

Auris Audio Euterpe headphone DAC/amplifier

by Alan Sircom



The concept of an audio Swiss Army Knife is overused and often incorrectly so. A Swiss Army Knife is a multi-function tool that is – in fairness – at best relatively OK at doing all the tasks it's meant to achieve (unless you are MacGyver, in which case you can build whole satellite communications systems with your trusty red penknife). The Auris Euterpe doesn't quite fit the 'Swiss Army Knife' bill, as it does three related things very well indeed; it's a DAC, it's a valve headphone amplifier, and it's an elegant wooden headphone stand. In other words, it's a one-stop shop containing all the bits from the end of your computer to the start of your headphones.

Teasing apart the separate sections here is not as worthy an exercise as usual, as the chances are it will be used in 'triumvirate' mode; you aren't going to use the Euterpe purely as a headphone stand (it's good, but it's a little 'spendy' in that context), and you probably won't break out either DAC or amp because of that form factor. So, where a DAC owner might paw over its ability to play DSD128 and PCM to 32bit, 384kHz precision, its XMOS USB section, and its use of a ESS Sabre DAC, and the amplifier owner might run through its ECC81 input tube and its pair of seven-pin PL95 beam power tubes to deliver just under a Watt to a 32Ω or 150Ω load in single-ended configuration, most will just roll this into one big good headphone amp/DAC sitting in a well-finished wooden headphone stand. The power supply is a separate box about the size of an external hard disk from about a decade ago. There is a spot of tube rolling allowed, as you can switch between PL95 and EL95 pentodes (there's a toggle switch on the top plate).

I was mildly concerned that the trio of tubes on the top plate of the electronics would slowly cook the headband of the headphones resting on

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the Euterpe, but after extensive not listening with the juice connected, it barely raises them above room temperature.

The Euterpe's connectivity is rudimentary, but useful. There is a single USB-B input and a pair of line inputs (switchable from the front panel). There are also a pair of line outputs to connect to a conventional stereo system. At the front there is a A/D toggle switch to flip between the two inputs, as well as a matching toggle to flip between low and high impedance headphones. The volume potentiometer doubles as a power on/off switch, and there is a single ¼" stereo single-ended jack (balanced operation – in or out – is not on the Euterpe's radar). The controls are minimalist and reflect the product's destination and intent. There are no fancy displays to denote sampling frequency, no filter options, not even a LED to tell you the power is on (there are glowing filaments on the valves to act as a guide there), but none of these are needed. What's needed is something that sounds good without adding inconvenience.

In truth, I wasn't expecting much from what is, in essence, a headphone stand with ideas above its station. Then I listened to it and came away extremely pleased with its performance. Both DAC and amp are well-matched and very easy on the ear; there's a warmth and even-handedness to the sound that doesn't throw detail at the listener, but is extremely detailed all the same. It's rich and satisfying sounding, and if you find yourself rejecting a lot of modern personal audio electronics for being 'stark' or 'etched', the Euterpe's balance will be perfect for you. There is a lot of dynamic range and mid-range detail on offer, and these extend up and down into the bass and treble, but at no time does the Euterpe shout or draw attention to itself.

Of the two sections, I think the amp is the real star. The DAC is good in and of itself, but plugging the line input into some extremely high-grade DAC outputs show just what the amp can deliver. Also, it isn't MQA compatible, which might be a problem for some. Euterpe is not constrained by the on-board DAC, just that it shows what the amp is capable of.

Perhaps most of all, I find myself being – unsuspectingly – in the target audience for the Auris Audio Euterpe. I spend a lot of time at the keyboard and some of it listening to music while I work. I've found the Euterpe is becoming something of

Summary

Voicing: Fundamentally neutral with slight warmth to mids and upper bass



(All ratings relative to comparably priced headphone amp/DACs.)

Resolution/Focus:



Sound staging/Imaging:



Dynamics/Expression:



Value:



Pros

- The most effective all-in-one there is!
- Very neutral performance
- Great dynamics and soundstage
- Plenty of detail

Cons

- Separates can sound better
- Single-ended only
- No MQA support

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Valve, single-ended headphone amplifier, DAC, and headphone stand

Inputs: 2x RCA line level, USB-type B

Outputs: ¼" headphone jack, 2x RCA line level

Digital formats supported: PCM to 32bit, 384kHz, DSD64, DSD128

Power: 0.9 watts per channel (32 Ohms/150 Ohms)

Valves: 2 x PL95, 1 x ECC81

Output Impedance: Low 32-80 Ohm / High > 150 Ohm

Dimensions (WxHxD): 27x21x23cm, PSU 9.5 x 18.5 x 5.5

Weight: 4.1kg, PSU 1.1kg

Price: £1,499/€1,499

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

Auris Audio

Distributed in the UK by Elite Audio

a constant companion, in a way a separate DAC, amp, and headphone stand never could. But the fact it's a companion without compromise makes this one is a keeper! +