and more can be controlled via the remote control. Among other things, it offers a phase inversion button - intended especially for devices with polarity reversed XLR inputs.

Particularly interesting are the "drive buttons" on the remote control: They send corresponding control commands via the USB connection to the PC. Manunta uses the USB HID protocol. For example, in Foobar or in the Tidal app, you can start/stop playback and skip via infrared command. However, volume commands are not transferred from the software to Young - so you should always leave the level in the software at maximum and set the desired volume on Young. This happens electronically, but on the analogue side.

The reason why the Young is called "DAC/preamplifier" has to do with the analog line input. If a high-level source or - for example, via Manunta's preamplifier "Nash" - a turntable is connected, then the Young can directly operate on a power amplifier or on powered speakers. They can even be remotely turned on via a trigger signal from the Young. However, the analog input signal is not output though an A/D converter via USB.

As is appropriate for a DAC of the upper class, there are various digital filters available for DSD signals, "FIR 1" to "FIR 4", which differ in the corner frequency and in the attenuation, and for PCM "Sharp "and" slow roll-off ", ie steep or gentle edge beyond the corner frequency.

At the hearing test, we preferred the "Sharp" filter this time, but the differences are more delicate. The young always sounds very linear, very stable in the bass, more analytical and sober overall. He painstakingly elaborates the character of each piece of music, images every detail, and when the recording gives it, it sounds very spatial. Of course, this also applies to DSD playback.

Neil Young should really listen to this DAC: he would enjoy it.

Laboratory Comment
Dreamlike values in all disciplines. Very low jitter. Best values also via the analogue input.

Ulrich Wienforth