

# Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems \$50,000 Momentum Lifestyle Integrated Amplifier With DAC And Audio Streaming Only for music lovers, because that is the MLife's raison d'être – to enable the listener to revel in one's love of music. Review By Tom Lyle

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## World Premiere Review!

Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems \$50,000 Momentum Lifestyle Integrated Amplifier w/DAC & Audio Streaming Only for music lovers, because that is the MLife's *raison d'être* – to enable the listener to revel in one's love of music.

[Review By Tom Lyle](#)

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Many audiophiles are familiar with the name Dan D'Agostino, by virtue of him being the founder, CEO, and chief engineer at Krell which he founded in 1980. The products made by Krell, which included everything from power amplifiers to SACD players and speakers, were some of the best high-end components available. In 2009 he was ousted by investors that he himself invited into the company because they thought the

company should change direction. Almost immediately after leaving Krell he formed Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems.

On a personal note, when I first became interested in audio in the 1970s the common wisdom at that time, and for quite a while after that, was that all power amplifiers that measure the same, sound the same. This was especially true in regards to an amplifier's power rating. In late 1970s a local dealer lent me a Krell power amplifier. When I auditioned it in my humble system it was almost instantly apparent that no, all power amplifiers do *not* sound the same. In fact, when I heard that Krell amplifier in my system I had a sort of "audio epiphany" – because the Krell sounded so much better than my reference amplifier even though it put out the same 250 Watts per channel @ 8 Ohms. I purchased that Krell power amp, and it remained in my system for quite some time. So much for the theory that all amps sound the same! But back to Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems, and the subject of this review, the Dan D'Agostino Momentum Lifestyle integrated amplifier.

## Components

Dan D'Agostino has really hit the ball out of the park with the line of components that bear his name. Not only does each product epitomize the look of a cost-no-object component, but all the Dan D'Agostino power amps, preamps, and monoblocks happen to be drop-dead gorgeous. Many attributes can take the blame for this, but two that are undeniable are the astounding level of fit and finish of its machined metal cabinetwork, and the glowing green central volume control which was inspired by Breuget watches that adorn the front panel of Dan D'Agostino's amps and power amps. The component under review is the Momentum Lifestyle integrated amplifier, which as you will see, is a perfect name for this component. According to D'Agostino it is "the ultimate integrated amplifier, networked".



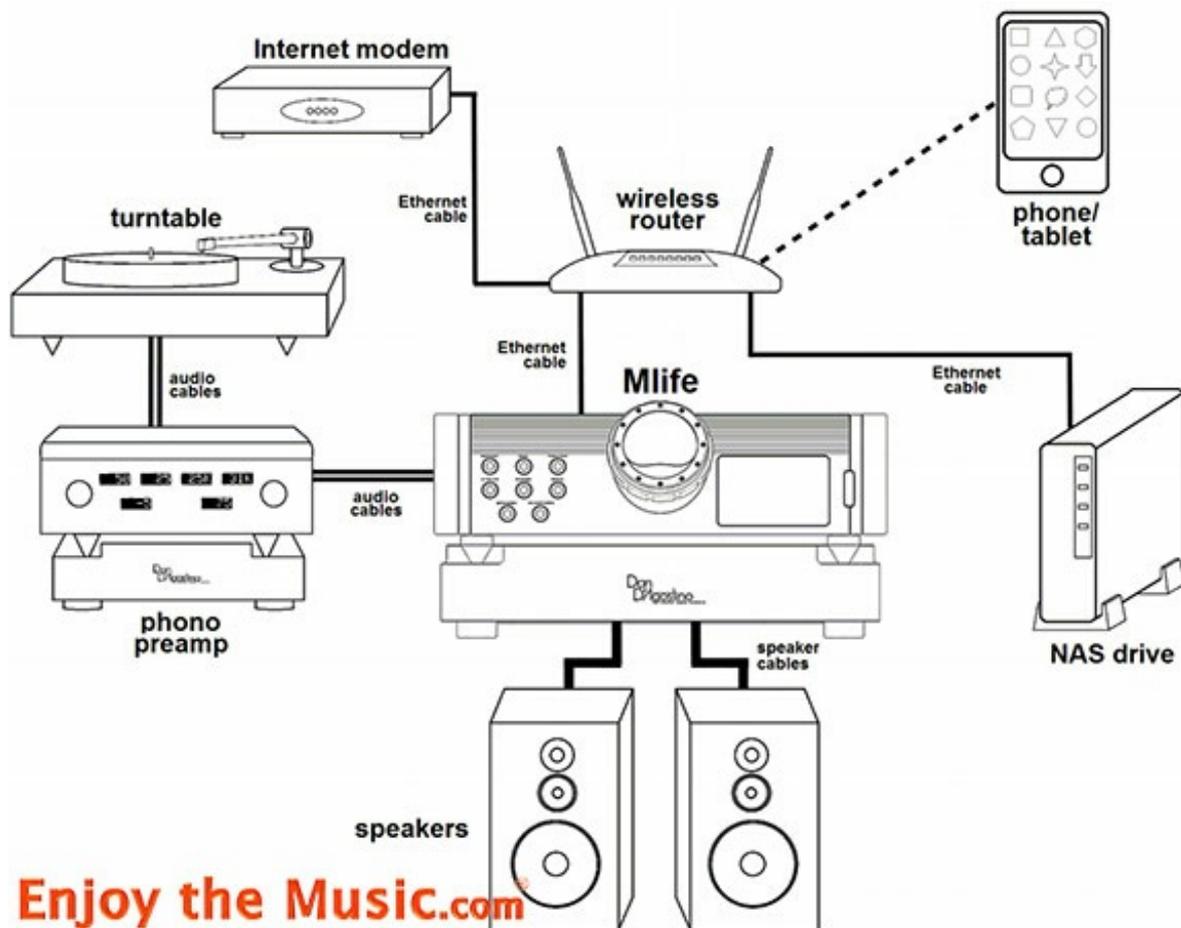
The MLife (short for Momentum Lifestyle) is a 200 Watt per channel @ 8 Ohms (800W @ 2 Ohms) integrated amplifier that, per D'Agostino, uses the identical amplifier and preamplifier circuits those in the Momentum series. The difference is that the MLife includes a 24-bit/192kHz digital-to-analog converter (DAC) that is combined with top-notch clocking to minimize digital distorting jitter, which they specifically included so its internal DAC can convert DSD digital signals with the highest resolution and sound quality. Added to this is the "networked" portion of this "ultimate" integrated amplifier, in that the MLife can play files wirelessly via an Ethernet connection on its rear panel or with Airplay from an iOS device. On the front panel of the MLife is a rather large LCD display, which is indispensable when playing files that are sourced wirelessly either through this Ethernet connection, or wirelessly through one's iPhone or iPad via AirPlay. After downloading D'Agostino's iOS app to a device, it acts as the MLife's remote, controlling all the functions of the MLife, while the metadata appears on the LCD screen on the front panel.

## The Room

The elephant in the room is that the Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Lifestyle integrated amplifier costs \$50,000. Yet if one considers that the MLife uses the same circuitry as used in Dan D'Agostino's Momentum power amplifier, the same circuitry as in their Momentum preamplifier, plus includes an internal DAC and has an Ethernet and Airplay connectivity to wirelessly play one's music files that are stored on a music server, I feel comfortable saying that the Dan D'Agostino is a very intelligent and economical alternative to purchasing all the Dan D'Agostino components separately. Of course, the MLife includes digital functionality that is available nowhere else. So, it makes perfect sense that Dan D'Agostino has named this integrated amplifier the Momentum Lifestyle, since it will enable one to enjoy the benefits of the Momentum separates, along with the convenience of having the DAC and wireless functions all in one package.

Some purists might argue that if purchased separately each component that is included in an integrated amp would include its own power supply, yet this claim is made much less convincing when one notices the MLife's huge power supply which comprises the lower third of the MLife – which is not only physically separated from the rest of the component but is ingeniously crafted to support the main chassis' four solid cast-aluminum conical footers that fit into dimples in the four top corners of the power supply. The whole shebang weighs a very substantial 120 pounds, which made connecting the two beasts, the power supply and the main chassis, to form the single MLife component on my equipment rack a requisite two-man job.

So me and the very gracious Bill McKiegan, President of sales for Dan D'Agostino, gently hauled the MLife out of its crate and placed it where it was obviously going to stay for quite some time. I might be making this a little more dramatic than it is because it is a relatively simple set-up procedure, and proved to me that despite its heft the MLife isn't at all difficult to assemble and as you will read certainly not difficult to operate. Plus, I assume that for most Dan D'Agostino MLife owners the delivery, unpacking and initial set up will be provided by the dealer.



Still, after the two chassis are connected, if the user is tasked with connecting the speaker cable to the MLife's very substantial binding posts and connecting the sources to the inputs on the components rear panel, it is certainly an simple procedure, and no different than connecting any other modern component. After that, one can start using the MLife almost immediately. But first, one must download the iOS app, which

will probably take about thirty seconds, and then go to its settings section to let the MLife know your network's password. Anyone, audiophile or non-audiophile, who has set up a wireless device will find this chore a very familiar one. Along with all the functions that are on the front panel of the MLife, the app also has controls for balance, phase, etc. The volume control on the app is a thumbnail of the MLife's front panel volume control, as one must move the arm on the meter pictured in the icon. Otherwise, it works as any other remote, except this one is an app.

### Sound

I would have been very surprised if the Dan D'Agostino MLife's sound quality wasn't first-rate. But wow, first-rate is one thing, but here I was, listening to an integrated amplifier that brought into my listening room a level of sound quality that I previously have heard only from components that were very close to state-of-the-art. But never from an integrated amplifier. It's safe to say that unless one is accustomed to very, very high quality high-end electronics in one's own listening room there will be no other audio components to compare to the sound of the Momentum Lifestyle. So, here was the MLife playing familiar tunes through my Sound Lab Dynastat electrostatic speakers, augmented by a Velodyne 15" subwoofer, and all I could do was bask in its sound.

Familiar favorites such as my Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs LP of David Bowie's *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* sounded much different than I was accustomed. I've heard this album thousands of times, so I'm familiar with every lyric, every note, every post-production effect...everything. At least I thought I was familiar with this album. The Dan D'Agostino MLife did more than a few things to inform me that I was now hearing this LP as it was truly meant to be heard. Each instrument and every voice, and every nuance of every vocal inflection and every production decision were now laid out before me to enjoy. Let me make this perfectly clear, though – the MLife was not an overly detailed sonic microscope that ruined the recordings by allowing me to peek behind the curtain, as it were.



What it did, instead, was bring me closer to the source of the recording, and at the same time overwhelm me

with the feeling as though I was present for the recording of this album. Never have I heard a component that let me hear the individual tracks that made up a multi-track recording so brilliantly that I could hear the details captured on each track, and at the same time as that how these tracks were artistically combined. So now, I could clearly hear the acoustical characteristics of the isolation booth in which David Bowie sang his lyrics, and how the track that held these vocals was assembled into the whole of the album.

And this was true with every other track that was captured on tape. I could focus on the drums and hear how the over-head microphones contributed to the sound of the drum kit, and how this sound was balanced with the individual microphones that were placed close to each drum. Also, how these drum microphones were mixed with the over-head microphones and then spread across the soundstage as only a seasoned engineer such as Ken Scott could. Of course, it helped that Ken Scott used the best studios in town, Trident and Abbey Road for this task. As I sat in my bargain basement but very comfortable padded listening seat I entered the world of David Bowie circa 1972, mesmerized by Bowie and his band's genius. I was held spellbound hearing this combination of poetry and compositional skill at the height in this stage of David Bowie's career, as if I was seeing their music sonically unfold in front of me for the first time. On a record that I've heard thousands of times.

The above description might lean a bit towards the esoteric. But to be clear, the Dan D'Agostino MLife's sound was quite amazing in every audiophile category and all descriptive terms that audiophiles love to use. One of the first traits I was drawn to was its bass prowess, which for me was quite an experience, mostly because I didn't think my speaker system was capable of reproducing this level of low-end quality. Yes, of course the MLife can reproduce bass down to the nether-regions when called for. But it's the *quality* of the bass where the MLife shines. The transient response of the MLife's bass, its "tightness" if I may call it that, is in a word, amazing. This is where I could hear in my mind's ear a sonic border drawn around the instrument that is producing this bass.

Whether it is a bass guitar, a kick drum, whatever the source, the bass was not only extremely pitch specific, but did not untowardly bleed into the rest of the lower portions of the soundstage. The same could be said for the MLife's mids and treble. I will spare you. Waxing poetic about midrange purity and treble extension is not my aim here. It is to insist that the MLife has nearly perfected the art of audiophile sound reproduction in the home. I would spend some time discussing the solid-state innards of the MLife, but this would be wasted space, as the MLife does not have a "solid-state sound" nor did Dan D'Agostino attempt to voice the MLife anywhere towards having a "tube sound". It simply sounds like a great audio component. And thus, sounds coming out of its outputs sound like music. Period.



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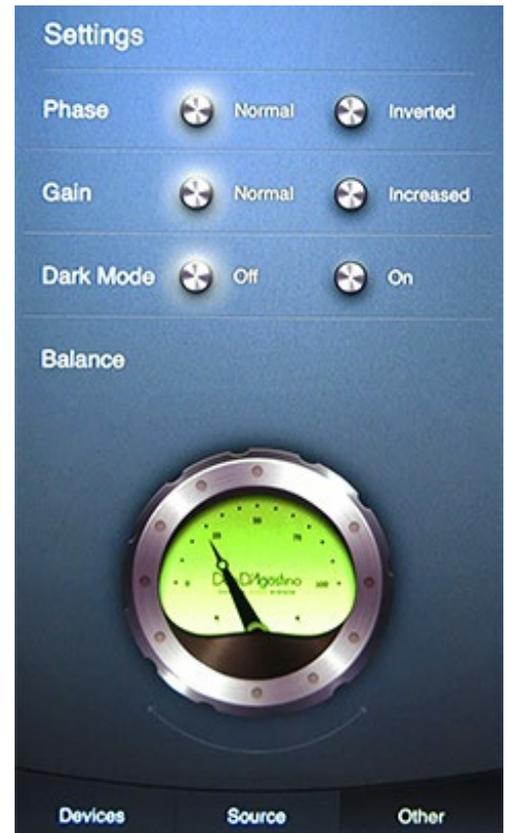
## Time

And what better time than now to discuss the internal digital-to-analog converter? It wasn't only when using this fine DAC that the rock-solid imaging and soundstaging prowess of the MLife became evident to me, but there wasn't any loss of these traits when switching from my analog source to the internal DAC of the MLife, that's for sure. These traits became improved. Although I must admit there wasn't as much of the transient attack wallop and the images in the huge soundstage weren't as clearly defining when playing LPs. My analog front-end consisting of a Basis Debut turntable, Tri-Planar tonearm, a Pass Labs phono preamp and phono cartridges such as the Gold Note Tuscany and Van den Hul Crimson Stradivarius is no slouch. But when reading DSD files fed from my music server the MLife's DAC gave this analog front-end a run for its money. And the DAC I usually use, the AURALiC VEGA might be in the "affordable" category to some, but it is no slouch either, although it can in no way compete with my analog set-up. Let me remind you, too, that the MLife was decoding these DSD files *wirelessly*. My Verizon-Fios home network is not hot-wired either, it is an off-the-shelf unit that Verizon installed. Nor do I use any of those Wi-Fi range extender/boosters sold on Amazon or Best Buy.

Playing files that were sourced from my music server, and then read by the MLife wirelessly via its Ethernet connection were not only comparable to files being read with a USB connection to my external DAC and then fed to the MLife via an interconnect, they sounded better. Better, in addition to other characteristics, in that the dynamic distance between instruments, groups of instruments, vocals, and other sounds was improved. There is measurable distance, at least measurable with my ears, between two or more sounds playing at the same volume simultaneously. This is very important when listening to orchestral music where there might be one hundred musicians on the stage being recorded, and many of them are playing at the same volume. When one or a group of these instruments plays just a bit louder than the others, how much sonic distance is placed between that instruments or group of instruments? Through the MLife, quite a bit. Even when these instruments or groups of instruments are playing at the same volume, how much distance is placed between them? Again, through the MLife, quite a bit. When listening to an orchestra live, I might be able to pick out an instrument or group of instruments, then my mind might wander – towards the conductor, or towards the sound of the entire ensemble playing in unison.

My concentration changes focus throughout the piece, in sort of a meditative way as it ebbs and flows throughout the piece. I found this happening when listening to the MLife play my favorite power orchestral pieces. Regardless of how boisterous the music might become, my focus changes throughout the piece, focusing on different instruments, different sections of the orchestra, and to its soloists. As it does in real life. The dynamic distance the MLife can create with this large group of instrument is second to none in my experience, regardless of whether I'm listening to the internal DAC fed by the Ethernet connection or a source connected through an interconnect, digital or analog. The internal DAC of the MLife was the best at conveying the characteristics inherent to the MLife itself. And sounded the best out of all the sources. Yes, there will always be something special about playing LPs, and the MLife did not diminish this pleasure. But to have digital playback sound as good as the MLife could was new to me. And quite a pleasure.

One of the pleasures of a high-end system is being to step back in time, and thus come as close as humanly possible to what bewildered audiences heard in the very early 19<sup>th</sup> Century when Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup> *Symphony*, or *Eroica*, was premiered. We're hearing modern instruments, of course, but that's not my point. At the time of its premier it was thought as too "structurally rigorous", and at nearly 45 minutes, much too long. It was quite a ground-breaking piece of music. Now it is regarded as one of his most celebrated works, and for good reason. It probably surprises no one that my favorite movement is the Adagio, the second movement, which Beethoven titled "Marcia funebre", or "Funeral March". The DSD file of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, conducted by: Kurt Masur Symphony is not only well read, it is a great recording. Via the MLife's internal DAC it is amazing to hear how it enables the sections of the orchestra to occupy distinct areas within the huge soundstage, projecting itself between, behind and to the sides of the speakers, making the speakers very difficult to locate when closing my eyes.





I've written more than once about how my Sound Lab DynaStat speakers do not have the greatest soundstage in the world. Yet given the right amplifier to power them the speakers come alive, and project quite an admirable soundstage, especially in their ability to portray depth perception. When this file of Beethoven's *3rd* is played wirelessly through the DAC of the MLife the sense of an orchestra sonically replicated in miniature was wonderful. During the second movement, I became lost in the music, reveling in not only the realism of the individual instruments that were laid out before me, but each instrument and section of the orchestra becoming reality in miniature. The oboe solo during the first half of this movement sounded scary real, floating between the two speakers, a little closer to the right, above and behind the cellos and violas. Beautiful! This selection was proof enough the Dan D'Agostino is a marvelous piece of high-end equipment, not only for the way it can render the orchestra in such a fantastic manner through my speakers, but all the characteristics that make this happen. And what's even nicer, this was true regardless of the genre of music I played through it throughout its rather long audition period. The MLife is a powerful tool in enjoying music to the *Nth* degree.

### Lifestyle

The moniker of this component, the Dan D'Agostino Master Systems Momentum Lifestyle integrated amplifier is certainly a mouthful, isn't it? I have no problem with it, except perhaps the "Lifestyle" portion of it, which might infer to some that this product was made to appeal to non-audiophiles who simply want the best integrated amplifier/wireless DAC they can buy, and not have to mess with it other than connecting a pair of speakers, and perhaps a younger family member's turntable set-up. Yes, Dan D'Agostino is correct in thinking that this is a great way to market a fantastic sounding and great looking piece of equipment not only to audiophiles, but anyone who wants the best sound, or simply, the best. But as an audiophile I found the Dan D'Agostino's Momentum Lifestyle integrated amp to be not only a great "lifestyle" product, but a great audiophile product.

I would have no qualms having this component as a permanent reference component in my system. The "downside" would be that I could no longer audition preamplifiers or amplifier separates as the MLife does not have a preamp-output on its real panel. I would gladly give this up for the pleasure of hearing one of the best audio components I've ever had in my home. I have no reservations recommending the Dan D'Agostino Master Systems Momentum Lifestyle Integrated amp to anyone who can afford it, audiophile or non-audiophile. The only requirement is that this person be a music lover, because that is the MLife's *raison d'être* – to enable the listener to revel in one's love of music.

Tonality	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Attack	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Decay	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Inner Resolution	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Soundscape Width Front	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Soundscape Width Rear	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Soundscape Depth Behind Speakers	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Soundscape Extension Into Room	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Imaging	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵
Fit And Finish	🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵



Self Noise	
Value For The Money	

### Specifications

Type: Integrated stereo amplifier with DAC and audio streaming

Power Output: 200 Watts per channel @ 8 Ohms

400 Watts per channel @ 4 Ohms

800 Watts per channel @ 2 Ohms

Frequency Response: 0.1 Hz to 1 MHz (-1dB)

Distortion: <0.1%, 20 Hz to 20 kHz

SignalToNoise Ratio: 95dB, unweighted

Supported Digital Formats

Lossless: DSD, WAV, FLAC, AIFF and PCM up to 24/192 resolution

Lossy: AAC, MP3, Ogg Vorbis and WMA

### Company Information

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