

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIGH END

Bryston | BDA-1 | £2350

Fine build and significant input

Ever wondered just how a DAC works? In Bryston's case it goes like this: signals fed into any of the digital connections are passed through impedance-matching transformers, before being sent through an upsampling circuit. Then it's on to the twin Crystal CS-4398 DACs, where the musical signal is converted, before being outputted via a pair of Bryston's own Class A discrete operational amplifiers. Phew.

The power for each stage of the process is individually regulated, and there are separate transformers for the digital and analogue sections. The signal is also re-clocked to reduce jitter. Yes, there's some serious high-grade tech inside this box.

Great use of space

The first thing you'll notice about the sound delivery is its spaciousness, a trait that lends itself very well to the

TECH SPECS

Type Standalone DAC **Inputs** 4 x coaxial, 2 x optical, XLR, USB, AES/EBU, BNC, RCA
Outputs Coaxial, XLR, RCA **Power supply** Dual independent **Finishes** 2 **Size (hwd)** 8 x 43 x 29cm **Weight** 8kg

atmospheric and ethereal *Alice in Wonderland* soundtrack. The opener, *Alice's Theme*, has a great spread across the soundstage, with a beautifully three-dimensional quality to the choir's vocals and a broad, spacious presentation of stringed instruments. Excellent tonal neutrality ensures that while the bassy horns are deep and rousing, they avoid becoming overbearing in the midrange, while the treble twinkles nicely without ever becoming harsh.

Continue to test the Bryston's mettle courtesy of the sophisticated cartoon funk-fusion of Gorillaz's brilliant *Plastic Beach*, and the BDA-1 proves itself to be tight, punchy and dynamic, following the album's diverse and frequently changing rhythmic styles in fine fashion.

A switch to the Eels' *End Times* proves that the Bryston has very impressive detail recovery, revealing all the charming lo-fi qualities in this rather DIY recording. There are times when background crackle is more than welcome in a musical presentation, and the BDA-1 manages to balance this while also digging up all the emotional nuance and imperfection in frontman E's vocal delivery and acoustic guitar.



The BDA-1 has twin Crystal CS-4398 DACs as well as Class A discrete amplifiers

So, hang on a minute: if the Bryston is so good - and it is - how come it only manages four stars? That's down to the brilliance of the Cyrus (see above), which is even better. But make no mistake: the BDA-1 is still a great DAC, and with its studio-strength build quality and full five-year guarantee, it has everything necessary to offer serious, long-term enjoyment.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Even-handed sound with plenty of insight; impressive range of inputs

AGAINST Some rivals are even more engaging and arguably better value

VERDICT A fine unit. It appeals as much for its inputs and build as it does for its great sound