Subject: Re: Benchmark Dac-1 Reviewed in Sensible Sound
Posted by Neal Hood on Tue, 18 Jan 2005 11:41:21 GMT
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I had one and sold it. While it was reasonably clear and dynamic, it lacked a certain "soul and emotion" that I get from a lowly Jolida JD-100. I also preferred my Bel Canto dac and, I heavily preferred a dcs Elgar/Purcell rig that I had on hand at the time. I should mention that the dcs rig, of course, is nowhere near the price of the Benchmark but, since many reviewers were comparing it to high-end machines I thought it appropriate to challenge it a bit. Compared to the dcs rig, the Benchmark did not have the soundstage depth nor the evolvement of the music. It sounded slightly abrupt and, maybe even slightly edgy compared to the dcs (and even the BC and Jolida). Maybe glassy is a better desciptive word. It was certainly relatively clear and dynamic, but so was the hyped up Art DI/O, another past dac-of-the-month that possessed those classic solid state glassy virtues. The Benchmark seemed to be slightly thin in the upper bass and lower midrange. Perhaps it was truer to the recording in this respect, I don't know. But to my ears the other machines and/or dacs did a better job of providing the body in the music that I associate with "life". I want to feel that I can reach out and touch the performer. With the Benchmark I always felt that it "was" a recording that I was listening to. With the dcs there was absolutely no solid state signature to the sound. Just music from a pitch black background. With the dcs rig, sounds would just start, evolve and decay in space in a most natural way. Very realistic sounding. The soundstage was boundless. I like this dac very much. But, it is also very expensive. Hideously expensive to be truthful about it. For the money, I like the Bel Canto dac-2 (or even 1 for that matter). It's just a very good all around dac with few vices. The Musical Fidelity Trivista 21 dac is discontinued now but, it is also a top notch dac. I thought the ultimate soundstage size (primarily height) was more limited than the dcs but, it provided that "soul" to the music and was very accurate and specific in image placement. Good depth too. And, at the price some of these are going for on Audiogon, they are a bargain. I hope my comments are not taken to denigrate the Benchmark because, I don't mean them that way. The Benchmark has it's place. If I were a recording engineer, I may well prefer a dac such as this because it did strike me as being very accurage and revealing. This is probaby why many reviewers seeem to like the unit. Fact is, no matter how much one reads we can't really tell how we fancy something until it is our ears doing the listening.