

# Stream Supreme

**Auralic's Aries wireless streaming bridge blends ease of use with reference quality sound, says Jon Myles.**

Sometimes a company's products sneak up on you over a period of time. Take Auralic, for example. Yes, I'd heard of their innovative streaming devices and had my interest piqued but never quite managed to get around to requesting one.

But then they began popping up in more and more systems being used at hi-fi shows and for product launches – partnered with the likes of Naim, Linn, McIntosh and other respected brands. What's more, the sound being produced was pretty engaging.

So it was obviously time to end the wait – hence the arrival of the Auralic Aries wireless streaming bridge in the office.

Which immediately begs the question: what exactly is it? And the answer is it is a way of adding high-quality streaming capabilities to your existing system for the relatively wallet-friendly price of £1495. Simply attach the Aries to a digital-to-analogue convertor

or a DAC-equipped amplifier via its AES/EBU, coaxial or Toslink outputs and it will replay music at up to 24bit/192kHz resolution from computers, NAS drives or other DLNA, UPnP compatible servers in the house. Alternatively, there's a USB input and output which will accept up to 32bit/384kHz files (if you happen to have any) plus DSD64, 128 and 256.

What's more the unit will also give its owner access to internet radio as well as the ability to stream CD-quality content from the likes of Tidal and Qobuz. Apple AirPlay is also built in.

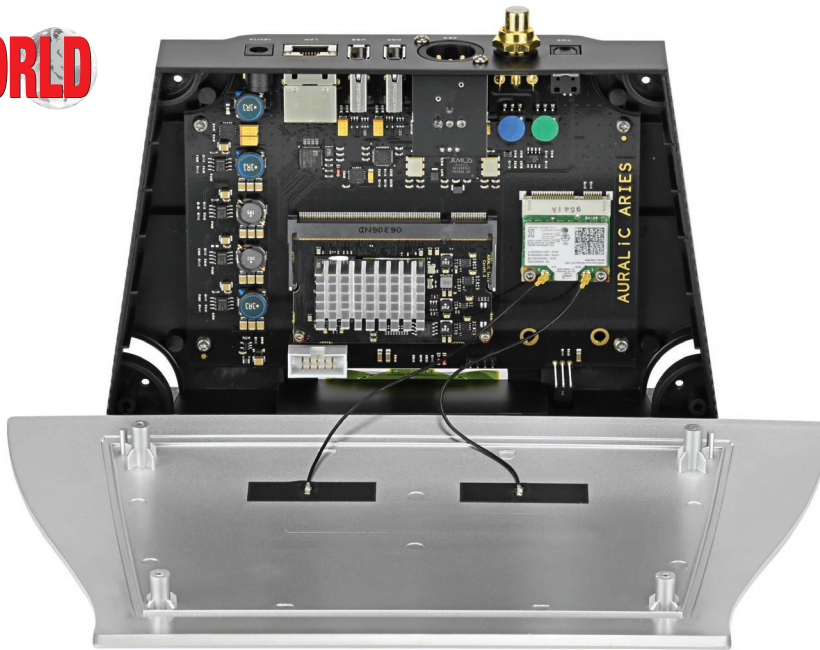
Hence the term wireless streaming bridge; the Aries in essence acts a gateway between all your stored digital files or streaming services and the hi-fi, which must have digital-to-analogue conversion as no DAC is built in. Control is via the supplied remote or, more conveniently, the free Lightning DS app (iPad and iPhone only at present) which delivers album artwork, playlists and other features.

The unit itself is divided into two parts – the bridge itself which is a slim box measuring 2.7" x 9.8" x 7.8" (H/W/D) with curved plastic casing and a three-inch OLED display at the front with an accompanying off-board power supply.

The latter deserves special mention - this is no off-the-shelf switch-mode unit but a carefully crafted linear PSU featuring Auralic's own Purer-Power technology which utilises filtering circuits in the form of large storage capacitors as well as high-speed, low-noise, low-impedance, multi-stage regulators.

Inside the main unit are two FemtoClocks (one for the USB, the other for all other digital outputs) plus dual-band Wi-Fi connection and there's also the option to go wired via an RJ45 connection on the rear. Auralic says the whole concept is designed to deliver an extremely low-noise, low-jitter input to the





Inside the Auralic uses two FemtoClocks (one for USB, a second for all other inputs) to reduce jitter.

DAC of your choice, coupled with an easy to use interface.

**SET-UP**

Credit to Auralic for making the Aries and its Lightning DS interface a pain-free set-up experience. I downloaded the app to an iPad, connected the unit to Chord's excellent 2Qute DAC via a QED Reference Optical Toslink cable and was up and running via a Naim Supernait 2 amplifier in minutes. The app found my digital files on both NAS drive and computers and indexed them with artwork, genre and other metadata in less than two minutes – impressive speed for 1300 albums' worth of data. Switching between tracks was also impressively speedy while accessing the likes of Tidal and Qobuz merely involved typing in my name and password once, after which it is automatically remembered.

Throughout the review period I tried the Aries on both wired and wireless connections and never experienced any dropouts even when streaming 24bit/192kHz files via the latter – something which is not always a given.

The Lightning app has specific display screens for the various functions on offer – be it Library mode when playing from digital sources such as NAS drives or computers, Streaming for the likes of Tidal or Qobuz, AirPlay from enabled devices or internet radio. A fully-

featured search function also makes seeking out specific content simple.

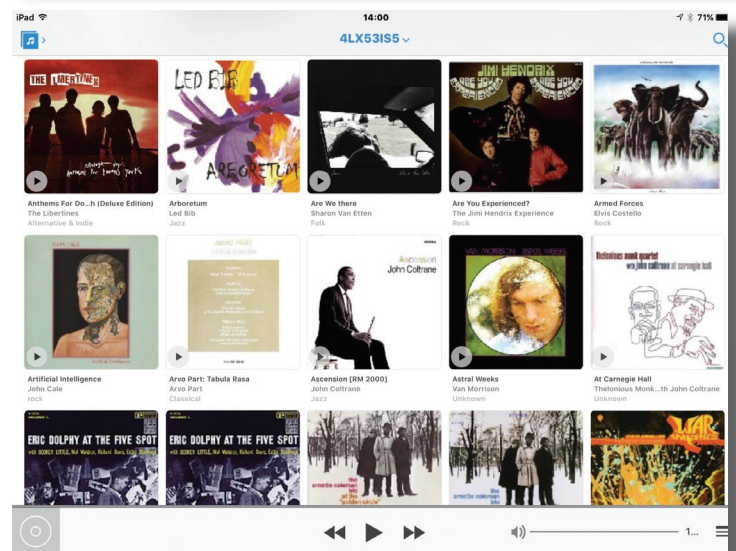
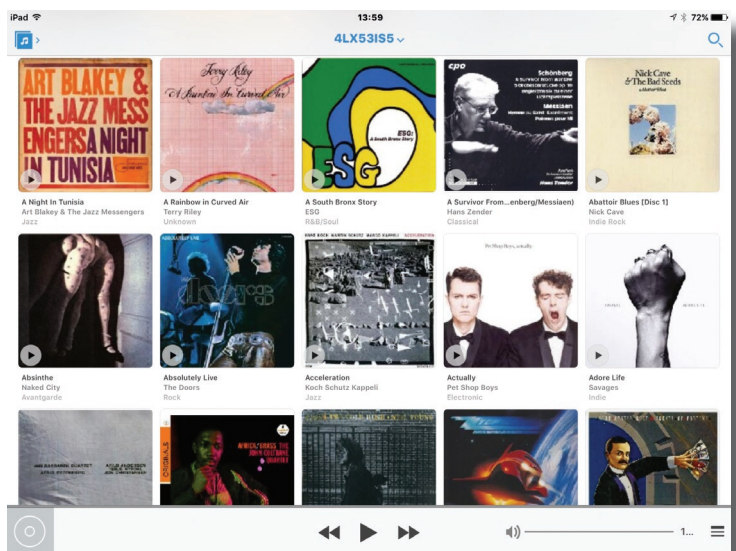
So while the Aries boasts some impressive technology, initial set-up and operation should be no problem for even the most computer-phobic of users.

**SOUND QUALITY**

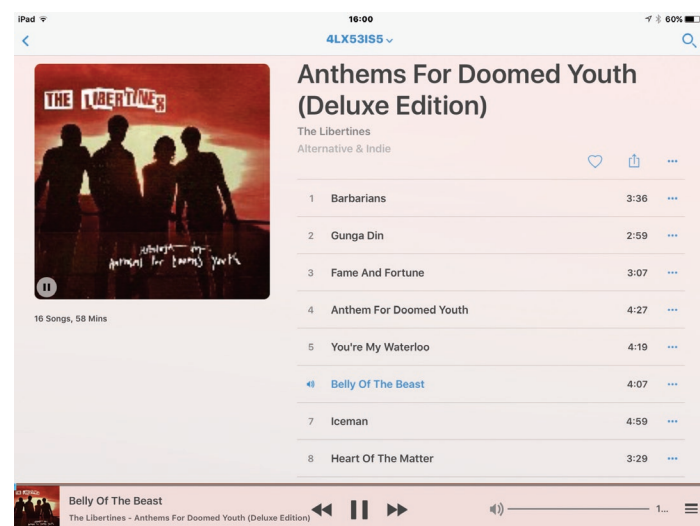
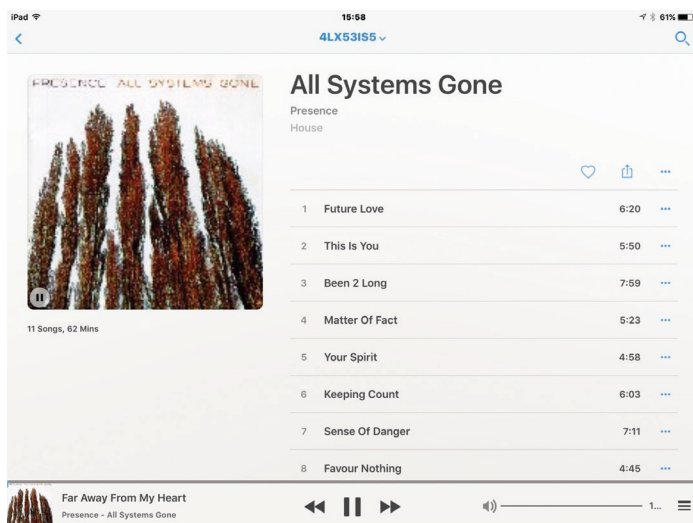
The Chord 2Qute DAC can be ruthlessly revealing of sources and so is an ideal reviewing tool. Plug in an inferior source and you'll soon realise it.

Not with the Aries, though. From the first notes of Daft Punk's 'Random Access Memories' (Studio Masters Edition - 24bit/88kHz) I was struck by just how detailed, crystal-clear and thoroughly engaging the sound was.

There's an exceptionally low noise floor which means instruments



Auralic's Lightning app brings up full album artwork for all music on your network.



**The Lightning app for iPhones and iPads makes browsing through albums and selecting tracks quick and easy.**

take on extra vibrancy. Listening to the guitar part on 'Giorgio By Moroder' the notes had added bite at the start, but also their decay lasted a little bit longer which translates into a sense of hearing a real instrument at work.

Playing music heavy with ambient and spatial atmosphere such as Kraftwerk's live opus 'Minimum-Maximum' it delivered expansive, three-dimensional musical images. Through a pair of Neat's little Iota Alpha floorstanders – no slouches in producing a panoramic soundstage – the music extended further into the room with a wider spread left to right. Lack of jitter also meant timing was excellent with a crystalline quality to Kraftwerk's electronic melodies.

The ambience of venues also comes through; I could hear the

differing acoustics of the various halls where the recordings were made.

This is ideal for lovers of classical music as it's easy to accurately place the position of the instruments even with the largest of orchestras. On a DSD recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherazade' (Fritz Reiner/Chicago Symphony Orchestra) the solo violin part had tremendous resonance and body while the woodwinds were suitably full-bodied.

I was continually impressed at how the Aries managed to pick

musical pieces apart so I could distinctly hear each individual instrument – but without sounding clinical. Instead it retained the energy and excitement of even the fiercest tracks I threw at it. On Jesus And Mary Chain's 'Never Understand', for instance, the feedback was no longer simply a sonic squall but became a rising and falling melodic line that propelled the song along with



**The off-board linear power supply features Auralic's own Purer-Power technology with large capacitors to filter out mains-borne interference.**

fearsome intensity.

This ability to present a clear, detailed reproduction of the music came through on any genre I played through the Aries – be it pop, rock, classical, chamber or whatever. And, of course, the better the file quality and DAC you choose to run it with the more impressive that performance becomes.

**CONCLUSION**

As digital devices go, the Auralic Aries has to be considered one of the best on the market at the moment. Plugged into my system it took the streaming experience to another level – with more detail, more depth and more clarity to everything I played. If you want to hear your stored files at their best (whatever the resolution) I'd say it's almost an essential purchase.



**Digital outputs are AES/EBU, optical and co-axial as well as USB for file sizes up to 32bit/384kHz as well as DSD.**

**AURALIC ARIES**  
**£1495**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best**

**VALUE - keenly priced**

**VERDICT**

A wireless streaming bridge that extracts the last ounce of detail from digital music files and boasts an excellently designed user interface. Its £1495 price makes it something of a bargain.

**FOR**

- detail
- high-resolution and DSD streaming
- low jitter
- intuitive set-up
- ease of use
- price

**AGAINST**

- Apple iOS only app

Auralic  
www.auralic.com