

Pro-Ject Pre Box S2 Digital



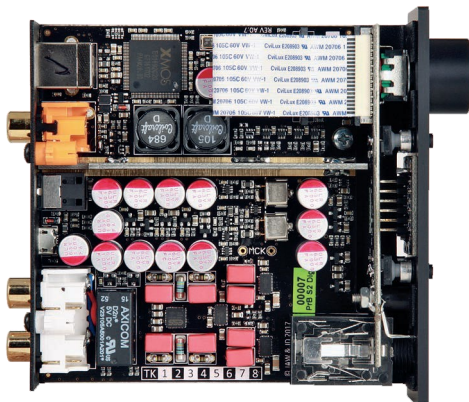
The S2 Digital clearly provided a real improvement in sound quality on the Sennheiser headphones that I also tend to use in the office. It delivers a clear, precise sound that might seem a little clinical if it didn't manage to retain such warmth and texture as well. I was impressed by the almost crystalline clarity of the intertwining vocals in Queen's vast, *a cappella* rondo on 'The Prophet's Song'. It's particularly effective at delving into the sound and isolating voices and details that would normally just merge together as a rather undifferentiated 'wall of sound'.

There's a strong sense of space too, with very precise left/right separation helping to create a widescreen soundstage that befits Queen's epic production, and when Brian May's power chords finally come crashing in they really do strike like a thunderbolt and lightning. But for real biblical overload even Queen can't compete with the polyphonic motets of Thomas Tallis, and it's here that the S2 Digital earns its wings. Even with my closed-back Sennheisers it felt as though the soaring vocals of Pro Cantione Antiqua's 'Spem In Alium' were taking flight and echoing around the cavernous nave of St Paul's Cathedral, where this recording originated.

The bass on 'Shadow Journal' now clearly stretched the Air 200 to its limits, and I could almost hear the compact cabinet straining at the seams to contain the sound. Switch to something a little less apocalyptic and the bass line on Blondie's 'Rapture', from the 1998 compilation *The Very Best Of Blondie*, bounced along like a playful puppy, overcoming its tendency to get lost in the mix.

Clearly, even as an interim DAC/preamp, the S2 Digital can still provide a genuinely attractive audio upgrade, both with 'phones and with a decent set of desktop speakers that you might use with your computer.

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT



Pro-Ject's Pre Box S2 Digital offers a wealth of audiophile tweakerly but its emphasis on USB ties it primarily – but not exclusively – to desktop and laptop PCs. On the other hand, USB hook-up means the S2 is still a *portable* option for laptop users, and it doesn't need a battery. For the price, its sound performance is impeccable, combining clarity and precision with an attractive warmth and impressive sense of space.

Sound Quality: 85%

