



# Ideon Audio

## 3R USB Renaissance mk2 regenerator

### SERIOUS COMPUTER AUDIO

started in the mid-nineties, with the advent of digital audio interface cards like the Zefiro ZA1. Suddenly it was possible to get the digital data stream from your DAT machine or CD player into your computer, and play it out. The great leap forward came with the advent of USB a decade or so later, making it easier to get working consistently. In 2009, dCS lead the field with its (then) new Debussy DAC, which offered a high-quality asynchronous USB input using its internal clocking rather than depending on the PC's. The sound quality was quite something, but it wasn't until Arcam's rDAC (*HFC 338*) that the technology became truly affordable. Since then, it has really taken off.

### The three Rs

That's not to say it's perfect. You can get great sound, but we're still on a learning curve. Ideon Audio's 3R USB Renaissance mk2 is designed to redrive, reclock and regenerate the digital audio stream coming from your computer before it reaches the DAC. That's why it's called the 3R. It's a small Greek company, making interesting niche products sold directly from its website in Europe. The idea is simply to 'turbo boost' the USB signal down the cable so that your DAC has an easier time converting those ones and zeroes into analogue music. There's a redrive chip to improve signal transmission from the USB cable, then the datastream is regenerated by reclocking it by a low-jitter clock.

It is a well finished, aluminium box with a DC input that plugs into the bundled 7.5V/1A switch-mode power supply. It has two USB sockets – a type-B in and a type-A out. Two LEDs are fitted, one showing power and the other that the unit has locked to the audio stream from the source computer. Given that this should travel as short a distance as possible before regeneration, the idea is to put it next to the computer. There's no need to install any drivers.

There is a clear difference to the sound of my MacBook Pro with and



without the 3R. It's not totally transformative, but it certainly makes its presence welcome in a subtle yet discernible way. Subjectively, it sounds as if a light layer of dirt has been wiped away, allowing more of the original flavour of the recording to be revealed. Crosby, Stills and Nash's *Wooden Ships* is perhaps not the world's greatest recording. It can sound murky and flat, but inserting the Ideon into the circuit seems to pep things up a little, making the song seem more tangible and realistic but less processed. For all its champions, computer audio can sound a little artificial and opaque, lacking the real life and spark of a good CD player or vinyl-spinner. The 3R acts to subtly assuage this, with a more vibrant and expansive sound.

I decide to feed it a more modern recording, so it is to Hall & Oates' *I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)* that I turn. This has a lovely, rich and fulsome feel thanks to its use of classic analogue synths. It springs into life via a good turntable, but often sounds workmanlike via computer audio sources, yet the 3R definitely jollies it up. The different strands of the mix

seem to play more easily, leaving one another greater space. The vocal harmonies are a delight, sounding silkily smooth yet vibrant and rich with texture. At the same time, that big, fat walking bassline takes on a new sense of direction – and provides a firmer underpinning to the music than before. As I run the gamut of my computer audio collection – and stream music out via the Mac – the 3R serves up a consistent improvement in sound, making things smoother yet better defined, more expansive in terms of sound staging and supple and fluid in terms of rhythms. There isn't any great improvement to dynamics, but you definitely pick up on subtle accenting.

### Chain reaction

Given its modest price and compact size, Ideon Audio's 3R Renaissance USB regenerator offers an impressive improvement in sound by treating one of the weakest links in the computer audio chain and making it markedly better. It's well worth trying if computer audio is a key part in your hi-fi replay chain. **DP**

### DETAILS

**PRICE**  
£260  
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### OUR VERDICT

