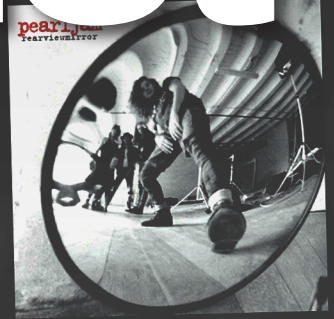


FEBRUARY 2017

stereo net



The Essential Pearl Jam
Pearl Jam

▶ Play Album

★★★★★

Joe Strummer once claimed that the Clash stardom in their hands, then they dropped it on the floor and broke it. Pearl Jam to

Tracks Album Info Credits

Disc 1



ELAC
DS-S101-G
DISCOVERY MUSIC SERVER

roon

ELAC

DS-S101-G

DISCOVERY MUSIC SERVER

Distributor: Synergy Audio Visual

\$1799 RRP

“ELAC have once again
stepped back into the spotlight”

I'd known of the ELAC for some years, but my first real experience of what the brand was capable of wasn't until I attended the 2014 High End Show in Munich, Germany.

Ironically, it was a demonstration but not in the ELAC room, but in the AudioQuest room where they were demonstrating the differences between stock cables and one of their mid-range lines at the time.

The system used for the demonstration comprised of a pair of ELAC floor standing speakers, together with NAD Master Series components. That room stood out to me as one of the best sounding (and better value) of the time I had spent there.

It's no surprise then, that when setting up my own dedicated listening room I opted for ELAC stand-mount speakers over a range of other contenders.

You may not know, but ELAC haven't always been exclusively a speaker manufacturer. Over the course of the past 90 years (yes, that is how long they have been around), they have a rich history building components and predominantly turntables. To celebrate their 90th Anniversary a brand-new turntable is due for release.

ELAC have once again stepped back into the spotlight, thanks to their recruitment of speaker designer and industry legend Andrew Jones in 2015. In just a short time, he's already put out the much talked about Debut, Uni-Fi and Adante Series' of speakers, under the ELAC banner.

Riding on the back of the buzz, ELAC have also launched a new range of components including the upcoming Element Integrated Amplifier and of course the subject of this review, the Discovery Music Server.

The Discovery DS-S101-G is quite a unique beast.

For those of you familiar with Roon, the Discovery comes equipped with a perpetual license (which stays with the product) for Roon Essentials, a functional yet slightly scaled back version of Roon.

To find out the key differences between Roon and Roon Essentials, I contacted Chris Walker, VP of Product Development of ELAC America. He offered the below explanation:

"The Discovery is not compatible with the full PC version of Roon. It ships with an embedded version of Roon Essentials and a Roon Essentials license (which does not expire). The license is tied to the device.

The Discovery is compatible with Roon Endpoints, AirPlay, and Discovery Endpoints.

The key differences between Roon Essentials and Roon are listed below.

· Discovery supports up to 30,000 Tracks while Roon can support many more based on the PC configuration. We chose 30,000 tracks as the upper limit to ensure a consistent user experience while still maintaining the ability to support future feature updates.

- DSD Support – The Discovery does not support DSD files. It does support WAV, AIFF, FLAC, ALAC, OGG, MP3, AAC up to 192kHz 24-Bit.*
- PC/Tablet End Point Support- The Discovery does not support using a Computer or tablet as an endpoint (Roon does support this).*

The Discovery offers a great experience for most people as well as offering a solution that does not require a computer or the setup and maintenance that a PC requires. There are power users that have very large libraries and specific needs where the Discovery is not the right solution."

Fortunately, even my own library combined those added via Tidal, I have around 19,000 tracks; well inside the limitations of the Roon Essentials license.

There are also ways to save space, like creating playlists of albums you like (for example 2016 Collection, 2017 Collection etc.) rather than favoriting individual albums you like on Tidal.

The Discovery runs as a Roon Core, thereby eliminating the need for a PC in your Roon based system. It should be pointed out though that if you already have a Roon Core within your ecosystem, you will need to disable it and let Discovery be the main core.

It can also run as three independent Roon zones via its two analog outputs as well as either of its digital outputs (toslink and coax are considered a single zone), granting it great flexibility on its own as a one box, multi-room solution. The only limitation being the inability to group the digital output with either of the analog outputs (which can be grouped together).

DISCOVERY SERIES™ DS-S101-G

Control App

The free Roon Essentials platform/license is a breath of fresh air. It stands apart from any other free control software thanks to its dynamic, user friendly and interactive presentation.

As it stands, it's compatible with your own music library, Tidal Music Streaming and interestingly, Dropbox.

The beauty is that unlike every other controller I have come across, Roon combines your own music library with Tidal to present them seamlessly as a complete library.

Each artist has an in-depth biography, which not only serves to give you information, but also acts as a direct link to other projects or artists they have worked with. As a result, you can lose a lot of time stumbling onto artists and projects you never knew existed, which is great, as we all love finding new music to enjoy.

One downside in comparison to the full Roon license is that it doesn't display the signal path, so for users like myself who have a DAC that doesn't show a sampling rate, you're kind of just left guessing what you're hearing.

Unboxing/Setup

The Discovery Music Server came with an Ethernet cable and wall-wart power supply. No audio cables were supplied.

Setup was painless: Connect to network via Ethernet (there's no provision for Wi-Fi), download the free Roon Essentials app (Android/iOS), open it and follow the prompts.

I had my own music library and Tidal account setup and running within minutes.

It does require a small amount of networking prowess in that you will need to know the actual network path of your music library to integrate it. An easy Google search will assist if you get stuck.

“dynamic, user friendly
and interactive presentation”



Listening

I connected the ELAC Discovery to my Vincent CD-S7 DAC via a Chord Anthem Tuned ARAY Coaxial cable, and began listening.

Having spent plenty of time listening to Roon via a MacBook Pro, connected with an AudioQuest Jitterbug and my WireWorld Platinum Starlight 7 USB Cable, it was an interesting contrast to instead listen via a product built exclusively for audio.

The performance improvement wasn't subtle. Even connected via the same DAC.

Playing back tracks I've listened to time and again suddenly offered up significantly greater depth and imaged better, all resulting in a more musically engaging performance.

For example, listening to **Broods'** stellar 2016 release 'Conscious', the standout track 'Heartlines' offered up a clean, clear sound with huge dynamics. My little ELAC BS 403 speakers were kicking out almost floor-standing speaker scale.

Like many, I've also created a 'Tidal Masters' playlist (consisting of MQA files).

I can't say I've been the greatest fan of **Coldplay** over the years, but I have had moments where I have found them really enjoyable. 'Fix You' is one of my favorite tracks of theirs and via the Discovery, it didn't disappoint.

The more I listen to this new format, the more I am appreciating lifelike dynamics and transparency, even without an MQA authorised DAC.

'Push' by **Matchbox Twenty** in the Masters format is another great example. It has never sounded so good and is a great demonstration of a well-produced modern day rock song.

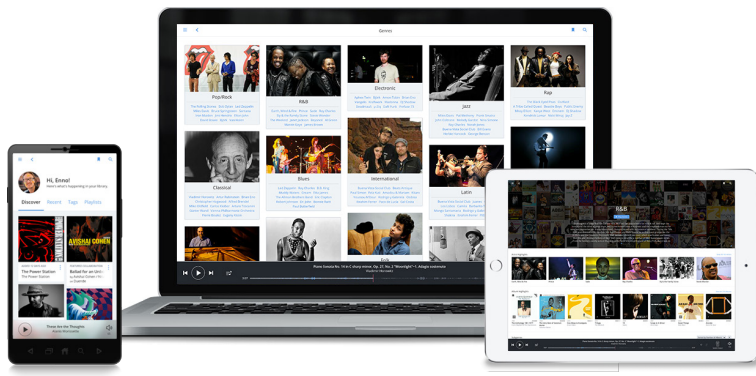
Death Cab for Cutie's 'I Will Follow You Into the Dark' can sound a little 'digital' at times, particularly around Ben Gibbard's vocal, but none of that was present, just an incredible intimacy as his melancholic tune permeated its way throughout my listening room.

Switching between the Digital Out and Analog Out provided me with some insight into just how good the Discovery's integrated DAC is. We'll go with "very".

Playing back **Noah Gundersen's** stellar ballad from the third volume of the Son's of Anarchy soundtrack, '**Day Is Gone**', I found only the smallest difference between running direct via analog and switching to digital via my CD-S7DAC. I would say that the latter had only a hair more depth and space, but it was close, scary close.

I dare say, many could comfortably situate the Discovery as a primary source without the need for a separate DAC.





“The music player for music lovers”

Roon Ready

For the duration of this review, I had been patiently waiting for Bluesound to launch their much-anticipated firmware update which would bring Roon integration.

Of interest to me, is if Bluesound products would be supported by the Roon Essentials software. The good news is that they do.

You could buy an ELAC Discovery and use the swish Essentials control app to operate and group any Bluesound (or other compatible products) zones on the same network.

The bad news comes with grouping however. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to group my Node2 with the ELAC Discovery for simultaneous playback. Upon clicking the little 'i' icon, it clarified that RoonReady devices could only group with other RoonReady devices and not with the Discovery itself.

For example, if you had Bluesound and Sonore products on your network, they could be grouped together. However, the Discovery server would always function as a separate, independent zone.

This isn't something that affected me as I rarely have both my systems running simultaneously, but for those looking to build an entire multi-room system around the Discovery, they should be aware of this limitation.





SPECIFICATIONS

CONNECTIONS

Analog outputs (independent zones)
/ 2

Coaxial output (independent zone)
/ 1 (192kHz 24-Bit Max)

Optical output
/ 1 (96kHz 24-Bit Max)

USB port (mass storage class)
/ 1 USB 2.0

Ethernet port
/ 1 Gigabit Ethernet

END POINT SUPPORT

Discovery

AirPlay

Roon End Point

CONTROL & USER INTERFACE

ROON Essentials Control app

/ For iOS (64-bit Devices), Android (4.4 and higher), Windows (7, 8, and 10) and Apple OSX (10.8 and higher)

FORMAT SUPPORT

Supported Audio Formats

/ WAV, AIFF, FLAC, ALAC, OGG, MP3, AAC

192kHz 24-Bit Audio Formats

/ WAV, AIFF, FLAC, ALAC

INTEGRATED STREAMING SERVICES: Tidal

/ Track Limit: 30,000 Tracks (Combination of Personal and Tidal Content) * Firmware Update Coming Soon

PLAYBACK MODES

/ Gapless, Crossfade, Shuffle, and Repeat

MULTI-ROOM SUPPORT

Type

/ Wired and Wireless

Synchronized Audio

/ Yes (Analog 1 & 2 can be grouped together and synchronized) (Wireless End-Points can be grouped together and synchronized as well). Please note that since the digital outputs always output the native sampling rate and bit depth it cannot be synchronized with the analog outputs.

POWER SUPPLY & CONSUMPTION

Power Supply

/ 12VDC 2A

Power Consumption Normal Operation

/ 4.8 Watts

DIMENSIONS & WEIGHT

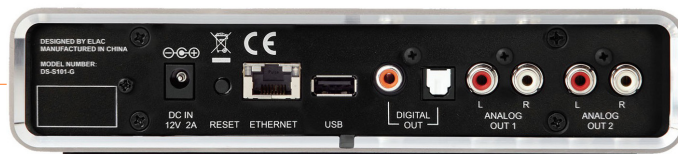
Dimensions (WxHxD)

/ 8-1/4" x 1-7/8" x 4-5/16

Weight

/ 2lbs

NOTE: The Discovery can be controlled using the free Roon Essentials app for Windows, OS X, iOS, and Android.



Conclusion

With the Discovery DS-S101-G, ELAC have provided us with a cost effective yet high performance music server.

It's a Roon Core, and the Roon Essentials controller offers all but the most hardcore of users all they would need to enjoy their digital libraries, without Roon's typical annual or lifetime license fees.

It has been designed exclusively for audio at a price that is around what you would pay for a well spec'd Mac Mini; something I had been considering myself actually.

ELAC may have just made that decision much easier.

The Discovery is a superbly thought out product, delivering exceptionally good sound for the dollars, and unequivocally recommended.

WORDS/IMAGES: Tarkan Ceviker