Joachim Pfeiffer's

HiFi SOUND & MUSIC

The Master Fidelity Story –
A Two-Part Journey

How NADAC Is Revolutionizing the Way We Listen

Digital Rethought, Analog Rediscovered: The NADAC D

Part One of Our Two-Part Feature. By Joachim Pfeiffer

For years, digital playback carried a reputation: precise, yes—but often cold, clinical, and emotionally uninvolving. Master Fidelity's NADAC D changes that narrative. Built around a proprietary True 1-Bit architecture and time-optimized signal processing, it delivers music with a fluid, organic quality that feels more analog than digital—without adding color, texture, or editorializing the source. In this opening installment, we explore the design philosophy behind the NADAC D and share our first listening impressions of a component that may well redefine what digital audio is capable of.

Some encounters you don't plan for—yet they change everything. High End 2025 in Munich: a sea of cables, loudspeakers, bodies, and promises. If you've walked those halls, you know the routine—glossy brochures, recycled marketing slogans, eager faces packed into demo rooms hoping to hear something that will "redefine the world." After three decades in hi-fi journalism, I thought I was immune to all that.
Then Meik Wippermann showed up. We've been on a first-name basis for years, and Meik is cut from a different cloth than most of the loudspeaker jugglers and marketing poets in this business. He's a senior director at the tax office—quite possibly even in tax investigation—and one of the very few truly independent voices around. He's no dreamer parroting industry buzzwords but a man of conviction. When he talks about sound, it's because he knows what he's talking about—and because he cares, passionately, without trying to sell you anything.

"You have to hear this," he said—calm, almost casual, but with a weight that made you listen. He was talking about the NADAC D, a digital-to-analog converter that had been causing a quiet stir among audiophiles, often dismissed as "just another DAC." But Meik is what you might call an audiophile evangelist—not someone who preaches, but someone who convinces. He'd discovered Master Fidelity, the brand behind the NADAC, fallen for it, and gone looking for others who might feel the same.

"I'll bring it to your hotel," he said. And I knew he meant it. There are people who talk, and there are people who act. Meik is the latter. The next morning—the final day of the show—he was at my hotel door, the unit under his arm, packed like a piece of studio gear. No flashy demo room, no PR hype, no scripted sales pitch—just a quiet mission: try it.

Old Wounds

Over the years, plenty of "world-beaters" have been pressed into my hands—gear that, after a quick listen, turned into nothing more than checklist exercises: plug it in, take a listen, send it back. But this time felt different. Maybe it was Meik's uncompromising attitude, or maybe it was my own history with digital sound—a history shaped mostly by disappointment.
That history goes way back—back to the previous millennium, when I set out to answer the question that's driven much of my audiophile life: Can you chop up a natural, analog signal, digitize it, and reassemble it into analog without losing its authenticity? And, more philosophically, what does "authentic" even mean? Where does interpretation begin, and where does truth end?

At that time, I had one of the finest analog front ends money could buy: a Goldmund Reference turntable fitted with a Clearaudio Insider Gold—still one of my prized possessions—feeding a Mark Levinson phono stage and a Krell preamp with balanced XLR outputs. That Krell drove an

Apogee A/D converter, a studio-grade unit built for maximum precision. On the other side of the digital divide, three DACs—flagships from Accuphase, Mark Levinson, and Wadia—took turns trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

The test setup was brutally simple: first, the pure analog path from the Krell straight into my Cello Audio Suite, which remains my reference to this day. Then, the same path with a detour: Krell into the Apogee, sliced into ones and zeros, and back out through one of the three DACs into the Cello. My thinking was blunt: If you can't hear the difference, maybe it's time to start collecting stamps instead.

The results were sobering—borderline shocking. None of the converters truly delivered what was carved into those grooves. The Wadia was the best of the bunch, though darker in tone, as if a fine veil covered the music. The Accuphase stretched the stage into a width that looked spectacular on paper but felt artificial. And the Mark Levinson? It aged voices prematurely, like singers had left their dentures soaking in the bathroom.

That experiment became a turning point. It suggested that digital conversion might not just be difficult but inherently flawed—a thought that haunted me for years and shaped my audiophile journey more than I'd like to admit. Much has changed since then—technology, my own perspective—but the sting of those early disappointments lingered, leaving me deeply skeptical of every new DAC that crossed my path.

Wadia – A Study in Timing

One company back then offered a glimmer of hope: Wadia. While most manufacturers were obsessing over frequency response, the Americans at Wadia zeroed in on something far more elusive—and far more critical: time.
Where others smoothed EQ curves, Wadia worked in the time domain. Their secret weapon was a mathematical innovation called the spline algorithm. Unlike conventional filters that simply drew a straight line between two sample points, Wadia's approach used flowing curves to reconstruct the original analog signal with much greater temporal accuracy.

The result? Playback that sounded less etched, less brittle—without the sharp "digital edges" so common at the time. You didn't first notice it in tonal balance, but in feel. The music simply flowed—more naturally, more vividly.

Wadia took this philosophy to its extreme with the Power DAC, a revolutionary design that not only converted the digital signal but amplified it directly. The entire system was driven by a high-precision master clock that pushed jitter down to vanishing levels.

I still remember an evening with my colleague Lothar Brandt in the AUDIO magazine listening room. We cued up mono recordings of Maria Callas through a pair of Dynaudio Evidence loudspeakers. These were tracks I knew like the back of my hand—but that evening, they sounded transformed. More sculpted. More immediate. As if Callas herself had stepped into the room.
No one spoke. No one took notes. We just sat there in silence. The music didn't play—it glowed.
It was a moment I never forgot—but it remained an exception.

CD had promised convenience—but it rarely delivered the kind of sonic magic that made me want to give up vinyl. And so, the discs began to pile up. As a hi-fi editor, I was regularly sent review copies from labels around the world. The result? A towering collection of CDs that kept growing—but were almost never played. They lined my walls: five meters wide, 2.3 meters high—a plywood monolith of music. Around 640 discs per row, stacked multiple layers deep. Roughly 3,000 CDs in total, all tucked away in jewel cases, packed tight between floor and ceiling. One day, a friend stood in front of it and asked the only logical question: "What if you want to hear one from the middle?"I laughed. The answer was simple: "I'm still waiting for a technology that actually makes me want to listen to them." But as the years went by, a quiet doubt crept in: What if that moment never came? What if the real damage happens during A/D conversion—long before any DAC has a chance to fix it? Today I know: that fear was unfounded. Digitization doesn't kill the music. But it demands a staggering degree of precision to get it right. And learning that took years**.**

The First Evening with the NADAC D

I came back late from the show—worn out from the long drive, my head still buzzing with conversations that hadn't quite settled. Normally, after a day like that, I don't touch new gear. I let it sit overnight, wait for a fresh set of ears in the morning.But not that night. Meik Wippermann hadn't handed me just any piece of equipment—he'd handed me the NADAC D. And when Meik does that, there's only one response: you hook it up and listen.

I skipped every ritual. No test signals, no measurement tracks, no audiophile samplers. I just pressed play on whatever was queued up: Level 42 – World Machine. I had listened to that album the night before the show, not as a deliberate reference, but for the sheer joy of it—using my usual setup: vinyl on my AVM turntable, and in parallel, the Qobuz stream via Grimm MU1 into the SPL Mercury DAC. The result had been predictable: the LP had more body, more ease. The stream, though clean and precise, felt emotionally flat. That distance—that subtle disconnect—had always kept me from embracing streaming as a true equal.
So now, same stream, same track—but this time through the NADAC D. And within seconds, everything changed.

What had been missing before was suddenly present: no veil, no digital residue, no urge to reach for the LP just to reconnect with something "real." I kept switching back and forth—LP to stream, stream to LP—and found myself no longer speaking in terms of better or worse. It was down to nuance. A touch more warmth on one side, a bit more immediacy on the other. But the emotional core? Identical. The NADAC D didn't sound spectacular. It didn't sound "digital".

It just sounded right. So natural, so unforced, that for the first time in decades I felt digital playback had finally crossed the line—into the realm of music simply being, free from the machinery that delivers it.

Music that tests everything

The first encounters with the NADAC D were not meant to just pass by like a quick functionality check. This had to be music that had been with me for years, music that mercilessly exposes every weakness and whose attack, rhythm, and spatial layering I know by heart. Meik had already raved about the NADAC C, its companion unit, but that one was still with the distributor in the Netherlands. So, I focused on what was right here in front of me: the NADAC D.
Grigory Sokolov – Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 12, Allegro:
Sokolov's touch is an event in itself—firm but never harsh, full of energy and yet perfectly controlled. His ability to let notes "stand" is legendary. Through the NADAC D, I could hear the hammers striking the strings and the vibration initially unfolding in chaos before settling into a stable tone. This transient, happening in fractions of a second, suddenly became its own experience: the subtle shimmering of overtones sorting themselves into a clear, sustained pitch that eventually collapsed in on itself, released the space, and fell into silence. This is where technology separates from musicality: a system with imprecise timing reduces this process to a mere sequence of notes. The NADAC D, on the other hand, rendered it as an organic event, as if the room itself were resonating.

Boris Blacher – Paganini Variations, Vienna Philharmonic under Georg Solti:
This piece is a rhythmic roller coaster. Blacher deconstructs Paganini's theme, rearranges it, compresses and stretches it, lets dynamic peaks explode unexpectedly, only to collapse back into the finest textures. The woodwinds weave delicate ornaments while the brass deliver accents with brutal precision, and the strings move from silky-soft pianissimo to a cutting forte. Through the NADAC D this musical tightrope act became clearer than ever before: bass accents and violin runs landed with absolute precision, creating a pulse that gripped you physically. Where a less precise playback would blur into a sonic mass, the NADAC D kept every event sharply outlined and time-coherent. It was as if the orchestra itself was breathing—not metaphorically, but palpably real.

The Rolling Stones – "Melody":
Finally, a counterpoint: a blues, but an odd one. "Melody" has been with me since the mid-seventies, and I discover something new every time I hear it—a casual piano figure, an almost swallowed guitar line, a drum accent that suddenly tilts the piece sideways. With every better playback, my interpretive power grows: I understand more, uncover details that were previously hidden, and yet the piece remains mysterious. The NADAC D gave this music a readability I had only known from excellent analog chains: the interplay of groove and breaks, the microdynamics of the instruments, and that special, slightly melancholic energy of the song that only emerges when time and space are absolutely right.

These first encounters weren't a verdict—they were a promise: digital playback can be different. More honest. More correct. And the NADAC D made me feel that truth long before I ever heard the companion C that Meik had spoken of with such reverence.
This wasn't about hi-fi fireworks. No "listen to how high that cymbal floats." No glitz, no sugarcoating. What I experienced was the removal of obstacles. The music was simply there—natural, unfiltered, exactly as it was meant to be. The spark didn't come because something was added.
It came because nothing stood in the way anymore. Maybe that was the night when analog no longer held the edge. Maybe that was the moment I realized: years of waiting can be worth it—
if someone has the courage to tackle the problem at its core:
Time.

Technical Features of the NADAC D

The The NADAC D is not a garden-variety DAC. It is the product of uncompromising studio DNA, born not from glossy hi-fi copy but from mastering rooms where every decision sticks and nothing can be airbrushed after the fact. In that world, gear is not built to dazzle; it's built to tell the truth.

Most converters chase a ruler-flat frequency response, polishing bass, mids, and treble until the graph looks perfect. The NADAC D starts somewhere else: time. In digital audio, time control means each sample arrives at precisely the right instant. Nudge the clock by mere millionths of a second and the image blurs. Think of a superb dance ensemble in which one step lands just a half-beat late: you may not see it at first, but you feel the groove lose its grip. That is why the NADAC D uses clock sources derived from professional recording practice, built to hold their course when lesser designs drift.

This time-first mindset aligns with human hearing. Our brain can register interaural time differences as small as about five microseconds—roughly a 200 kHz time resolution—so we are far more sensitive to timing and phase than to frequency curves alone. Upper harmonics shape space, depth, and realism; analog master tapes often extend to about 50 kHz, and DXD goes past 100 kHz. But bandwidth without time coherence is like a pin-sharp photo taken with a tiny hand tremor: the detail is there, yet the picture looks soft.

Connection Wanted: In addition to the usual interfaces, the NADAC D includes two less common ones—visible on the left in the picture. Ravenna, a nod to the unit's studio pedigree, is joined by a BNC socket for the external master clock, the NADAC C.

Accordingly, the NADAC D is built like a studio tool. On the back panel you'll find two ports rarely seen in living rooms: Ravenna networking, and a 10 MHz BNC input for the external master clock, the NADAC C. Ravenna hardware is present but disabled for home use—a quiet nod to the unit's studio lineage. The back-panel photo on page 8 shows both. Inside, the layout is modular: separate blocks for digital inputs, processing, and the analog output stage rather than an all-in-one chip. That output stage is a full-blooded amplifier path, chosen to preserve microdynamics and temporal cohesion—more like a skilled translator conveying the breath of a sentence, not just the words. Equally telling is what the NADAC D refuses to do.

Many DACs "improve" the stream with upsampling and heavy filter seasoning, the culinary equivalent of pouring a rich sauce over every dish. This one favors fresh cooking: process what's there, skip the flavor enhancers. The result isn't an instant wow; it's the quieter aha when music simply appears—natural, unforced, correct.

At its core, the NADAC D is a True 1-bit design. Instead of representing values with many bits, it expresses the signal as a very high-frequency stream of two states—on or off—where the information lives in the duty cycle. That architecture makes the conversion itself elegantly simple, but it demands ruthless precision: every edge and pulse width has to land on time, like a conductor cueing entrances with a stopwatch.

This is where "True" matters. Many makers implement 1-bit logic in programmable devices like FPGAs or CPLDs. Flexible, yes—but physically imprecise. Internal routing is auto-assigned, so

trace lengths and propagation delays vary and can drift with temperature and voltage; clock management is weaker, raising phase noise and jitter. Master Fidelity chose the harder path: a custom ASIC with hand-tuned layout. That gives full control of logic paths, internal clock trees, current flow, and edge symmetry, and it allows two in-house technologies—Bitstream Jitter Lock for clock recovery and Edge-Entanglement Technology for edge integrity and dynamics—to operate right on the silicon. In practice, that means fewer micro-smears and more unforced calm.

One culprit most designs underplay is slow phase drift—"wander"—in the infrasonic range. You can't hear a 0.5 Hz drift directly, but its higher-order harmonics creep up into the audio band and erode solidity, image focus, and ease. Master Fidelity measures and optimizes timing stability all the way down to 0.1 Hz to keep that foundation steady over real-world timescales—more like steering a hot-air balloon than flicking a switch: you don't feel the moment-to-moment correction, but it determines where you land.

Measurements and listening line up. Based on NADAC D and C evaluations, the 1-bit architecture yields the highest linearity among common conversion schemes, including delta-sigma and R-2R. What audiophiles often call digital glare or hardness typically traces back less to amplitude errors than to time errors from complex, pseudo-linearized conversion tricks that end up disturbing the clock. True 1-bit flips the priorities: minimize complexity at the point of conversion, maximize temporal coherence. Analog tape has its own slow wow and flutter, but because of the medium's continuity those modulations don't pollute the full band the way digital timing faults can. Hence Master Fidelity's obsession with sub-5 Hz phase noise—and its harmonics—that decide how "solid" and three-dimensional a performance feels.

The connections and controls follow the same studio-first logic. The 10 MHz input invites the NADAC C to lay down the time base. Ravenna highlights the unit's professional heritage but is of no relevance in a home setup, as the feature remains entirely inactive. Six selectable digital filters let you fine-tune impulse behavior and transition bands without shifting the converter's core neutrality. It feels less like a showpiece and more like a precision tool you enjoy using because every touchpoint has been thought through.

In the end, the experience is simple. This converter doesn't try to flatter; it tries to be right. You can justify it with microseconds, clock trees, and ASIC edges. Or you can just listen: the first attack lands, a voice feels present rather than enlarged, and silence carries tension instead of emptiness. Time stops being an engineering variable and becomes the medium in which music takes shape. That is exactly where the NADAC D does its work.

Connections, Operation, and Filters

The NADAC D provides balanced XLR and single-ended RCA outputs, so it drops into almost any system without drama. Digital inputs cover coaxial S/PDIF, AES/EBU, and Toslink; there's also USB-C—still uncommon in high-end audio, yet a robust, modern way to connect a computer or streamer. Ravenna, an interface rooted in the unit's studio heritage, is present as a reminder of those origins but plays no active role at present..

Up front, you get two headphone jacks—quarter-inch and 3.5 mm—and a clear, legible display for input, sample rate, and volume. The built-in volume control works from the front panel or the remote. For loudspeaker setups, I still favor a dedicated preamp, as the NADAC D's level steps are a touch coarse for hair-line trims.

Six digital filters can be selected on the unit. They differ mainly in transition-band behavior and time-domain feel rather than obvious tonal shifts:

1. Linear-phase keeps frequency response ruler-straight but can add a hint of pre-ringing.
2. Minimum-phase removes pre-ringing, trading in a little post-ringing instead.
3. Hybrid variants split the difference for a balanced impulse character.
4. Apodizing aims to strip artifacts inherited from earlier A/D filter stages.
5. Short emphasizes speed and transient snap with slightly lighter stop-band suppression.
6. Long maximizes stop-band rejection with greater group delay and a steadier, weightier feel.

My take after extended listening: Filter 6 became my long-term choice; depending on the music, Filter 2 often felt "just right." In practice, the options let you fine-tune image density and transient behavior without undermining the converter's core neutrality. The only operational quirk is that filter selection is local to the front panel—handy enough, though a remote toggle would be welcome.

In short, connectivity and ergonomics are as carefully considered as the sound: purposeful, clean, and clearly designed for daily use rather than demo-room theatrics.

NADAC on Tour – Two Encounters, Two Reactions

The NADAC D had made such a powerful impression in our own listening room that it felt almost inevitable to take it further—to see how it would hold up outside familiar walls, in unfamiliar systems, under unfamiliar scrutiny. So we packed it up and hit the road. A listening tour of sorts. Two stops. Two reactions.

Stop One: Karl-Heinz Fink is no ordinary listener. One of Europe's most respected loudspeaker designers, he has ears honed not just by talent but by decades of experience. Anyone who's had the privilege of visiting his lab knows: judgments here aren't made on first impressions. They're earned. When we arrived with the NADAC D in hand, expectations were high—and so was the skepticism.

The result? Not a standing ovation, but something just as valuable: a moment of thoughtful pause. "It sounds different," Fink said—so different that it gave him reason to stop, consider, and question. His central concern: Was the NADAC D voiced for a particular sonic signature? Does it emphasize certain characteristics by design? And if so—why? Our answer was direct: It isn't.

That kind of voicing goes against the very core of the NADAC philosophy. This isn't about crafting a "feel-good" sound, but about delivering uncompromising musical truth—as neutral, as transparent, and as authentic as possible. The NADAC D doesn't aim to please. It aims to reveal.

The discussion remained open—and that's exactly what made it meaningful. Encounters like this don't end with a yes or no. They start something. High-level skepticism isn't resistance—it's the beginning of a deeper conversation. And that conversation will continue.

The next visit to Karl-Heinz Fink is already on the calendar. This time, we'll be bringing the NADAC C.

Stop : Audio 2000 – A dealer with standards, a dealer known for its no-compromise approach to high-end audio. The environment couldn't have been more different: unfamiliar room, unfamiliar speakers—and, almost provocatively, no USB connection. Instead, the NADAC D was fed via coaxial cable. Just to make things interesting, a heavyweight DAC from T+A stood ready for direct comparison. And yet, the NADAC D delivered—flawlessly. The differences weren't dramatic in the

audiophile fireworks sense. No flashy transients or exaggerated staging. But for those who truly listen, the distinction was immediate:
more structure, more flow, more emotional clarity. What we had described at home as "special" took on a new dimension in this setting. It became a masterclass in digital playback—quietly confident, but unmistakably superior. Even the dealer—known for being hard to impress—nodded in approval. And then said something remarkable: "This isn't just different. It's fundamentally different— and in the best possible way. It doesn't just sound different. It sounds right."

These two stops confirmed what we already suspected: The NADAC D provokes debate. It invites serious listening. It refuses to play the high-end game of smoke and mirrors.
It doesn't trade in showmanship. It deals in substance.
And that's exactly what makes it so compelling. The journey isn't over. In fact, it's just beginning.
Soon, the NADAC C will join the mix—and then we'll see just how far this duo can go.
In more systems. In more rooms. And perhaps—beyond what digital has previously dared to attempt.

First Impressions and What's Next

Our first encounters with the NADAC D made one thing perfectly clear: Digital doesn't just have to sound different—it can sound right. This is studio-grade precision brought home, without a trace of showmanship. No flash. No fireworks. Just a converter that steps out of the way and lets the music speak—honest, immediate, and free from any electronic fingerprint. And yet, this is only the beginning.

The NADAC D is just half the equation. It´s companion, the NADAC C—a super clock built to redefine timing—wasn't even in play during these first sessions. It was still with the distributor. But even before hearing it, Meik Wippermann's quiet excitement hinted at what's to come. Because if the D alone can deliver this kind of effortless musical truth, what happens when the C locks in?
This pairing could reset the hierarchy in digital audio. Those expensive streamers, once thought essential for no-compromise playback? They might suddenly seem… optional. Because timing and jitter control—the core mission of the NADAC C—could prove far more critical than any boutique power supply, exotic cable, or server costing more than a car. My recommendation: Take it one step at a time. Start with the NADAC D. Live with it. Let its honesty become your new baseline. Then—when you're ready—bring in the NADAC C.
That's not just an upgrade. That's a second revelation. Coming Up Next What happens when D and C unite?

How does the musical experience shift?
And are we finally approaching a point where digital playback doesn't just rival analog…
but quietly, confidently—surpasses it?
Stay tuned. The story isn't over.
It's just turning the page.
Stay tuned. This story is just getting started.