

# Astell&Kern

## AK USB-C Dual DAC Cable



**IF YOU'RE LOOKING** to use headphones to listen to music on your PC or laptop, bear in mind that the socket only uses the internal sound card and so is unlikely to offer decent quality. The solution is to bypass this by using an external DAC and headphone amplifier. If you intend to listen to music on a laptop while out and about, you'll want a solution that is compact as well. Enter the AK USB-C Dual DAC cable, which is USB-powered and ticks all these boxes.

Employing bespoke designed capacitors, the audio circuit has been optimised to suppress power fluctuations for stable operation under a variety of conditions. There are two Cirrus Logic CS43198 DACs, which support up to native DSD256 and 32-bit/384kHz. The output from the DACs feeds an independent analogue amp with a no-load output level of 2V RMS, which is designed to drive a variety of high-impedance headphones. The output is via a 3.5mm stereo socket.

### No dice for iOS

The device will work directly from a USB-C connector on an Android smartphone, Windows 10 PC, tablet PC or MacOS computer, but sadly not on iOS-based devices, such as iPhone or iPads.

To test the Dual DAC Cable, I connect it the to the USB-C port on my Windows 10 PC and use it to drive a Sennheiser HD 800 dynamic headphone with foobar2000 (HFC 448) handling playback of the audio files. I kick off with a 16/192 PCM WAV of a master tape recording from 1960 of Mstislav Rostropovich and the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra playing Schumann's *Concerto For Cello And Orchestra*. Using the normal PC output the music is pleasant to listen to, but not exceptional and definitely not anywhere near the quality of the original. Switching to the A&K cable the difference is night and day. Suddenly, the soundstage widens, the orchestra is fuller and more dynamic and Rostropovich's cello



playing much more expressive and emotional. It's like listening to a completely different recording.

Playing a DSD128 file of the Allegro from Mozart's *Violin Concerto In D Major* is quite a revelation. The sound of the violin has greater refinement and the overall performance is far fuller and much more expressive.

For a change of genre, I play a 24/192 PCM file of Burt Bacharach's *The Look Of Love* sung by Dusty

is suddenly significantly wider and deeper, and there is clearly more air around the individual instruments. The drums also have a noticeably improved top end while the bass kicks are far more evident.

### Going live

A recent SACD from Lyn Stanley's album *Live At Studio A* highlights how using the USB-C Dual DAC cable gives much greater realism to the sound. The track *Pink Cadillac* places Stanley's crystal-clear vocals bang in the centre of the soundstage with the electric guitar close behind her slightly to the left and the piano further back and to the right. As with the *Skyliner* track, there is definitely more space around the instruments, which also sound far better focused.

For an accessory that is hardly bigger than an adapter cable, the A&K USB-C Dual DAC cable is an extraordinary little unit that may well revolutionise music playback on dynamic headphones from your PC. For the price, it represents excellent value for money and it is certainly versatile enough to play many modern audio file formats in their native resolution. **NR**

## An extraordinary add-on that may well revolutionise on-the-go listening

Springfield. From the PC output, Springfield's vocals seem to merge with the orchestral backing, but swapping to the A&K her voice stands out in front with the orchestra behind. I'm aware of greater clarity in her diction and can hear her breath during the song – something that's not discernible when listening via the PC sound card. Similarly, a 16/44 PCM file of The Velvet Brass playing Charlie Barnet's *Skyliner* takes on a whole new dimension. The soundstage

### DETAILS

**PRICE**  
£109  
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### OUR VERDICT

