

Auralic Aries

A NAÏVE EDITOR RECENTLY SAMPLED STREAMING FOR THE FIRST TIME VIA AN AURALIC ALTAIR. HERE A MUCH MORE STREAM-LITERATE RAFAEL TODES TACKLES AURALIC'S EQUALLY IMPRESSIVE ARIES

RAFAEL TODES

Numerous streamers are available at a host of different price points; some are good, some not so good. However, I nearly always prefer the solidity and the tangibility of the sound of a good CD player, which I have usually found comfortably exceeds the capability of most streamers.

Technically speaking, Auralic's £1495 *Aries* is a bridge between files stored on a network, connected wirelessly or by USB, feeding an outboard DAC. The *Aries* also has the ability to stream Tidal and other streaming music services from the unit, rather than from a phone. *Aries* is powered by Auralic's proprietary Tesla hardware platform that includes a Quad-Core ARM Coretex-A9 processor running at 1GHz, 1GB DDR3 onboard memory and 4GB internal storage. The Tesla platform can take AAC, AIFF, ALAC, APE, DFF, DSF, FLAC, MP3, OGG, WAV, WV and WMA in its stride. The USB audio host can deliver PCM from 44.1 to 384kHz at 16-, 24-, and 32-bit resolutions as well as DSD, Double-Rate DSD and Quad-Rate DSD for compatible USB DAC's. The other digital outputs are limited to 192 KHz at 24-bit (as dictated by the S/PDIF protocol).

The unit is built in plastic, which at first sight gave a poor impression; I later discovered this is because the Wi-Fi aerials are located within the casing, and using metal would have caused radio connectivity problems. Available in two versions: *Aries LE* has a low-phase noise crystal and standard switch-mode external power supply; the all-singing and -dancing *Aries* has two individual femto-second clocks for both USB audio host and digital outputs, and a high quality external linear power supply. The unit is extremely well designed and built, with great care given to the two elements that in my experience enhance digital audio sound quality: the pair of femto clocks (which ensure a rock-solid soundstage, as well as really accurate instrumental timbre); and the lower noise power supply which adds to and amplifies these qualities.

The unit is controlled by an OS App called Lightning DS, or uBubblepnp on Android, which work well, can change input, volume, and outputs to either AES, S/PDIF, Toslink, or USB. When a hard drive is connected, the Apps will search through



the contents, and then provide access. The unit also features a 3in OLED display of playback status, and a remote control for basic operations such as play, pause and 'track select' without needing to open the Apps.

Sound Quality

Linking the *Aries* to a Chord Electronics *Dave* by USB yielded astonishingly good results. I was instantly struck by a huge and stable soundstage when playing Sir George Solti's *Magic Flute* on Decca, *via* Tidal. This doesn't remotely sound like any streamer at this price I've heard previously. The soggy and imprecise rendition I'm accustomed to from this class of streamer just isn't there. Instead the transients are razor sharp, and the orchestral timbre is superb – right up there with a good CD player. Above all and combined with *Dave*, the performance is musically really engaging. There is simply so much detail from a Mozart score: the music is poised and the sound is tightly presented.

Mahler's epic *6th Symphony* is a large orchestral work, and a 24-bit/192kHz Linn Download of the Duisburg Philharmonic gives an incredible sense of space, accuracy and weight. The *Aries* really gets its teeth into 24-bit/192kHz and shows it off to the best of its ability. I am not used to hearing such an expansive sound, which exhibits this degree of control. This music is in my opinion the most demanding test of any piece of equipment, and it passes with flying colours.

Conclusions

I am full of awe for what Auralic has done with the *Aries*. It packs the most mighty punch, and Auralic has not only avoided the traps that other streamer makers fall into, but annihilated them! This obvious Best Buy unit obviates the need for a CD player and represents a real breakthrough for streaming technology. (There's also an *Aries Mini*, which works well too, and is excellent value.)

HIFICRITIC
BEST BUY

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|--------------|----------------|
| Size (WxDxH) | 25x20x7cms |
| Weight | 0.8kg (w/o PS) |
| Price | £1495 |

The System

Chord Electronics *Dave* (DAC); Townshend *Allegrì* (passive pre-amp); VAC *Phi 200* (power amplifier); Yamaha *NS1000* (speakers)

Contact:
<http://www.auralic.com/>