

ADL

CNET – ADL Esprit Review

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Advancing the state of the art of desktop audio

The ADL by Furutech Esprit is exactly the sort of component that can elevate the sound of a high-end desktop system.

by Steve Guttenberg



Late last year I raved about the ADL by Furutech Cruise USB digital-to-analog headphone amplifier, so when the company sent over the new Esprit desktop digital-to-analog converter, I was eager to see what it could do. I had the 2.3-inch-by-5.8-inch-by-7.4-inch component on my desktop for a few months and I was a little concerned that I was starting to take it for granted. It sounded so utterly natural that I listened to it a lot longer than I needed to write a review, and that's always a good sign. I ran it with my Emotiva airmotiv 4 self-powered speakers, but it really would have liberated my ultimate hi-fi fantasies if I had the Esprit when I was reviewing the truly superb Harbeth P3ESR speakers. Or even better, the Magnepan Mini Maggie flat-panel speakers. The Esprit is a preamp, so it needs to be used with a separate power amp, like my Bel Canto REF500s, to drive nonpowered speakers.

The Esprit's machined-metal input selector and volume control knobs have the luxury feel you'd expect with a first-class component. There's no remote; it's a hands-on user interface, and considering that the Esprit was less than 2 feet from my chair, I didn't miss the remote. It's easy enough to reach over and make the adjustments by hand. Connectivity runs to USB, Toslink optical and coaxial RCA digital inputs, and two stereo analog inputs and one output. The USB port handles up to 96-kHz/24-bit audio; the optical and coaxial digital connections accept up to 192-kHz/24-bit audio. The Esprit also has a headphone jack.

The Esprit's rear panel



I listened to a recent concert with jazz guitarist Bill Frisell with The Bad Plus piano trio on the NPR Web site, and the sound was thoroughly enjoyable. Later, while listening to WAV and Apple Lossless files on my computer, I compared the Esprit with one of my favorite USB converters, the Halide Design HD (\$495). The Halide is really good, but the Esprit had a fuller sound, and its broader and deeper soundstage was more inviting. The Halide was more immediate, with more of an edge, but I missed the Esprit's lush life. On Bernard Herrmann's "Mysterious Island" orchestral film score the Esprit's sound was bigger and juicier, compared with the Halide HD, which is just a small black box with only a USB input and analog output. It lacks controls or inputs, but it's half the Esprit's price.

Listening to a few high-resolution albums upped my estimation of the Esprit's transparency. Ola Gjeilo's "Piano Improvisations" album in 96-kHz/24-bit audio sounded positively vivid and pure over my Audeze LCD-2 and Grado RS-1 headphones.

The only real problem I had with the Esprit was that it sounded so good it interfered with my productivity. I would find myself not working and just savoring the sound. M.S.R.P. is \$999; the Esprit is available from a number of sites, including HiDEF Lifestyle and Amazon.

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