Subject: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Sun, 04 Feb 2024 13:56:23 GMT
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Clever people,

I'm considering investing a bit in a tube-based DAC. I'm in the research phase and have looked at SWX1, Abbas, LAB12 products - from new; for a long time interested in Sonic Frontiers offerings, but they're rarely for sale here in Europe.

About a year ago I sold my Audio Note DAC 01.x to fund upgrading my RIAA from a Sugden A21 Phono to a Leben RS30-EQ - in and of itself a great decision in terms of getting the sound I was expecting.

However, I miss the sound of the 01.X - perhaps because of its zero negative feedback design and lack of digital filtering. I'm currently using a Topping E30 - as different from the Audio Note as things can be.

Which leads me to my question. Does anyone have experiences with DACs from SW1X, Abbas, or LAB12?

The rest of the chain is Harbeth M30 speakers and Leben CS-600 amplifier.

Recommendations for others brands is more than welcome too.

The Audio Note DAC 0.1x design is with a fixed tube (6111WA) that cannot be changed without soldering. I'd like to have more flexibility in a new DAC.

Thanks in advance,

Kasper

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by Rusty on Sun, 04 Feb 2024 18:46:34 GMT
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I have a Chinese tubed DAC I've had for years now. Lite Audio DAC-60. I doubt it's up to what you might expect from a newer pedigree. Actually since I've integrated an audio processor I've been using for vinyl for years and now with my cd player and DAC-60. Has made the greatest improvement with cd listening. The Aphex aural exciter. Used more in commercial applications, broadcast, sound reinforcement and recording.

Most people on audio forums I've praised it's use have considered it to be sacrilege used in home audio reproduction. I guess I'm a heretic. But I find it enhances in a good way the aspect of the

home audio experience in a more vivid presentation of recorded music. Which I feel is an approximation obviously to live music and what limits of the recorded mediums capabilities are. Anyway, that's my bag. And I like it.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Tue, 06 Feb 2024 11:53:01 GMT
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Rusty wrote on Sun, 04 February 2024 12:46I have a Chinese tubed DAC I've had for years now. Lite Audio DAC-60. I doubt it's up to what you might expect from a newer pedigree. Actually since I've integrated an audio processor I've been using for vinyl for years and now with my cd player and DAC-60. Has made the greatest improvement with cd listening. The Aphex aural exciter. Used more in commercial applications, broadcast, sound reinforcement and recording.

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Thank for you reply and thoughts. I hadn't heard about the Lite Audio DAC-60. Sounds exactly along the lines of what I'm looking for.

And I wouldn't rule out older DACs / construction types. The Audio Note DAC is built around the Philips TDA 1543 chip (launched for cheap end cd players in 89'. Got a cheap Marantz CD65 II with the same chip, but have moved out of CDs to focus on vinyl.

What does the Aphex do more specifically?

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by Rusty on Tue, 06 Feb 2024 12:59:57 GMT
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The DAC LITE Audio-60 goes back towards the first decade of the new century. I bought it for its reviews at the time and price I would spend. It never really gave what I found to be an improved presentation of the digital medium of CD's for me. I generally lost interest in digital for a good decade. Funny I had the Aphex all the time. But I used it exclusively with vinyl.
Here's a link about the Aphex that may give you some better insight.
https://www.soundoctor.com/aphex.htm
Most people interested in higher quality audio dismiss this device straight out as a distortion generator feeding back into the signal to enhance it. I don't notice any distortion. I find that it compliments the signal and brings out a higher quality sound to the original signal. It has mute buttons for each channel to compare. I found out about it originally from this link.
https://www.kabusa.com/frameset.htm?/aphex104.htm
They don't carry it anymore.

Like the ad says. It isn't your electronics, it's the pre-recorded medium itself that lacks the impact and sparkle. Any-who I'm not into the pedigree of electronic brands and what the audio press says to throw your money at. I just want what sounds good to me. This thing has completed my wanderlust. I won't play without it now.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Tue, 06 Feb 2024 18:38:37 GMT
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Rusty wrote on Tue, 06 February 2024 06:59The DAC LITE Audio-60 goes back towards the first decade of the new century. I bought it for its reviews at the time and price I would spend. It never really gave what I found to be an improved presentation of the digital medium of CD's for me. I generally lost interest in digital for a good decade. Funny I had the Aphex all the time. But I used it exclusively with vinyl.
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Interesting! First thing that came to mind when you mentioned it first was the artist 'Aphex Twin' - this must be a deliberate loan.

I think I'll have to re-read the description - it's bit of a black box after the first read.

Back in the mid 90's I built my own speakers for a home studio and used a power amplifier from Behringer. The combined sound was very good with paper woofers and silk domes - but everything would presumably measure horrificly. But I guess most concert setups do to a degree to.

Came across a tube-based DAC from British Musical Fidelity called the 'Tubalog' produced in the mid 90s also. This good a good candidate to replace the the 0.1X.

Looks like a clean layout, punchy transformer and two changable tubes (in contrast to the Audio Note's fixed 6111WA mini tube.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by Rusty on Wed, 07 Feb 2024 00:09:31 GMT
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I use tube gear from Transcendent sound. Sold as kits. https://www.transcendentsound.com/
I have their monoblock OTL amps from years ago. The T-16 mono's. 16 Russian 6c19pi tubes and their new preamp, The Slider with built in phono circuit. My speakers are Pi Theater 4 speakers. A discontinued speaker Wayne used to offer plans. Digital is a Yamaha carousel cd player then the Lite Audio-60 dac. My issue with cd playback was that bass would sound rather

synthetic and generally a presentation throughout the musical spectrum seemingly 2 dimensional sounding. The Dac didn't seem to ameliorate that condition. The Aphex has. For phono, the laid back presentation inherent to vinyl playback has been made more vivid, vocals clearer and generally more engaging.

I think the home audio experience is simply an attempt to capture some sense of reality as best and much as you want to pursue it. The Aphex has for me has just made it a little more believable. Like Conway Twitty sang in the song. It's all only make believe. I've reached a plateau of contentment with the way the sound is for some years now. Feels good. Good hunting in your pursuit.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by gofar99 on Thu, 08 Feb 2024 02:15:47 GMT
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Hi, I have no experience regarding the gear you are thinking about. I do love tube sound and almost all of my designs are all tubes. (a few things like SS rectifiers though). My sense is that since the media that goes into DAC is digital I would personally opt for a digital DAC with a clean audio section. It could be either SS or tube. Each has positive and negative aspects. It is ironic that the DAC I use has settings to "make it sound like a tube unit". After listening to all the choices I chose another one. I'm not sure what they were trying to do but the clean output variations sounded better. If you can hear the units you are thinking about it would be best, an alternative is a try before you buy arrangement (yes I know fairly rare). Otherwise it is kind of a crap shoot. No two folks have the same ears and yours are the ones that matter in this case.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Fri, 09 Feb 2024 10:43:14 GMT
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gofar99 wrote on Wed, 07 February 2024 20:15Hi, I have no experience regarding the gear you are thinking about. I do love tube sound and almost all of my designs are all tubes. (a few things like SS rectifiers though). My sense is that since the media that goes into DAC is digital I would personally opt for a digital DAC with a clean audio section. It could be either SS or tube. Each has positive and negative aspects. It is ironic that the DAC I use has settings to "make it sound like a tube unit". After listening to all the choices I chose another one. I'm not sure what they were trying to do but the clean output variations sounded better. If you can hear the units you are thinking about it would be best, an alternative is a try before you buy arrangement (yes I know fairly rare). Otherwise it is kind of a crap shoot. No two folks have the same ears and yours are the ones that matter in this case.
Thank you for your reply, insights & thoughts!

I have Topping E30 DAC now which measures very well in terms of 'neutrality' according some measurements done on Audio Science Review, but it's like something's missing - which I see some peoeple attributing to op amps instead of tube amplifiation.

The Abbas is made to order, but it might be possible to listen to the LAB12 at the dealer's. But sometimes the listenings rooms, amplifiers and speakers are so different it from time to time doesn't make sense.

thanks again :)

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by Rusty on Sat, 10 Feb 2024 16:03:16 GMT
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All I can impart Kasper to your DAC quest is that putting faith by the amount of money to obtain the mentioned brands would be a big gamble for me. Based on my experience with just a mid-level DAC purchase. The draw of the high end sound is a lure touching both objective, subjective ends of ones psych. I've only dipped my toes into modest higher end components like my tube amps and preamps through kits. Speakers through DIY build. It's all relative to income though. My income never could warrant the high end cost pursuit. But I hope you fulfill your desire for quality listening by whatever means.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Wed, 14 Feb 2024 17:13:30 GMT
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Rusty wrote on Sat, 10 February 2024 10:03... The draw of the high end sound is a lure touching both objective, subjective ends of ones psych. I've only dipped my toes into modest higher end components like my tube amps and preamps through kits. Speakers through DIY build. It's all relative to income though. My income never could warrant the high end cost pursuit. But I hope you fulfill your desire for quality listening by whatever means.
Wise words! And it's (often) difficult to tell where the sound hobby end and the addiction starts - and it keeps moving. But I'm faily convinced my Leben integrated amp & RIAA are the end station for that parts of the chain.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by gofar99 on Fri, 16 Feb 2024 02:58:09 GMT
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Hi, I thought that too...about 10 years ago. It sneaks up on you. Especially if you are like me and constantly trying to improve existing gear. Right now I am pushing for all the diy tube gear to at least meet a wide-band -95 S/N. Only the phono preamps are a little behind that goal (-88 t0 -90 depending on the variation). As you might guess I really hate hum and noise. If I can hear it or see it on a scope then it has to go regardless of how long it takes. BTW the very earliest phono preamps (ca 2010) were horrible at about -65. One variation could find a power transformer or other source of hum at 5 feet away. Yikes. Not any longer.

Subject: Re: Tube DAC - SW1X, Abbas, LAB12, Sonic Frontiers?
Posted by kasperbergholt on Tue, 20 Feb 2024 16:57:35 GMT
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gofar99 wrote on Thu, 15 February 2024 20:58Hi, I thought that too...about 10 years ago. It sneaks up on you. Especially if you are like me and constantly trying to improve existing gear. Right now I am pushing for all the diy tube gear to at least meet a wide-band -95 S/N. Only the phono preamps are a little behind that goal (-88 t0 -90 depending on the variation). As you might guess I really hate hum and noise. If I can hear it or see it on a scope then it has to go regardless of how long it takes. BTW the very earliest phono preamps (ca 2010) were horrible at about -65. One variation could find a power transformer or other source of hum at 5 feet away. Yikes. Not any longer.
I understand completely, but I'm a bit less picky, I think. What RIAA do you use now?