

TONEAudio

Music.Gear.Style.

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The AudioQuest JitterBug Small, Awesome, (it's 50 bucks and you want it!)



The Art of Zen:
Decware's Mystery Amplifier

Ending the Argument:
Graditech's Lumi 3 Speaker Cables

Ultimate Compact:
iFi Retro 50

Powerful Push:
Massive amplifiers from Pass and BAT

Coollest Record Cart Ever:
The Wax Rax RC-2

A first look at the Apple watch,
soapy goodness from Lush,
Flagstone outdoor speakers and more!

SPRING AWAKENING:
Reviews of New Albums From
My Morning Jacket, METZ,
Waxahatchee, Torres, Django
Django, Caexico, Buena Vista
Social Club, Joe Lovano, and
Many More

**A Conversation With
Breakout Singer-Songwriter
Courtney Barnett**

BEER SNOB RETURNS!

JITTER BE GONE!

By Jeff Dorgay

Priceless little is known about the latest audio insect, I mean gadget. AudioQuest set the digital world on its ear two years ago with their DragonFly miniature DAC and headphone amplifier bundled into a package barely bigger than a USB stick. It offered incredible performance for the meager price asked and set a new measuring stick for budget DACs.

Two years later they've done it again, but this time in a slightly different manner. Their latest creation is the JitterBug, a digital filter for your USB bus. As AQ's Steve Silberman puts it, "There's so much noise and parasitic resonance coming from a computer and USB bus we felt there was a real opportunity to clean things up a bit." The JitterBug takes care of noise flowing from both the power and data portions of the USB interface, and as you might suspect, this might vary from setup to setup, because every manufacturer treats this part of the digital equation differently.





AQ suggests that incremental results can be achieved by using two JitterBugs – on your computer and/or DAC – but in parallel, not series. In some cases they claim excellent results just using it as a noise snubber on unused inputs.

Your results may vary

First, don't expect this to turn a \$400 DAC into a dCS Vivaldi. It won't, and that's not a fair thing to expect out of a \$50 tweak. However, using the JitterBug with everything from my dCS DAC down to the \$500 Arcam R-DAC we reviewed a few issues ago, I did notice a perceptible difference on every system I connected it to using a laptop or phone as a source. Much like the results you get when compressing photos, it's kind of a garbage in, garbage out kind of thing. The better the source and DAC, the less effect the JitterBug made. But for \$50, I still say buy a couple of 'em, just to experiment with.

Per Silberman's initial email, I tried the JitterBug as a noise snubber on my NAS, and it did have enough of a positive effect to happily leave one in place. Perhaps the biggest improvement was in the car, going from iPhone to the audio system in my BMW Z4, which has a particularly dreadful audio system. The JitterBug's presence in the car cleans up the presentation dramatically, getting rid of a lot of the brittleness and digital artifacts that the system has. A short road trip with a couple of unsuspecting non-audiophiles got the same response: "What does that black thing do? The music sounds a lot more relaxed." Exactly.

Taking the JitterBug for a spin in a new Jaguar with a Meridian system and Porsche 911 with a Burmester system yielded equally eye-opening results. The Burmester system, with its prodigious power, becomes another level of magnitude cleaner, revealing considerably more music than without the JitterBug in the system. If you are a Porsche owner, this is the best \$50 tweak you will ever make to your car. (Maybe the only \$50 tweak you can make to a current model Porsche?)

It's all good

Even in the context of a very high-end system, the JitterBug works to great effect when using a laptop as a source, as many of us are starting to do. PC or Mac, good DAC or great DAC, the benefit is there. Minimizing noise and jitter on the USB bus results in a cleaner, clearer presentation. The stereo image opens up and the high frequencies are rendered in a much more analog-like way.

Acoustic music and vocals make the comparison a lot easier. The sound

quality of cymbals, violin and piano is the most profound example of the JitterBug in action. Vocals become more palpable and realistic, with much more body and dimension. It's not so much like cleaning a dirty window, but giving one more round of cleanup to a window that still has some streaks after the first round. Every time I thought the JitterBug wasn't contributing to the sound of my system, it only took removing it for about 30 seconds for the harshness to return.

Whether in the house or on the go, I'll bet you fifty bucks your system will benefit from a JitterBug, no matter where you decide to install one. As AudioQuest did not have measurements to share with us yet, I'll be curious to see what John Atkinson at *Stereophile* has to say about the JitterBug once he's put it on the test bench. This has to be the coolest accessory I've ever used. Hell, go buy a handful of 'em, and give them to your audiophile buddies when they stop by for trick-or-treat this year. Highly recommended. ●

