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more than 2' away. (She was at the rear of the orchestra, so I assume the mikes were cardioid in pattern.) So the perspective is rather close-up, but I adapt to it fairly easily. On the laments, she can be heard breathing perhaps more than she would be in an opera house. I realize that many listeners will say, "Bring it on." The orchestra and harp-sichord miking I have no such reservations about.

I'm trying to set things up so we can host a sound clip when this column is posted on www.stereophile.com. In the interim, you can visit www.denielledeniese.com or just buy the CD. Highly recommended.

More great recordings (and recording gear)

Any time there is a new recording of anything by Morten Lauridsen, I try to get it. I was particularly motivated when I saw that the Norwegian chamber chorus Grex Vocalis had recorded *O Magnum Mysterium*, because for more than 20 years, Grex Vocalis's *Ressansse for Kor* (Kiku FXCD 39) has been one of my all-time favorite CDs of any kind. Their performance of "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen" on that disc is one of my desert-island tracks.¹ So I requested Grex Vocalis's recent Christmas-themed

CD, *O Magnum Mysterium*, from their new label, 2L (which stands for the corporate name *L y n d b e r g Lyd.*). In reply, I received half a dozen 2L CDs. I'll tell

you about the Christmas CD closer to Christmas; for now, I have to tell you about a truly fabulous Bartók CD.

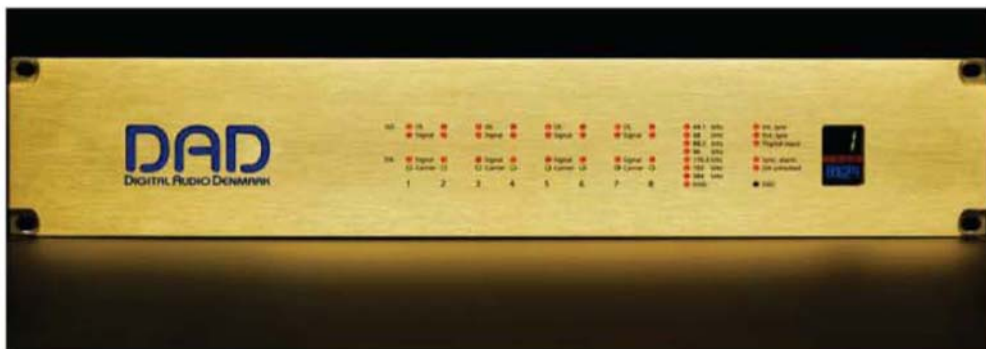
First, some background. 2L's website, www.2L.no, is worth checking out. They seem to have some time ago switched from releasing CDs to SACDs, and it looks as though they

now have as many SACDs (all both hybrid and surround, as far as I can tell) as CDs in their catalog, which is impressive for its eclectic but non-superficial nature. I first encountered 2L by word of mouth; mastering engineer Alan Silberman was knocked out by a 2L Mozart SACD that had been recorded using DXD technology, and Kalman Rubinson named this SACD one of his "Records to Die For" in February. By coincidence, *Enjoy the Music* scribe Rick Becker was knocked out by the same SACD, and sent me a copy of it.

DXD? I hear you mutter. Right. *All we need now is another audio initialism to cope with.* I feel your pain. But Digital eXtreme Definition (DXD) is a rather rational response to the loose ends Sony left when it pretty much dropped the SACD ball. Direct Stream Digital, aka DSD, is the very fast one-bit recording

Audio Denmark (www.digitalaudio.dk). They make a modular unit, the AX24 Converter System, which can be optioned as anything from two channels with line inputs, running at 48kHz, to eight channels with mike preamps, running at DXD, DSD, or Double-DSD (128Fs rather than 64Fs, ie, 5.645MHz). US prices run from about \$5000 to around \$20,000. Telarc outfitted one of its recording rigs with AX24s, for their re-recording in Atlanta of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*. Perhaps JA can assign some other *Stereophile* scribe to evaluate the AX24 when optioned as a stripped-down, playback-only (DAC) device. It sure looks handsome.

Of late, 2L has been recording with DXD, with gear from Merging and Pyramix, then downconverting to DSD for SACD production. The Mozart SACD



Digital Audio Denmark's modular AX24 Converter System.



method that is the "delivery system" for SACD; in other words, the pits on an SACD represent a one-bit DSD datastream. For many proponents and adherents, DSD is the preferred recording medium as well. The big problem is that few pro-audio production tools are available for DSD, and none are what you'd call affordable. The

less-big (for the moment) problem is that DSD is not exactly what you'd call future-proof.

DXD is a PCM-based system that can take advantage of many existing production solutions, such as ProTools HD and the Pyramix DAW, and offers data density claimed to be four times greater than DSD. DXD runs at a 352.8kHz sampling rate and 24-bit resolution. It appears to be the brainchild of, or has been codeveloped by, a company that is new to me, Digital

did sound very, very clean, and if I'd heard that performance at a concert, I would have considered the time very well spent. But I didn't feel a need to keep hearing the recording, pleasant as it was.

However, 2L's Bartók SACD (2L28), by violinist Annar Follesø, pianist Christian Ihle Hadland, and clarinetist Björn Nyman, struck me altogether differently—this is one of the most attractive Bartók releases I have come across in years. A close perusal of the liner notes reveals that it was recorded in 2003 and 2004, before 2L went ultra-hi-rez; the master recording is 24-bit but only 44.1kHz. Fear not—it sounds very good, even as a CD.

I had never heard of Annar Follesø. The liner notes say he studied at Bloomington, Indiana. The cover photo does him no favors; he looks deranged. I was apprehensive that I was in for some scenery chewing before I consigned the SACD to the "donate" pile, but I was wrong.

¹ There was an LP too, but I never snagged it. I bought my CD from Hart Huschens of www.audioadvance.com. Perhaps he has some CDs, or perhaps even LPs, salted away.

Follesø's traversal of Bartók's technically and musically daunting Sonata for Solo Violin is entirely musicianly. Follesø is poised and confident but not cocky. There is no showing off, no exaggerated gestures. He plays the work as though it belongs to the great tradition that predated and encompassed Bach, while giving due weight to its folkloric strains. Very quietly, Follesø makes the technical challenges go away. I am impressed. Some might find his tempos a bit on the measured or careful side; I prefer to think he is avoiding coming off as rushed or frantic.

Follesø plays a different violin for each work on this SACD, the other compositions being a very fine Sonata 2 for Violin and Piano and, you guessed it, *Contrasts* for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, in a spirited performance. None of the violins is a top-shelf choice; the solo sonata was performed on a 1921 Paolo de Barbieri, the sonata with piano and most of *Contrasts* on a ca 1870 Rocca, and the *scordatura* section of *Contrasts* on a 1919 Blažek. Follesø makes them all sound major-league.

As does the recording, at Oslo's Sofienberg Church. A photo in the booklet suggests that for *Contrasts*, the violinist and clarinetist stood on risers on either side of the piano, a Bösendorfer whose lid had been removed. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, that's a temptation I've never had the courage to give in to. But listening to the recording before I noticed that, I heard nothing amiss.

To sum up: We have a hybrid SACD/CD, the master tape of which was higher-rez but not DSD-rez, let alone DXD-rez, of comparatively unknown musicians playing repertoire for which there is no shortage of world-class competition, the violinist playing not even a "name-brand" violin—yet the result is an engrossing and completely artistically successful chamber-music program. Most highly recommended.

Relaxe-se com uma cerveja

If the foregoing has been a little too highfalutin for you, relief is at hand. Perhaps not in the form of a relaxing cold beer, but maybe the next-best thing: a very mellow CD of (mostly) Brazilian bossa nova played on classical guitar. The collection, *Deve ser Amor* (It Must Be Love), features guitarist Michael Andriaccio (Fleur de Son FDSJ 57977; www.fleurdeson.com). Pieces are from the pens of Baden Powell, Astor Piazzolla, Antonio Carlos Jobim, and Luiz Bonfá—what could there be not to like?

Bonfá's "Manha de Carnival," the famous "Theme from *Black Orpheus*," is here—of course.

This is a very nice, low-intensity program—no glimpses of the cosmos, no holy-this or holy-that moments of virtuosity-induced stupefaction. Andriaccio has a very pleasant way with this music on classical guitar. Is his playing on the same level of technical accomplishment as, say, Göran Söllscher's? Nope. Is the audio engineering up to the level Deutsche Grammophon has provided for Söllscher? Double nope.

I found the sound somewhat lacking in sparkle and hall ambience, and even in the solidity of the center image. But the music was so agreeable, I refused to let *Audiophilia nervosa* get in my way. Next time around, though, the engineer might want to try an M-S mike array, perhaps with figure-8 ribbons such as can be had from Crowley and Tripp. Perhaps in a livelier hall.

But don't let my quibbles stop you from picking up this CD. It might be just the ticket if you're a fan of classical guitar or bossa nova, or simply want some mellow music to zone out to. Beer from Brazil is optional. A nice little album.

Barking up the wrong tree

I'll soon return to the project of assembling systems based on one-box CD receivers, but I first want to vent a bit about some of the more enthusiastic denizens of AudioLand. I had heard several hymns of praise sung to the notion of using a first-generation Sony PlayStation (SCPH-1001) as a CD player. Okay, I bit. Hope sprang eternal that if the PlayStation proved a giant-killer, I could then recommend an alternate system, cutting a couple hundred dollars or more off the price.

I looked on eBay, where people were repeating the shibboleth that what they were offering was "as good as \$6000 audiophile CD players." I ended up paying \$25 in person at my local Salvation Army for a PlayStation, one controller, a power cord, and a multi-output cord set. Within a few hours of setting it up, I was asking myself:

What planet are these people from? Remulac????

I admit that the PS1 didn't sound at all bad playing CDs through

its RCA analog outs. Rather good, in fact. Compared directly to the CD section of the Music Hall Trio CD receiver (\$999), and using *Cardas Neutral Reference interconnects* (\$525/meter pair) to carry the PS1's output to the Trio's Aux input, I found the sound using the PS1 and the Cardas cable to be noticeably more extended, open, and agile, and at the same time slightly more rich in the midrange, with a greater sense of hall sound. No question: definitely more to my tastes, but no revelation—just a welcome upgrade.

Substituting a molded cable set grabbed from my personal Graveyard of the Giveaway Cables, there was less of a difference. The not-quite all-important but nonetheless hugely important midrange was a tad threadbare via the giveaway cables, compared with the Cardases; the treble was a trifle thin, too. In short, and considering only sound: With the Cardas cables, the PS1's audio improvement compared to the Trio's stock CD section was worthwhile (and must be taken into account in one's estimation of the Trio on the whole); but with the molded generic cables, the PS1 just wasn't worth messing with.

So, based on several days' on-and-off listening, I am in no position to say that you don't get at least \$25 worth of sound quality from a Sal's Boutique PlayStation One—assuming you hook it up with excellent and somewhat expensive interconnects. The drawbacks: everything else, starting with:

The PS1 has a power switch. When you power up the unit, it outputs a loud "trademark sound" that I call the *Buumnggg* sound (that's what it sounds like). I have never before dealt with a CD player that made its presence known that way. And, let's not forget, there's a pushbutton to activate the top-cover disc-access



Good sounds, but forget about ergonomics or user-friendliness.