



IFI MICRO IUSB3.0 & MICRO IDAC2 SYSTEM REVIEW

BY ATES BERBEROGLU JULY 13, 2016



Introduction:

The IFI is a co-brand of AMR Audio that is known by its famous audio gears such as DP-777. They produce many different audio components – digital audio converters, amplifications, speakers, cables and active noise cancellation units. The IFI provides four main product lines which includes the Nano, Micro, Retro and Pro. In the Nano Line, there are smaller units compared to the Micro Line. The Pro Line, offers the Pro iCAN tube amplifier. The Retro Line. IPurifier2, Gemini and Mercury cables that are included in this review can be seen in the accessories and power sections in IFI website.

The IFI provides a large product range and most of them are multi-functional with multiple outputs and inputs. It is highly possible to find beneficial and cheap solutions to close the gaps of the desktop systems. As we all know, a system is no stronger than its weakest part.

The Units of the Reviewed System:

Micro iDac2:

It is made from high quality aluminum and a Burr Brown chip is utilized for DSD native playback. On the iDAC2, there are coax/USB digital inputs and RCA/3.5mm outputs. There is no 6.3mm output for full-size cans. It must be connected to an external amplifier, if more power is needed. Its output power is not so sufficient to drive power hungry cans.



Overall build quality is quite satisfactory and the volume potentiometer works well; there is no unbalanced problem. In addition, as a dac/amp combo, iDAC2 supports all popular formats including DSD 256, PCM384 and DXD.

For more information: <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/micro-idac2/>

Micro iUSB3.0:

This is the most impressive part of the reviewed system. According to the IFI, it has active noise cancelation, relock, rebalance and regenerate technologies. The iUSB3.0 fixes the system's weakest parts with its power regulation inside. It utilizes an external power supply to eliminate bad electrical signals and reduce noise coming from the computer. This way, the system becomes quieter and more effortless.



Overall build quality is similar to the micro iDAC2. Both units have aluminum outside cover. There is 9V power supply input, one USB input and two USB outputs. Thus, two separate units can be powered via iUSB3.0. For example, both HDD and DAC units may have clean electrical signals when connected to the iUSB3.0.

For more information: <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/micro-iusb3-0/>

iPurifier 2:

This small unit also has reclock, rebalance and regenerate technologies. It is the successor of iPurifier and it has the same size of its little brother. As far as it can be seen in the website, the IFI recommends getting iPurifier with micro USB and Gemini to correct signals. In this review, iPurifier 2 is used in the system with iUSB3.0 and Gemini dual-headed USB cable.

For more information: <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/accessory-ipurifier2/>



Gemini Cable:

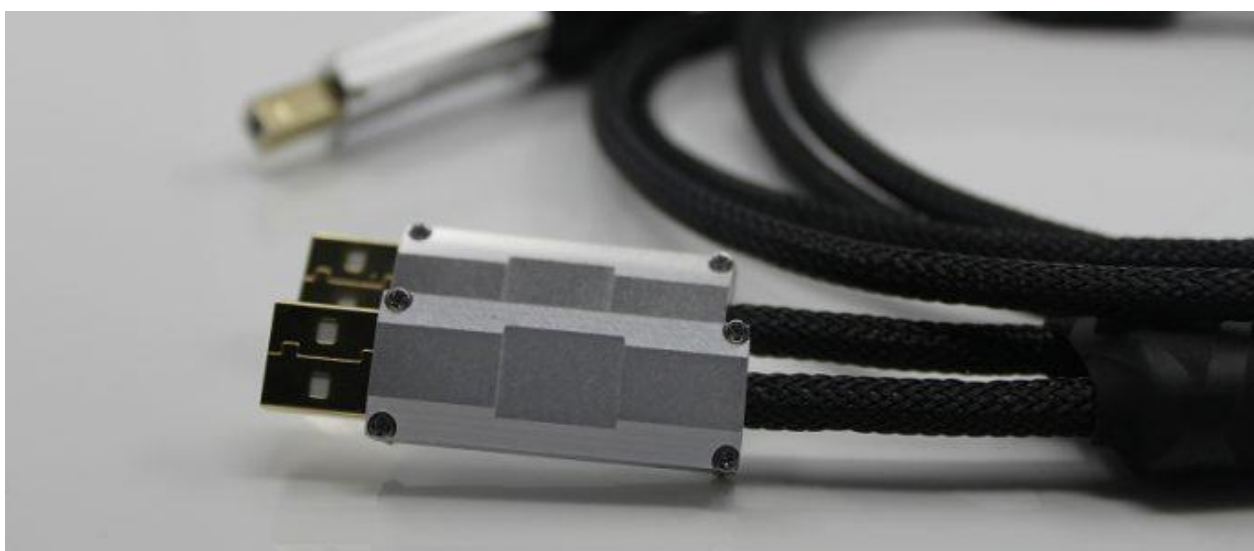
The Gemini is a dual-headed USB and black-sleeved cable. It can be utilized along with micro iUSB units to send signals to external dacs. The Gemini is a bit thick due to dual USB cable that carries power and audio signals separately. In addition, there are metal oxide ceramic silencers on the cable as well as gold-plated USB plugs.

For more information: <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/accessory-gemini/>

Mercury USB Cable:

The Mercury is the Gemini's little brother that has a single USB cable. It is made from high quality copper and there is an advanced shielding tech inside. Surely, it is not as thick as the Gemini cable and it is easier to use due to more flexible build. However, we need to consider that the Gemini's intended use is different than the Mercury.

For more information: <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/accessory-mercury/>



IFI pays attention to the packaging and the accessories. The outer boxes look premium and are strong enough. In the iUSB3.0 package, there are an USB cable and a wall power supply as well as base protecting stickers as it is in the iDAC2 package. I should say that the standard USB cables are a bit too short.

Sound:

The review is based on the comparison between iDAC2 and the whole system.

The system configuration: MacBook-> Mercury-> iPurifier2-> micro iUSB3.0-> Gemini->micro iDAC2-> 3.5mm analogue output

The reviewed IFI system consisting of two IFI cables, iDAC2, iUSB3.0 and iPurifier2 sounds warm, dynamic and weighty. The main and the most impressive part of the system is the iUSB3.0 that improves the sound quality dramatically good. The iDAC2 has a brighter and less forgiving tone and the difference is significant when compared to the whole system.

Low Frequency:

Without the iUSB3.0 and the rest of the system, the iDAC2 has a bit of messy notes in low frequency region. The low frequency notes sound a bit close to listener and mid-bass is prominent. When the iUSB 3.0 is connected to the system, the low frequency becomes more powerful, tighter, less stressed and more distant. The difference in the location of the low frequency presentation creates more three-dimensional sound. Also, the mid-bass resolution is better with the iUSB 3.0.

Mid Frequency:

Overall mid-range location doesn't change much with the iUSB3.0, but vocals and instruments become cleaner in accordance with the difference in midbass presentation. Indeed, iUSB3.0 makes mid-bass presentation more controlled and less prominent. In addition, the midrange presentation is more refined and more effortless when the iUSB3.0 is connected. The system has a better note reproduction in terms of thickness and it is a bit more transparent when compared to iDAC2.

High Frequency:

The iDAC2 has some stress on treble notes as it is in the overall presentation when compared to the system. The iUSB3.0 makes the treble notes smoother, cleaner and more tolerant for bad recordings. The iDAC2 has more open tone, but the iUSB 3.0 makes the tone truer and the presentation becomes more natural and less fatiguing.

Soundstage and Separation:

The soundstage of the system is not very wide, but the depth is improved when we switch from the iDAC2 to the system. Also, the system betters the iDac2 in terms of background blackness and cleanliness. Overall imaging and instruments' positions are similar, but the system has more distant background location. Both iDAC2 and the whole system provide a good separation, but due to the more controlled mid-bass presentation, layering gets better and the separation level slightly increases in the system.

Pricing and Ordering Information:

IFI has many distributors all over the world; so it is very easy to reach to their products and order them.

Micro iUSB3.0: \$399 USD

Micro iDAC2: \$349 USD

iPurifier 2: \$109 USD

Gemini Cable: \$189 USD (0.7 Meter)

Mercury Cable: \$189 USD (0.7 Meter)

Total System Price: \$1235 USD (Based on the Amazon US)

Final Words:

The reviewed system is not cheap but the total price is justified when we consider its general sound quality and competitive in the industry. The stronger unit in the system is the iUSB3.0 that significantly improves the sound. Surely, the other units are also good, but iUSB3.0 takes the lead. However, the system is not powerful enough to drive full-sized cans. As mentioned above, we may need an external amplifier to listen to power hungry headphones such as HD800. All in all the whole system sounds slightly warm, natural, dynamic and very satisfying.

IFI Website: <http://ifi-audio.com>

I would like to thank Tyler Folsom from IFI America and Hakan Burkut from Turkish IFI distributor Dukkan Hifi for providing this review set.