



The ES9018-2M chip also gives the Concero HP/HD an advantage over its forerunner: an ability to decode DSD64 and DSD128 (via the DoP protocol) as well as DXD (aka 24bit/352.8kHz PCM). The original Concero's ES9023 DAC won't decode DSD but it offers a PCM ceiling that goes higher than either of the HD and HP units: 24bit/384kHz. This wafer-thin advantage will hold until RL's engineers resolve the 384kHz distortion issue troubling the two newer models.

Show me the money. Despite a paucity of mainstream titles, DSD is a hot ticket amongst audiophile consumers. Demand for DSD-capable DACs has strengthened during the last year or so. Lest anyone sees my coverage of DSD-related products as proof positive that I've gone gaga for the DSD format, let me be abundantly clear: I haven't.

In the three years since my initial interest in hi-res digital audio my song library hasn't been overrun by über PCM releases. I've bought all the R.E.M., Talking Heads, Joy Division and Rolling Stones on offer at HDTracks but I still have only a hundred or so hi-res releases sitting inside iTunes. Compare that to tens of thousands of Redbook/CD rips sitting in my library. Playing the numbers game, Redbook resolutely remains the main course with hi-res PCM being an interesting side dish and DSD a small-but-pleasing dessert.

Maybe Chad Kassem can build inroads to the major labels faster than HDTracks' David and Norman Chesky. Maybe. SuperHiRez.com's DSD catalogue stands at 114 titles (at time of writing), but like HDTracks, it's (technically) US only - a sharp reminder that overseas licensing deals are a legal quagmire. Having recently renewed their hi-res vows, Sony may be able to pull off wider distribution deals but I'm sure I'm not alone in my reluctance to buy into a format on the promise of future riches. I'm not sold...yet. Not until the number of available **DSD downloads** improves significantly.



"But what about the music offered by Blue Coast, 2L et al?". Sorry guys, it sounds wonderful but it 'says nothing to me about my life' (Remember: **You are a DJ - you are what you play**). As one reader opined in the comments section of this week's **Schiit Loki news piece**: "...the library of available titles [at SuperHiRez.com] looks like my Aunt Virginia's record collection (5 or 6 Norah Jones records and a bunch of 30's to 50's jazz)". Ha!

For the time being, I'm staying pragmatic. With my reviewer hat on, I'm keeping one foot in DSD waters and one on dry land to temper the tide of (over?)-enthusiasm. I listen to music (primarily) because I like it and not (just) because it sounds good. Otherwise Arcade Fire would never get a look in. To invert those priorities – to put sound quality ahead of emotional nourishment or sing-a-long enjoyment – would see the tail wagging the dog. I'm not *that* kind of audiophile.

Thankfully, Depeche Mode's *Exciter* ticks both boxes. It's my favourite DM album and Mark Bell's techno-tinged production means it sounds bloody marvellous (exciting!), even if it isn't the last word in dynamic range.



Credit where it's due. DSD and Depeche Mode seem made for each other. The electronic squiggles and bleeps that Bell has baked deep into the mix are easier to discern on the SACD rip (DSD) than a CD rip (ALAC) of the same 2007 remaster. Via the Concorso HP, the DSD ups the jump factor, is less condensed and more munificent.

Bandwidth and storage issues associated with DSD aren't insignificant either. The aforementioned SACD rip of *Exciter* consumes 2.5Gb of storage space. Storage might be cheap but how long does it take YOU to download 2.5Gb? How many releases could you grab per monthly download quota?