



# Viva las Vega

Auralic's Vega G2.1 is a highly capable single-box streaming DAC preamp, says a suitably impressed **David Price**

**H**i-fi is nothing if not fluid. A decade ago, few would have imagined we'd have abandoned physical media so quickly. CD sales are plummeting in most major western markets, especially the USA and UK – and the world is moving to streamed media. That's perfectly understandable as it's so convenient – in theory at least – and brings a huge choice of content.

The result is we now have a brave new world of streaming DACs, which form the heart of modern day systems. To this esteemed company we should now add Auralic's latest DAC.

The Vega G2.1 is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, the company was very early to streaming – and has watched the hi-fi world move towards it, rather than others that have belatedly decided to 'do a streamer'. This means it has its own streaming platform and technology; it hasn't bought in someone else's.

Secondly, the Vega G2.1 is but one member of a family that together forms a full high-end streaming DAC preamplifier solution. This means you can start off with this box and your existing CD player and NAS drive to get going, and then add the matching £4,200 Aries G2.1 transport (HFC

469) for better disc-based digital sound. Then there's the £8,000 Leo GX.1 reference clock and £6,000 Sirius G2.1 upsampling processor. You end up with an expensive dCS Rossini-level digital front end, but you don't have to shell out for all the bits at once. As a prospective purchasing proposition, that's hard to argue against if you're serious about high-end digital.

The first thing that strikes any newcomer to the brand is the compactness and neatness of the product. It doesn't need to be full width, so it isn't. That's not to say that build quality has been skimped on; it has the feel of a solid aluminium and copper ingot, rather than a pressed steel box with a brushed aluminium fascia added for visual effect. It's heavy for its size and very nicely finished.

Then there's the ease of use. It's easy to get up and running, and works seamlessly via its Ethernet port. Auralic's own Lightning streaming hardware and software platform is very good; the app doesn't look quite as swish as some, but does the job without any drama. It has multi-room, gapless playback, on-device playlists and memory caching to make the user experience smoother.

## DETAILS

- PRODUCT**  
Auralic Vega G2.1
- ORIGIN**  
US/China
- TYPE**  
Streaming DAC
- WEIGHT**  
9.5kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**  
340 x 96 x 320mm
- FEATURES**
  - Streaming, preamp functionality
  - AES; USB; optical; coaxial digital inputs
  - RCA phono line input; unbalanced RCA; balanced XLR outputs
- DISTRIBUTOR**  
Auralic
- WEBSITE**  
auralic.com

The Vega G2.1 DAC crunches all the numbers it needs to – up to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD512. At its heart is a specially modified version of the latest ESS Sabre DAC; this isn't as exotic as the custom silicon in some rivals, but certainly isn't shabby. Jitter gets a good seeing to from Auralic's dual 72fs Femto clock, and galvanic isolation is used between digital and analogue sections to keep noise down. The Vega hooks up to the matching Aries G2.1 transport via Auralic's Lightning Link, with a two-way communication protocol for high-speed data transfer.

As befits a thoroughly modern preamplifier, care has been taken to shield the electronics by fitting a copper sub-enclosure. A large toroidal transformer is used, kept well away from the Orfeo passive volume controls. This all sits on Auralic's so-called Unity chassis; a heavy metal base anchored by four tuned sprung feet. Round the back you get a choice of RCA phono or balanced XLR analogue outputs and a single RCA stereo analogue input alongside AES (XLR), optical, coaxial and USB digital inputs.

## Sound quality

With its precise, cultured feel to the way it goes about making music, the Vega G2.1 sounds closer to DACs at twice the price than it does to those at half. There's an alluring mix of smoothness and insight that makes for real listening pleasure. Yet it's not overly soft and has real speed, which animates everything you play.

I kick off with a silver disc of Maximum Style & JB Rose's *Wake Up* going into the coaxial digital input

from my Cyrus CD Xt Signature CD transport (HFC 386). It's a lovely piece of modern dance and the Vega G2.1 delivers an engaging and enjoyable sound with lots of insight into the mix, plus plenty of life. I am struck by the power of the bottom end, combined with its speed and tunefulness, and how it ties into the fluid and supple midband. At the same time, the closed-miked female vocals sound earthy yet smooth; there's no artificial gloss or lack of insight. The overall effect is really satisfying.

The DAC proves highly impressive across a number of digital sources and genres; my 24-bit/96kHz DVD Audio disc of Rush's *Subdivisions* via a Sony Blu-ray spinner sounds great. The Vega G2.1 really getting into the

## Soundstaging is big, wide and bold, there's sweet treble and a crisp, fluid bass

groove, eking out copious amounts of low-level detail in a forensic sweep operation of the recording. Yet it doesn't sacrifice this for the bigger picture, managing to dig deep but keep the sense of a powerful music event unfolding. This is an unusually dense mix that needs a top-flight DAC to 'unpack', and the Auralic does precisely that.

It's a great streamer too; a range of my favourite tunes find themselves rendered in a very similar way to the digital inputs. The Who's *Baba O'Reilly* is a tour de force, with much drama and emotion, while Sade's *When Am I Going to Make A Living* is sultry and brooding. Jazz music shows off the spry and clean tonality; it's not as arid as some ESS-based designs, but doesn't colour the

## HOW IT COMPARES

Naim's £5,300 NDX 2 is a strong competitor, but a subtly different one. On many levels it offers similar functionality, but with a better display and well-established app. Yet there's no analogue input and fewer upgrade options aside from Naim's external XPS DR or 555 PS DR power supplies. It sounds slightly more musically engaging than the subtler Auralic, albeit not quite as detailed and finessed. Both represent excellent value and should give many years of listening pleasure.



An inner copper sub-enclosure is used to shield all the electronics

musical picture to make things sound artificially warm. Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* is accurately conveyed, with a brisk musical gait and a faithful rendering of the tonal palette.

The analogue input is a super feature, and lets me connect up my Michell GyroDec/TecnoArm/Lyra Dorian via my ANT Audio Kora 3T phono stage. Spinning my Wings *London Town* LP shows it is very capable as a preamp too.

I adore the big, wide, bold soundstaging, sweet treble and crisp, fluid bass. There's just a subtle softening of the central image and loss of depth perspective in absolute terms. You'd have to pay a lot for a purpose-designed preamp to better it.

## Conclusion

Less of a lowly DAC preamp and more of musical Swiss army knife, Auralic's Vega G2.1 is seriously classy product. It does an awful lot very well indeed and offers a painless upgrade route out from the £2,500 DACs that

many folk run – all the way up to the high-end where five-figure sums tend to change hands. It does so much so very well that it offers up seriously stiff competition for those, mostly British companies who have made this section of the market their own. As such, an audition is strongly recommended if you're in the market for updating your system ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★
  - VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★
  - BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★
  - FEATURES**  
★★★★★
  - OVERALL**  
★★★★★
- LIKE:** Functionality; build; sonics; upgradeability
  - DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price
  - WE SAY:** A digital Swiss army knife with superb sound

## CONNECTIONS

