

DACs

## HRT Music Streamer II

# High resolution tunes

If I look up from where I sit, I can see two opposite ends of the audio spectrum.

Right ahead of me, sitting on top of my Hi-Fi stand, is my turntable, which only yesterday was spinning some vinyl.

To my left is my laptop. This is currently connected to my Dussun long term amplifier, and I'm listening to some quality music.

In between amp and laptop is a High Resolution Technologies (HRT) Music Streamer II Asynchronous USB DAC, and it's this neat little device that has transformed my laptop from merely a music storage device into one with audiophile pretensions.

HRT states that the Music Streamer II is a high performance audio interface that with its unique topology is able to provide a completely isolated path between the computer and audio system.

Isolating a noisy laptop or PC from your audio system is a must if you want clear, quality audio.

Just as important as isolation (maybe even more so), is the way that a DAC gets its data from a connected source.

Here the HRT Music Streamer II uses an asynchronous mode of operation to eliminate timing errors, and this ensures – or should – that what you hear is not affected by jitter-induced noise.

I should add at this point that when using a USB output on a PC, it's your PC that sends data to the receiving DAC as and when it feels like it. This leads to jitter. Asynchronous DACs essentially tell your PC that they're the boss and control the stream of data, and by doing so limit timing errors. This is an oversimplification, but you should get the gist of the importance of asynchronous technology.

Installing the Music Streamer II is simple.

All you have to do is plug it in to a spare USB port and it will install itself. There are no power supplies to connect as the Music Streamer gets its power from USB and it regenerates power for all its internal circuitry using a sophisticated set of proprietary circuits.

I'm going to make a small digression here and say that it is worthwhile using a good quality USB cable. In fact the manual for another USB DAC I have in for review insists that you should use a certified, quality cable.

As Audio Urgency is the agent for AudioQuest, they supplied an AudioQuest Forest USB cable for this review, so I was sorted on the cable front.

Once connected and installed on my laptop, I opened Foobar 2000 – the free software







## ■ Vital Stats ■

**Digital conversion**.....Up to 24-bit/96 kHz  
**Frequency response** ..... 20 Hz – 20 kHz  
**Signal-to-noise ratio** ..... 99 dB  
**Inputs** ..... USB  
**Outputs** ..... Stereo analogue out  
**Dimensions (DxWxH)**.....5.1x2.3x.875-inches

### VERDICT

The HRT Music Streamer II takes PC-based audio to audiophile like levels. It's simple to use and is portable, both of which add value.

**PRICE**..... R1 899

**SUPPLIED BY** ..... Audio Urgency  
 011-234-0440

**WEBSITE** ..... [www.audiourgency.co.za](http://www.audiourgency.co.za)

package I use for my music on my laptop – and selected the Music Streamer II as the output.

I used the same add-ons that were recommended for one of the other DACS I had reviewed, and then pressed the play button.

The music I heard was good, but there was the occasional glitch that sounded like a scratched CD.

Being a Sunday morning – yes, I often work on a weekend – I decided that I would take a break, and before doing so, sent an e-mail through to HRT listing the settings I had used and the issue I heard.

A little later that same day I received an e-mail from HRT – remember this was still Sunday – with their recommendations on how to solve my drop out issue. I tried their solution, which was spot on, and continued with my review. Kudos here for great customer support.

With music now streaming from my laptop to the Music Streamer II correctly, I sat down and did some comparative listening between my current CD player and the Music Streamer.

The obvious question is how the two combinations compared, and I have to say that my CD player was ever so slightly better, but the margin was not as great as the price difference between the CD player, and laptop/Music Streamer II would suggest that it should be.

Still, I was perfectly happy to listen to the Music Streamer II. It delivers music that is detailed, has impressive spatial presentation, and while not quite able to match the subtlety of my CD player, certainly was better to listen to than an old CD player of mine that I hauled out for comparison.

Throw in the fact that the Music Streamer II provides full support for applications such as iTunes, and Windows Media Player and that you can also use the Music Streamer II to listen to high resolution downloads, Internet radio or other music subscription services and you can see why it is a great little piece of audio equipment.

That HRT have two models above the Music Streamer II also leads me to believe that the days of the dedicated CD player are numbered.

**Joel Kopping**