

AVS Forum user “kolson” gives the upgraded Theta Digital Casablanca IV an **A+**



Although I'm mostly a lurker around here, I thought folks might be interested in my comments about DIRAC working on the CBIV. I've had the upgraded CBIV for several weeks now, but it was only last week that the DIRAC software finally was released. Most of the delay since December appears to have been caused by the need to debug DIRAC for the Casablanca. Even without DIRAC the upgrade is a very nice one--the improved internal bandwidth to the DACs improves the sound noticeably, if subtly (as in, mostly us audio nuts will be the ones who notice).

But the reason for the upgrade is DIRAC and I was finally able to run the calibration process on Saturday. I've been a happy camper since. Let's just say that the bandwidth difference may be subtle, but the room correction is NOT. I've got a difficult, though not impossible, room that has large openings into our kitchen and into a den, plus in-wall surround speakers that aren't ideal but are necessary given the shape and uses for the room. So I've always known that I could really use some room correction. I've tried a few Audyssey based systems and the improvements have been nice but didn't produce a sound as good as the uncorrected Casablanca.

With the room correction, the CBIV has taken a huge positive step. Looking at the basic graphs, the DIRAC has managed to cure a suck-out around 55Hz and a peak in the 150Hz range, along with quite a few other irregularities that had muddied up the sound. The "after" curve is almost perfectly flat, with the typical gentle slope down as the frequency climbs. The core quality of the Casablanca is still clearly there, but with far better clarity and detail. It is early, but so far I detect no losses from this process. With the room and speaker issues essentially fully cleaned up the quality of the presentation is dramatically improved. It's a little bit like going from an old 1 or 2 MP early digital point and shoot camera to a brand new Canon 5D with one of Canon's best lenses. The poorer camera gives a decent idea of the basic scene and is better than nothing, but the 5D gives a far more satisfying level of detail, color and context.

With room correction the CBIV, too, provides a vastly improved presentation, with instruments popping into place and much more easily followed. For example, we played around a little with the Dave Matthews Radio City Blu-Ray, which has a very nicely recorded Dolby True HD track. It has always sounded good on my system, but now it is at another level. The Matthews and Tim Reynolds guitars are right there in the room, exactly where they should be based on the video staging, and Matthews' voice is exactly where it should be to the right of center and above the guitar. It becomes easy to just sit back and enjoy--we meant to turn it on for a song or two, and didn't stop until it was done. I put on a few CD's (and SACDs) without video and the sensation was the same--the instruments were there with far more clarity and body than before and it was much easier to follow individual lines within a piece.

For this run I did the calibration using DIRAC's recommended curve and didn't try to adjust the recommended frequency response. I'm sure I will try some tinkering, as the software seems to provide a large measure of flexibility, but the basic recommended curve is very satisfying.

Overall, an A+