AURALiC ARIES G2.2
streamer

Jason Kennedy

There is no shortage of hype in this business, in fact it's abundant everywhere, but in our field there is plenty of talk that isn't always backed up when it comes to actual results. It is refreshing therefore to find a company that doesn't tend to exaggerate, one which when it says that nearly ten years of research and development have gone into a product the chances are that's true. AURALiC is such a company and the ARIES G2.2 streamer is the freshest fruit of that labour. I don't imagine that engineer/founder Xuanqian Wang gets much sleep, it's not as though he has only been designing the so-called Tesla G3 platform for a decade, in that time AURALiC has released over half a dozen iterations of their dedicated ARIES streamer, but this time things have changed.

The casework of the ARIES G2.2 looks exactly like that of its predecessor the G2.1, small changes to the back panel notwithstanding, it's inside the chunky aluminium box that things get interesting. The heart of any streamer is the processor, the computer that controls everything from signal routing to upsampling to converting formats. For the G2.2 generation the processor is built around a quad-core

with 64-bit architecture that has eight times the power of that found in the G2.1. The way that this processor interacts with the audio signal has also changed, unlike most it no longer uses a USB bridge for this purpose but has DMA (direct memory access) technology as the interface. This eliminates a stage in this bridge and reduces jitter and latency by a claimed 90% over the previous design. To keep this high-power processor happy AURALiC has added 4GB of system memory for the purpose.

Dirty work

The power supply dubbed Purer Power has also undergone a significant revision, it is built around two linear supplies with twice the capacity of G2.1, alongside galvanic isolation to ensure that the one dedicated to signal processing is not tainted by the 'dirty' work of running computing and display. This was achieved with high-speed galvanic isolation, ensuring that EMI and jitter are kept as low as possible in a design focusing on ultra-quiet operation for maximum sonic resolution.

The ARIES G2.2 design goes to great lengths to keep interference out of the audio circuit because it's this type of electrical noise that undermines the quality of digital audio, »

ARIES G2.2
Streaming Transporter

AURALiC

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it's what makes it sound hard and cold with limited low-level resolution. CD players have the advantage that they are not connected to that major source of this interference, the internet, they cannot avoid the EMI that comes in with the mains power of course and are still prey to the influence of RFI or radio frequency interference which is everywhere. AURALiC minimise the extent to which this invades the circuit by building a nickel-plated copper case around the circuitry, you can't see this because it's under the machined aluminium hood but it's far more effective as a shield.

Connections

The G2.2 connects to a partnering DAC via coaxial, optical, XLR (AES) and USB outputs; apparently, there have been changes made to the last of these to ensure wider compatibility with third-party converters. Those with an AURALiC VEGA DAC can use the HDMI-based Lightning Link connection, allowing two-way communication between the devices. There is a second Lightning Link socket for those wanting to upgrade the ARIES with a LEO GX.1 clock, which is a tempting but pricey proposition. A second USB A connection is provided for a storage drive, this is a high-speed USB 3.0 port and when you connect a drive and use AURALiC's Lightning server software it means that the music files stored on it can be accessed in the same way as those on a NAS or dedicated music server.

There is an even more interesting alternative to this which marks another change to the ARIES, the G2.1 iteration allows an onboard SATA drive to be fitted and used to store music files much like an external drive. For G2.2 AURALiC has moved to NVMe SSD storage which has much faster operation and the low noise benefit of solid-state memory, thus the ARIES G2.2 can be purchased with 4TB of SSD

storage onboard for £600 extra. This is considerably cheaper than adding a dedicated music server and one would expect it to offer decent performance.

Where the magic is

The sonic character of the ARIES G2.2 is underpinned by extremely low noise. We're not talking about crackles and buzzing, but rather the noise in signal-to-noise measurement, the noise floor below which audio signals are unlikely to be clear. Dropping the noise as far as AURALiC has with this ARIES means you can hear mountains of detail usually hidden beneath that noise floor. Of course, this is the quiet stuff; the fundamentals will always be clear, but the high resolution is all about the quiet stuff because that's where the magic is. With each note, there is a fundamental that has harmonics which are quieter and ebb away in what some call reverb tails, it's these quieter elements that make the sound real and, critically, give it a naturalness and warmth that is usually the preserve of analogue sources.

You need a decent network and DAC to appreciate this of course, and you need the Lightning DS app on your iOS device to set up the library and log into the streaming services you want to hear, the ARIES gives access to more of these than most. It also allows you to rip your CDs to the onboard or any outboard drive to which it's connected by using a USB disc drive, a cheap computer one if you like. The processor onboard can do remarkable things with a raw feed, it can even play the disc straight through like a CD player.

But it's with streaming from services and local libraries that it really shines, and I mean that literally. High frequencies are so clean that they have a clarity and beauty that often eludes digital systems, they open up

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Box' sounded better than I've heard it and that was on Qobuz, generally streaming services lag behind local files but this was superb with a richness of tone and emotional depth that is on another level.

I played a lot of music through the ARIES G2.2 whilst it was in the system and would love to keep hold of it, my regular streamer is good but not in this league. You have to hand it to Xuanqian Wang, the new ARIES is significantly better than its predecessor and, I suspect, better than the competition at this price. Throw in the option for inexpensive SSD storage and the massive feature count of Lightning DS and you have a seriously competitive streamer at a price that is very keen for the quality on offer. If you enjoy the finer things in audio or you don't think that streaming is as good as CD, have a listen to the ARIES G2.2 and a decent DAC, I guarantee it will be an eye/ear-opening experience worth savouring. ✚

» the soundstage and bring the venue's air into your room. I had the opportunity to compare an ARIES G2.1 with its replacement and this was one of the key areas where it delivered so much more, the image scale and depth seemed to double. In fact, the musical data seemed to double in truth, it was quite shocking how much more the G2.2 revealed, and the G2.1 is no slouch. Clearly, Tesla G3 is a breakthrough of no small significance.

Full scale

On its own terms, this streamer has an ease and relaxation that is totally exhilarating, by pushing the noise floor down so far it delivers image depth and width that is uncanny, it reveals so much more than most that you can't help wondering how much more there is? The fact that there is an ARIES G3 at nearly twice the price due later in the year might answer that but for now, this streamer is a wonder that keeps you listening way too late for the seven o'clock alarm the next day. The Locrian Ensemble recording of Mendelssohn Octets proved just how much detail there is in a decent recording, the violins producing an image that soared to the ceiling and out to the side walls with enough depth to almost replicate the huge hall that the performance was made in. In the studio, John Martyn's rendition of 'Glory

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Technical specifications

Type Solid-state network streamer with optional SSD storage

Analogue Inputs none

Digital Inputs One Gigabit Ethernet (via RJ45), one USB A, 802.11b/g/n/ac Tri-Band WiFi

DAC Resolution/Supported Digital Formats FLAC/WAV/MP3, etc. Sampling rate for D/A conversion 384kHz/32 bit, DSD512

Music services/Wi-Fi inputs Qobuz, Tidal, Amazon, HighResAudio, TuneIn, vTuner, KKBox/Spotify Connect, Tidal Connect, Airplay, Bluetooth

Analogue Outputs One stereo balanced (via XLR connectors), one stereo unbalanced (via RCA jacks)

Digital Outputs One coaxial S/PDIF (via RCA jack), one TOSLink, one AES/EBU (via XLR), one USB, one Lightning Link (via HDMI)

Frequency Response Not specified

Distortion (THD + Noise) Not specified

User Interface 4 inch display (on main unit), Lightning DS application software for iOS, Roon Ready, Open home

Dimensions (H×W×D) 96 × 340 × 320mm

Weight 10.2kg

Price £5,299, $6,099

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