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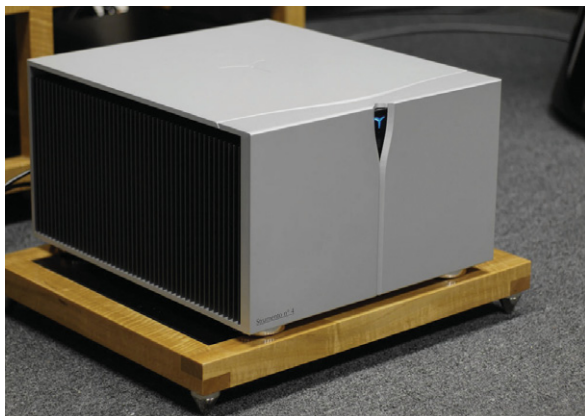
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CANADA HiFi

august/september 2013

forward >>>

I'd like to start this issue with the warmest welcome to George de Sa in his new role as the Director of Marketing/Senior Editor. George has demonstrated his passion and dedication for all things audio and video, contributing regularly to the CANADA HiFi magazine over the last couple of years. During his time with us, he has provided great insight about various music components through reviews and shared his knowledge in a wealth of feature articles, which have been enjoyed by tens of thousands of readers. Since George began contributing to CANADA HiFi, he expressed a higher level of interest in this publication in areas other than just writing and quickly showed that he was the ideal candidate for the new role. George and I have already begun developing a new path for CANADA HiFi's continued growth and have slowly begun implementing some of the changes and enhancements. I look forward to working closely with George and making CANADA HiFi the very best that it can be for the benefit of all of our readers as well as the audio video industry as a whole. George will continue to contribute to this magazine and take over the tasks that Neil Underwood has assisted me with over the last few years, in addition to tackling a number of new initiatives. I'm very grateful for Neil's assistance and input over the years, and I'm certain we'll see more articles from him in the near future.

In this issue, Malcolm Gomes explains how room acoustics can be detrimental to audio and offers guidance on how to improve them in your listening room, whether it's a 2-channel music system or a home theatre. George on the other hand, takes on the subject of "Bookshelf or Floorstanding Speakers – Which Should You Choose?" – a topic contemplated by most audio video enthusiasts.

We had so much content generated for this issue that we decided to leave out the 'Product News' section. Instead you'll find a number of very hot product reviews in these pages. Hope you enjoy your read and the rest of the summer!

Suave Kajko
Publisher / Editor in Chief

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Improving Acoustics In Your Listening Room

Tips on Identifying and Resolving Acoustic Problems

Malcolm J. Gomes

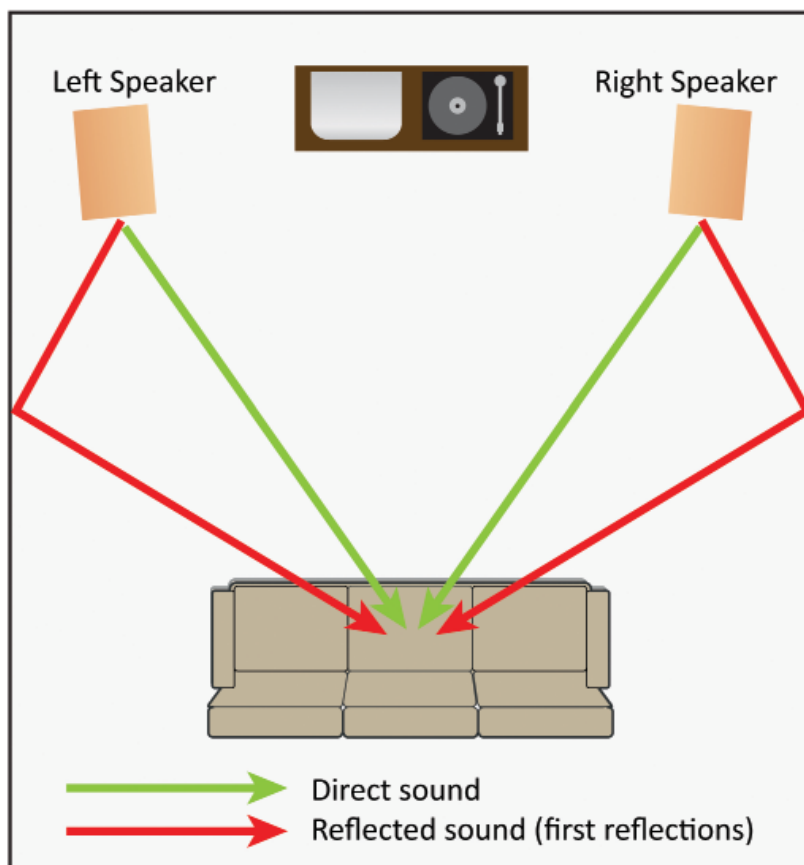
I find it astounding that so many music buffs do not realize the extent of the role that the listening room plays in modifying the sound from the time it leaves the speakers to the time it reaches our ears. It would not be an overstatement to say that your listening room is one of the most important components of your audio system.

It is therefore a pity that so many passionate music fans spend a big chunk of their hard earned money on high-end audio gear and on periodically upgrading components and still, frustratingly, do not obtain the sound quality they seek only because the less than ideal acoustics of their listening room keep defeating all their attempts to optimize the performance potential of their audio system.

Look at it this way; most of the sound generated by our speakers, bounces off our listening room walls, floor and ceiling as well as the furniture and fixtures in it, before it reaches our ears. When this happens, depending on the nature of the surface, the sound is subjected to varying degrees of absorption, reflection and diffusion. This means that you can have a truly splendid audio system, which achieves just a fraction of its true potential because of less than ideal room acoustics.

Listening rooms can vary from almost totally dead because of too much of absorption, to too bright because of an abundance of reflective surfaces, and everything in between. The size, shape and dimensions of the listening room also play a significant part in influencing the

Direct sound versus reflected sound



sound that we hear. A room that is perfectly square can be a nightmare because of its potential to generate standing waves, which are the nemesis of good acoustics. Ceilings that are too high can rob you of deep and tuneful bass. Too many glass dominated windows and doors and a hardwood, laminated or ceramic tile floor can result in too much of reflected sound and artificial brightness.

Not all music listeners can afford to have a dedicated listening room and so have to make do with having to use their living room, family room or den double up as the listening room. This is where the spouse acceptance factor kicks in with a vengeance because the furnishings in the room that make it aestheti-

cally pleasing may not always make for good room acoustical properties and the spouse will usually not hear of removing or moving anything just to get better sound quality.

Another disadvantage of not having a dedicated listening room is that it restricts speaker placement. Most speakers sound best and produce the deepest soundstage when they are placed five to seven feet from the back wall and the side-walls, which is not always possible in a living room or family room setting. Another hurdle is the wiring, especially speaker cables, which may look unsightly and could also be a tripping hazard.

One of my audiophile friends was so frustrated with the restrictions on tweaking his living room for bet-

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ter acoustics, he actually converted his double garage into a dedicated listening room and took a no holds barred approach to adopting the best acoustical tweaks that his budget would allow and to heck with the aesthetics. He even reconciled to leaving his beloved Porsche 911 exposed to the elements, treating it as a reasonable trade-off to optimize the potential of his audio system.

In reality, some effective tweaks that you could use to improve the acoustics of your listening room cost little to nothing. Ironically, some very expensive devices that claim to make a huge difference to the acoustics of your listening room are little more than snake oil, peddled by unscrupulous vendors preying on the gullible.

Before we get into cost effective ways to improve the acoustics of your listening room, it would help to understand the nature of sound waves. Sound travels at around 345 meters per second so in a typical listening room sound directly from the speakers should reach the listener's ears in around 0.01 to 0.2 seconds. This is followed by a series of sound waves reflected off the walls, ceiling, floors, furniture and fixtures of the listening room which reach the listener's ears around 50 to 80 milliseconds later and at a lower amplitude. All these reflected sound waves merge into reverberant sound, which builds up till it reaches an equilibrium level and when intercepted by our eardrums, is detected as distortion. If there is too much of reverberant sound we detect it as a loss of clarity. Air in the listening room also absorbs some of the high frequency sound waves and the degree of absorption varies with the frequency, the humidity level and the air temperature.

The key to attaining good room acoustics is to achieve the right balance between short reverberation time so that clarity is not compromised and long reverberation time to maintain the 'liveness' of the room. It should also minimize echoes and background noise. This will result

in totally immersing the listener in the music while still allowing easy localization of the sound source. This should contribute to a well-defined, solid and stable sonic image.

One of the simple and affordable ways to get an immediate improvement in sound quality is to reduce or eliminate primary (or early) reflections. These are the sound waves generated by your speakers that bounce off your sidewalls, floor and ceiling before reaching your ears.

Locating the sources of these primary reflections is quick, easy, painless and best of all, free. All you need is a mirror of around 12" X 12" and a friend. You sit in your listening spot while your friend slides the mirror along each of the sidewalls, and the back wall - at the height of the tweeter. When you can see the tweeter in the mirror, your friend marks the spot with a post it note. If your listening room is carpeted you need not bother, but if it is hardwood, laminate, ceramic tile or other reflecting surfaces then repeat the exercise with the floor as well.

You now need to place absorptive material at the marked spots. The material on the walls and ceiling should be around 18 inches square. On the side walls it should be placed so that the top of the panel is at or higher than the height of your speakers to be effective. A good option is to use 2-inch fiberglass panels covered by fabric. If that does not pass the wife acceptance factor test then you could use decorative wall hanging and floor rugs, which may not be as effective as fiberglass but will make a positive difference. Wool carpets tend to do a better job at absorbing sound waves than synthetic carpets. Another simple and affordable tweak is to place a relatively thick curtain with a lot of gathers behind the speakers on the back wall. You can use matching curtains or fabric covered blinds to cover any glass windows and doors of the room as well. Blinds have the added advantage of allowing you to adjust the amount of absorption by manipulating the angle of the blind

slats. If you would rather purchase acoustic panels for your room, there are numerous specialist companies in the market that will be glad to sell you acoustic panels of various designs and sizes.

Diffusion is your strong ally when improving room acoustics because it scatters the sound waves that it encounters. The advantage here is that since the sound waves are scattered rather than absorbed, the diffused waves do not rob the room of its 'live' nature the way overdone absorption treatments will do. Some of the best live performance venues in the world use diffusion very effectively. In fact many concert halls of the last century have incredible acoustics because of all the ornate work on their walls, which act as great diffusers. You can benefit from diffusion by placing items like bookshelves fully stacked with different sized books around the room. I have a friend who has a collection of over 9,000 vinyl records and since almost every inch of the side and back walls of his listening room are covered with shelves stacked with these albums, he has all the diffusion he requires to achieve excellent room acoustics. To achieve diffusion, you need to present the sound waves reaching the back wall with an uneven surface that is not totally absorbent. A book rack or shelving containing vinyl records or other items with uneven surfaces will serve quite nicely. You can also use dedicated diffusion panels, available from various manufacturers, which can be hung on the back wall. Some of these diffusion panels are available in attractive shapes, sizes and colours that enhance the aesthetics of the room.

As a general rule, the right amount of absorption on the side and front walls, as well as diffusion on the back wall of your listening room should work well.

Another ugly dragon to slay when improving room acoustics are standing waves, which usually occur at frequencies below 300Hz. These are caused by some sound

waves colliding in the room resulting in some frequencies being reinforcement and others cancelled out. This results in hot and cold spots in your listening room. If you walk along the walls of your listening room while bass heavy music is playing, you can easily detect spots where the bass is artificially strong and other spots where the bass is thin. Typically, the corners of your listening room are hot in this regard. These are often referred to as room resonance modes. A cost effective way to tame the hot spots is to install bass traps in the corners of your listening room. These come in various degrees of effectiveness so ideally you should buy them from dealers who allow you to try them out before you finalize your purchase.

Another nemesis of good room acoustics is known as flutter echo. This usually occurs in a room with parallel reflective wall surfaces that result in the frequencies above 500Hz generating ringing reverberations that can be detected even after the direct sound has stopped. A good way to test for flutter echo is to stand in the middle of the listening room and clap your hand as loud as you can. If you can hear the sound of the clap reflecting back and

forth between the walls you have a flutter echo problem. If you do not address the flutter echo problem, it will result in transients (fast musical attacks) getting blurry and the midrange and treble part of the music sounding harsh and unpleasant. To resolve your flutter echo problem you will need to control the reflections of your walls by either absorbing or diffusing the sound waves with strategically placed sound absorbing panels or items like bookshelves that will diffuse the sound.

If your listening room is part of an open concept house, it will make it significantly more difficult to achieve a good, solid, well defined soundstage, because, ideally your speakers should be placed equidistant from the side walls but if you spend enough time experimenting with different speaker placements, you will probably be rewarded with a reasonably satisfactory soundstage.

If you are lucky enough to be able to build your listening room from scratch as in constructing a custom built home, then the height to width to length ratios you should aim for are 1 : 1.4 : 1.9. For example if the height is the typical 8 feet, then the width should be 11.2 feet and the

length should be 15.2 feet.

If on the other hand, like the majority of us, you have to tweak a room with less than ideal acoustics, how do you tell if you have been successful? You could use a relatively simple test. Just play music that you are very familiar with which has a wide soundstage. Start from your sweet spot and listen carefully for a minute. Then walk very slowly towards the spot between the speakers. If the soundstage stays focussed and you can easily tell where each musician and singer is on the stage, it indicates that you have done a good job. If it sounds like you are walking closer to the stage with the sonic focus intact, you have done a great job. However, the acid test is listening while standing near the entrance/exit door of the room. If, in this position, you can still easily locate the soundstage aurally, then you can pop the champagne to celebrate the fact that you have done a truly outstanding job!

Editor's note: Do you have questions specific to the acoustics of your room? Please join Malcolm on the CANADA HiFi (www.canadahifi.com/forum) and he will be glad to help you.

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Bookshelf or Floorstanding Speakers: Which Should You Choose?

George de Sa

When it comes to putting together an audio system, for a home theatre or a two-channel stereo, there is no avoiding a decision on loudspeakers. Speakers are an essential part of any audio system and hence spending some time getting to know more about them is always beneficial. Today there are many types of loudspeakers including satellite, in-wall, on-wall, sub-woofer, planar, electrostatic and so on, each of which have their own specific purpose; however, one of the most common questions that comes up with audio enthusiasts is...“should I buy bookshelf (stand-mount / compact) loudspeakers or floorstanding (tower) loudspeakers?” Though this question may at first seem simple to answer, there is in fact much to consider in making a decision between these two primary types of loudspeakers.

The decision between a bookshelf speaker and floorstanding loudspeaker becomes that much more difficult when the two vary in configuration, materials, engineering or quality. An example would be if we tried to compare a high-end bookshelf speaker (made of billet aluminum that uses an exotic beryllium tweeter and ceramic composite woofer) to a mass-market floorstanding speaker (made of MDF that uses a conventional fabric-dome tweeter and off-the-shelf paper coned woofers). Can you guess which would be the better performer? Could you guess which would likely cost more? Such a comparison would not help us decide on the fundamental speaker form, i.e. bookshelf or floorstanding. Simply put, you can find many bookshelf speakers that cost more and perform better than floorstanding loudspeakers and

vice versa. Does that mean the question of bookshelf speaker or floorstanding speaker is unanswerable? Well, not exactly. There are, in fact, a number of aspects worth considering; however, they only make sense when we hold other factors constant. What I mean is that we need as close to an apples-to-apples comparison - a standardized scenario. For instance, let's start with two speakers: one a bookshelf and the other a floorstanding speaker, both manufactured by the same company, within the same product series and having the same configuration (i.e. two-way, two-driver, 1" dome tweeter, 6" woofer, with similar crossovers and overall quality of construction and materials). In this scenario, the only variable is the speaker form, bookshelf or floorstanding - an apples to apples comparison, well not quite but close enough. Now, in light of this scenario, we can consider some of the differences between bookshelf and floorstanding speakers. Let's look at these differences in terms of seven key aspects: 1) cost; 2) size; 3) placement & décor; 4) power handling; 5) sensitivity & volume; 6) bass extension and; 7) accuracy & imaging.

Cost

In our scenario, since the two speakers have similar quality and construction and use the same drivers, we might guess that the floorstanding speaker would cost more. Af-



ter all, the floorstanding speaker is essentially the bookshelf speaker in a taller/larger cabinet, plus it has a tweaked crossover to adjust for the greater frequency range and efficiency afforded by the larger cabinet. A larger cabinet means more material, more parts and more labour. Specifically this means more: MDF for the cabinet, adhesive for assembly, insulation, internal bracing, sanding, stain, varnish, wiring and assembly time. And, that's not all - the floorstanding speaker being larger, calls for more packaging and being larger and heavier, higher shipping/handling costs. So it would be understandable that the floorstanding speaker would have a higher cost and price but is that the whole story? Not quite - there's something else to consider. Though the bookshelf speaker, in our scenario, should always be cheaper, the performance of a bookshelf speaker is highly dependent on the



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foundation that it is placed on. To realize the full performance potential of the bookshelf speaker, it must be perched atop a suitable, quality speaker stand – as opposed to... well, a bookshelf. A speaker stand, in keeping with the quality and performance potential of a bookshelf speaker should roughly cost between 20 to 35% of the price of the bookshelf speaker itself – so it is definitely a consideration. Factoring in the cost of a stand; the difference between our bookshelf speaker with a stand versus the floorstanding speaker will likely be small, if anything. This means that cost, should not be the key deciding factor between bookshelf and floorstanding loudspeakers.

Size

If you have limitations on space you might think the bookshelf speaker would be the best choice but this may not be the case. As stated above, a good quality stand is a must for getting the most out of a bookshelf speaker. A stand will likely occupy a similar amount of floor space as a floorstanding speaker and the bookshelf, on the stand, will likely be similar in height to the floorstanding loudspeaker – no space savings here. However, a bookshelf speaker can also be wall mounted or placed on a shelf – taking no floor space. Keep in mind though that wall mounting or shelf placement will most likely compromise performance. Why? A wall mount or shelf placement will put the bookshelf speaker much closer to surrounding walls than it should be for optimal performance, increasing the negative effect of rear and side wall reflections and resulting in less accurate sound with diminished bass quality. To ensure our comparison is fair, we should assume the bookshelf would be used with a stand, making the difference in size between a bookshelf and floorstanding speaker insignificant.

Placement & Décor

In considering size, we did look at some placement options for a bookshelf speaker, such as wall or shelf mounting but there is more to consider in the areas of placement and décor. A floorstanding speaker, given its larger internal cabinet volume will generate greater bass output than a comparable bookshelf speaker. This greater bass output means the floorstander will have a greater propensity to generate standing waves within the room boundaries and excite room nodes, which could potentially compromise bass quality, specifically resulting in reduced bass definition. To compensate for this tendency, a floorstanding speaker will generally require greater attention to placement and further distance from surrounding walls than a comparable bookshelf speaker. This necessity to pull floorstanding speakers away from walls, can often present a challenge in the case of multi-use rooms. All of a sudden, the floorstanding speaker becomes a main element of décor – nothing to brag about on an interior design show, for sure. This is one area that a bookshelf speaker gains significant appeal over a floorstanding speaker, since bookshelf speakers with their lower bass output can generally be placed more easily and closer to walls – where they can have less impact on décor. Another factor is that bookshelf speakers generally sit on stands that have legs, and these less are less imposing and more delicate looking, making the bookshelf and stand seem smaller than the floorstanding speaker – a plus for any stiff décor requirements.

Power Handling

In our scenario, we are comparing a bookshelf speaker with a floorstanding speaker, where both speakers use the same tweeter and woofer and similar crossovers, with the difference between the two being limited to the enclosure/cabinet size. A larger enclosure is not a primary determinant of power handling capability (or maximum pow-

er handling) and so in our scenario, though we have two different types of speakers - the power handling capabilities, dictated by the crossover and driver will be the same. If we were not doing an apples-to-apples comparison and looking at a multi-driver floorstanding speaker, power handling would tip in favour of a floorstanding speaker but let's keep with our scenario.

Sensitivity & Volume

Where all things, except enclosure size, are kept equal, a floorstanding speaker, given its greater internal cabinet volume, will be more efficient at producing sound than a bookshelf speaker. This greater efficiency is more commonly described in terms of sensitivity. Sensitivity is a measure of the sound pressure level (SPL) or output in decibels (dB) at a distance of 1 metre, for 1 Watt (W) of power input. A higher sensitivity rating means a higher output or louder sound for any level of power input. In short, with the same amount of power, the speaker with the higher sensitivity will produce a higher volume, at the same distance, in a room. Since our floorstanding speaker is more efficient, it will also have a greater sensitivity and therefore produce a higher volume with any given power level versus the comparable bookshelf speaker. So, if volume or amplifier power is a concern, it's worth knowing that a floorstanding speaker will have an advantage over a bookshelf speaker. How much of an advantage is more difficult to determine, as other factors such as the specific difference in sensitivity, the room size and the power available from the amplifier must be considered.

Bass Extension

One of the definite advantages that a floorstanding speaker will have over a bookshelf speaker is in the area of low frequency bass extension. It's a matter of physics – a greater internal cabinet volume will provide greater capability for low



frequency extension. So the floorstander in our scenario will be able to produce lower bass notes, at a higher volume level, than the bookshelf speaker. The question is how much lower and how much more bass? Well, that depends on how much bigger the floorstanding speaker is and also on the design of the cabinet but rest assured to some degree, whether smaller or greater, the floorstanding speaker will be able to produce a greater quantity and lower frequencies of bass. Adding a subwoofer to a pair of bookshelf speakers will more than offset any difference in bass extension but our level playing field would be gone.

Accuracy & Imaging

This brings us to a very important aspect, which is accuracy and imaging. There are a number of factors involved here that we need to consider. The first factor is that of cabinet resonance. With the movement of the tweeter and woofer, the speaker cabinet, to which the drivers are affixed, will vibrate or resonate. Cabinet resonance is an undesirable result of the movement of the speaker drivers. These resonances negatively impact the accuracy or purity of the sound waves emitted by the speaker drivers with an audible effect. The manifesta-

tion of these unwanted resonances is typically a blurring or muddiness of the sound, with reduced clarity and transient speed as well as vagueness/loss of imaging. Imaging is the ability of a stereo pair of speakers to present sounds in perceived fixed locations before the listener - left to right, closer and farther, as well as higher and lower. Good imaging, commonly referred to as the soundstage, can recreate the various elements of the sound, such as the singer or instruments, as if they were in-front of the listener. Speaker engineers try to design speaker cabinets to minimize resonances and their negative effects; however, all speaker cabinets resonate to some degree. The fact is that the larger the cabinet and the longer the cabinet walls the more difficult it is to reduce cabinet resonance. Floorstanding speakers require additional internal bracing to keep their resonances in check, given their larger and longer panels. However, without great additional cost, it is very difficult to reduce a floorstanding speaker's cabinet resonances to the level of a bookshelf speaker. This means, that in our scenario, the bookshelf speaker will have lower cabinet resonance and therefore, better or more accurate, clearer sound with better imaging than the floorstander.

The next factor is baffle interaction. The baffle is the front facing panel of the speaker to which the drivers are generally mounted. When the speaker drivers move and emit sound, some of the sound waves travel across the baffle before rolling around the speaker to the back. A larger baffle will have a greater impact on the emitted sound, which can be compensated for in part by the crossover design but ultimately, larger baffles generally result in larger negative impacts on frequency response, while also reducing the ability of the speaker to go unnoticed or disappear within the soundstage. Hence, a floorstanding speaker, having a larger front baffle, will be more negatively impacted by this effect and a bookshelf speaker will generally have a more even frequency response with better imaging.

Another factor is floor bounce. Since the speakers we are considering are

both two-way, two-driver models, floor bounce will generally not be a significant factor. Floor bounce is the reflection of the sound waves emitted by the drivers off the floor between the speaker and the listener. The closer the speaker drivers are to the floor, the more detrimental the impact, which generally presents itself as a hump in frequency response between 100 Hz and 200 Hz. In a two way speaker, the drivers would likely be significantly elevated, minimizing this effect. This would be something to pay more attention to in a multi-driver floorstanding speaker that has drivers close to the floor, in which case the bookshelf speaker would generally be more immune to this distortion.

Something to keep in mind is that as you add drivers to a speaker it generally requires a more complex crossover. Crossovers have a detrimental effect on the audio signal, which can be minimized by design, parts and engineering but never completely eliminated. More complex crossovers will have greater potential to negatively impact the audio signal and most often floorstanding speakers will have more drivers and more complex crossovers than bookshelf speakers. This is not an absolute and doesn't relate to our scenario but is worth keeping in mind.

Conclusion

So what's the verdict? In our controlled scenario, the results are that: cost, size and power handling are irrelevant; placement & décor and accuracy & imaging favour the bookshelf speaker and; sensitivity & volume, together with, bass extension favour the floorstanding speaker. In most general terms, this means if bass and higher volume capability are of prime importance, a floorstanding speaker will have the advantage; whereas, if accuracy, imaging and flexibility of placement turn your key, then a bookshelf speaker will likely be the more attractive choice. In the real world things get more complicated with varying quality, materials, driver types and multiple drivers, along with subwoofers. This information can help as a guide but the only way to get to a definite answer is to try as many speakers out in your room as you can and let your ears guide you.

Kudos Super 20 Floorstanding Speakers

Phil Gold

On first glance, there is little to lead one to expect anything special from the Kudos Super 20. Its form factor is the familiar rectangular box, albeit very nicely finished. It's a slim tower with two conventional looking drivers mounted near the top. But I've heard Kudos speakers at recent HiFi shows and remember being quite impressed with their musicality. These shows are not always the best guide as it can be difficult to work around the limitations of the hotel rooms and ballrooms used. The former are often too small and the latter too large to do justice to the equipment. Much better then to spend a month or so in company of those components that seem worthy of further examination. So that's what we've done with the Kudos Super 20 (\$8,500 in the standard finish).

design features

There are speakers that need to be placed just so in the room, the reviewer's job involving hours of experimentation, often in consultation with the manufacturer, to get the best out of them. I am spoiled by the YG Carmel, a slim tower speaker with no port that seems happy wherever you plunk it down. Not having a port is a key factor, since rear ports in particular project sound behind the speaker and are quite fussy in terms of distance from rear walls and corners. Another key factor is dispersion. The Carmel is blessed with a very smooth and wide dispersion pattern. None of the beaming that makes some speakers not just difficult to place, but also means you have to sit in the exact sweet spot to avoid the image



collapsing. Anyone with experience of flat panel electrostatic speakers will know what I'm talking about.

So the first piece of good news is that the Super 20 is cut from the same cloth as the Carmel. Not fussy at all. Within minutes of unpacking, glorious music emerged. The distributor Alex Tiefenboeck (of Crown Mountain Imports) was on hand and was also immediately

happy to hear his well-used babies fitting so well into the room and the system. The one drawback for me was that the Super 20 is not set up for biwiring. No problem – we plugged one set of bananas into the standard banana socket and the second we clamped into the bare wire hole, thus maximizing the quantity of copper wire connecting the amp to the speakers. I learned later that

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Kudos make all of their speakers in two versions – the standard one with a single set of connectors like the test pair, and a special order option set up for biwiring. So my small reservation here just evaporates.

When I say copper wire, that's a bit of a simplification – the cables are Nordost Valhallas, like all the rest of the cables in the system. They are constructed from strands of 99.999999% OFC copper, plated with a 78µm-thick silver coating. The rest of the system comprises the EMM Labs XDS1 CD/SACD player, EMM Labs Pre 2 preamplifier and the Modwright KWA 150 SE amplifier.

Before I get too carried away on how it sounds, let me give you a bit of background on the manufacturer as it may well be unfamiliar to you. Kudos Audio is a speaker manufacturer located in a beautiful part of England - County Durham - close to the Scottish border. Designer Derek Gilligan took over Kudos in 2005 after a stint at NEAT and a number of other companies. He believes in simplicity of design and then optimizing that design through the use of the highest quality components rather than pioneering the use of new materials or construction methods. So no carbon fibre, ribbon tweeters or aluminum baffles here – just high density MDF boxes and conventional albeit highly refined drivers customized for Kudos by SEAS of Norway.

The Super 20 is the top dual driver model in the Kudos range, and it sits above the stand mounted Super 10 which shares the same Kudos Crescendo K2 fabric dome tweeter. Kudos' statement speaker is the Titan T88, a considerably larger animal with an Isobaric bass reflex design and the same expensive tweeter. Six other models, the C1, C2, C10, C20, C30 and the entry level X2 complete the range. The Cardea C1, Cardea C10 and Super 10 share a common stand-mounted chassis, while the Cardea C2, Cardea C20 and Super 20 share a floorstanding chassis, with the quality of drive units, components and refinement going in lockstep.

The box is constructed from 18mm thick high density MDF, internally braced and damped. It is finished with real wood veneers or a satin white option if you prefer. It sits over an attractive beveled plinth which combines a high density MDF lay-

er, a damping compound and a steel base with four adjustable stainless steel spikes. There is a gap between the speaker and the plinth through which the downward firing port breathes. It is designed to control the port output and to a lesser extent, the main driver itself. Derek feels this carefully calibrated design lies somewhere between a traditional ported and an infinite baffle, marrying the advantages of both. The 7" Nextel-coated paper cone bass/midrange driver has been developed especially for this model and incorporates a copper shorting ring to reduce eddy currents and an aluminum phase plug. The low order crossover (always a good choice if the chassis and the drive units permit) incorporates Mundorf inductors and resistors and an exotic Mundorf Supreme gold / silver / oil capacitor, which puts it in very select company. As you might expect at this level of refinement, components are specified to tight tolerance and then hand matched to the speaker. All internal wiring is from The Chord Company.

performance

Let's cut to the chase and tell you how the Kudos Super 20 sounded. On Girl Talk, track six is the amazing "My Baby Just Cares for Me". The Kudos does a good job here but it falls significantly short of the best in this Holly Cole recording. Holly's voice is sweet and warm with no sibilance, evidence of a superb tweeter. The strong plucked bass is tight, well-pitched and musical and excites no cabinet resonances. So the lower end is well sorted. What's missing is the visceral slam that the Carmel offers. Plucked notes also decay faster than the reference which sounds more relaxed here.

The Kudos is warm and dynamic in the big Mahler symphony. The bass is quite quick and is reinforced by proximity to the rear wall. The midrange is quite sweet and this quality extends to the treble. No matter the volume, the sound is never harsh or congested, but could be more detailed and fully resolved in the bass.

The Beatles Love album provides many tests because it includes the simplest tracks like "Blackbird" up to the heavy rock of "Back in the USSR" with stops in between like "Eleanor Rigby" with its



The Kudos Super 10 bookshelf speaker is the little brother of the Kudos Super 20 floorstander.

lush strings and "Because" with low level bird sounds and unaccompanied vocals. The Kudos is thoroughly at home in all styles, offering strong clarity, a rich harmonic mix in the vocal tracks, with just a trace of a nasal sound in Paul's voice and a slight percussive edge to the guitar on Blackbird. "Back in the USSR" is suitably tight and punchy although some clarity is lost behind the lead instruments. "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" is well contained and controlled, with a slight lack of focus in the strings. Leading edges are somewhat restrained making for a gentler overall rendition than the Carmel which brings more colour to the guitar and greater coherence to the strings.

Béla Fleck's "I'm Gonna Tell You This Story One More Time" is a tough track to get right. There are things going on in the background that are easily missed. But the Super 20 clearly reveals the presence of the cymbals playing at a low level far back in the mix. The piano, the most difficult instrument to reproduce accurately, shows really good tone. The image is large but not ideally stable. Fleck's banjo sounds more percussive than beautiful here. The bass is firm but not resonant, showing more of that excellent control. Overall the sound is cohesive and very dynamic. It sounds a little softer than the Carmel which brings more of a funky edge to the material.

Now for the toughest test - the Haydn. The Super 20 throws a big image, with forward projection, and easily handles the dynamics at all volume levels. It is very clear with a slightly aggressive treble that is in keeping with the gut strings used on the original instruments. I find it really involving with a complete absence of the usual flattening of dynamics. It starts and

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sidebar - the music

Intimate Jazz Recording – Holly Cole – Girl Talk – Alert Music

Canada's own Holly Cole was recording sultry jazz renditions before Diana Krall came along and she is an equally original artist. This 1990 recording, her first album, will sound good on almost any setup, but it really rewards the listener when played on a system with huge dynamics and an extended and fast bass response.

Spectacular Large Scale Orchestral Recording – Mahler's Second – Ivan Fischer – Channel Classics

This fabulous SACD offers outstanding sonics to match the superlative performance of one of the 20th century's greatest masterpieces. One listen to this and you'll be converted into a Mahler addict. It's all encompassing, deeply moving and offers moments of extreme tenderness as well as ear splitting climaxes.

The Best Sounding Beatles Album – Love – Apple Records

Even though I've been living with the wonderful EMI sets of the complete Beatles remasters, both mono and stereo sets, nothing touches this remixed and remastered album for sheer sound quality. If you get a chance to see the Love show by Cirque Du Soleil in Las Vegas, grab it. This is the soundtrack.

Béla Fleck and the Marcus Roberts Trio – Across the Imaginary Divide –

Rounder Records

I love to include recordings where I've also been present at the live event. Béla Fleck is the King of the banjo – he can do absolutely anything with it. Here he plays with the great stride pianist Marcus Roberts. On drums the phenomenal Jason Marsalis and on bass we have Rodney Jordan. It's a superb combination and I prefer it to Fleck's many outings with the Flecktones. The dynamics are huge and you really need a system with great clarity in the treble to do justice to Jason's percussion work and great speed to keep up with Marcus Roberts' flamboyant and aggressive fingerwork.

The Acid Test – Haydn Quartets – Quatuor Mosaïques – Naïve

This is the very best recording of Haydn Quartets I've ever heard, but on most systems it sounds hard and aggressive. It demands everything from your equipment – a balanced frequency response, massive dynamics, low level detail, accurate instrumental colour, pinpoint imaging, lightning reflexes, the lot. Fall down on any one of these qualities and the performance will sound thin and uncomfortable, not at all musical. But if you play all your cards right, this is simply magical, revealing the humour, the imagination, the bravura playing and the cohesion of these four wonderful musicians playing on their gut stringed original instruments.

stops very quickly and never sugar coats. This is a superb performance from the Super 20 on a recording that will trip up most competitors.

Overall there are many strong points gleaned from extensive listening. First is that the Super 20 has an excellent sweet top end. This is extremely rare in speakers, and it is the quality that makes it easy to listen to these speakers for long periods of time, and from almost any position in the room. It's why you're paying the big bucks. The bottom end is also very well controlled and quite fast. But no reflex ported designs can compete with a well

sorted sealed box system for tunefulness, speed and pitch accuracy in the bass. Porting is designed to extend the lower frequency reach of a speaker beyond what could be achieved without a port in a similar sized cabinet. In a very broad sense you could say a port trades quality for quantity. There is no doubt the Carmel has the better bass, particularly in how clean and well sustained it is, although it does not necessarily dig deeper or play louder. The Carmel is among the most revealing speakers ever made. Its resolution is astounding, although it doesn't play as loud as some other similarly sized speak-

ers, the Super 20 among them. Against the Carmel, the Super 20 does not match the level of midrange resolution, although it will compare well amongst other in its price range. You notice this more on some recordings than others. The more complex the music, or the more delicate the instrument, the more noticeable the difference. The Super 20, with its two wide dispersion drivers mounted closely together on a narrow baffle, aided by its highly specified low order crossover, is a very good imager. Most importantly, the Super 20 does a great job of playing louder when required without evidence of dynamic compression. On the downside, it's a relatively expensive speaker for the size of the box and is a bit over-damped to my taste, leading to the observed fall off in plucked notes and slight loss of transient attack and low level detail.

I've been very impressed with a number of speakers that compete with the Kudos, including some made right here in Canada. The Kudos Super 20 is another winner. It's a thoroughly musical offering from Kudos Audio that just sounds right across a broad range of music and listening levels. It should certainly be on your shortlist if you are in the market for some serious kit. It's room friendly, accurate, well balanced, images strongly and it has a remarkably good treble. On top of that it offers a lot of sound for the size of the package and you should find it very easy to drive and relatively efficient so you don't need a monster amp. It's beautifully finished and sharp looking. Give it a listen and if possible, try it in your own home. That's the true test of any component. I think you'll be as impressed as I am.

quickinfo

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**Kudos Super 20
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Serene Audio Talisman Active Speakers



Suave Kajko

If you're an avid music listener than you probably have tons of great music caged up inside your computer, smart phone or tablet. And if you care at all about sound quality, the last thing you want to do is play your music through a lousy pair of speakers. Serene Audio is a relatively young Canadian speaker maker that would like to unleash your favourite artists through its range of high-quality compact powered speakers.

Some music listeners care strictly about a speaker's sound quality and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, but I'm not one of them. I agree that performance is paramount but I value aesthetic appeal nearly as much. To truly enjoy my audio

gear, I prefer for it to look as good as it sounds. When Serene Audio asked us to review a pair of their speakers, I took a quick look at the company's website and something became immediately apparent: Serene Audio's top priority is quality of sound but the company also places a big emphasis on creative design. And so, without hesitation we asked them to send us a sample pair for review.

design features

Serene Audio offers three speaker models designed and manufactured in Canada. Its product line-up consists of the Pebble, the Talisman and the Paisley models – each offering a strikingly beautiful and distinctive look. All three models are rear-ported and available in an active (powered) ver-

sion for \$495 or passive (non-powered) version for \$395. The active models are designed for use with computers, smart phones, tablets and Apple's Airport, if you desire wireless playback. The passive models on the other hand are intended for use with TVs and in home theatre environments. Besides their unique enclosure designs, these speakers use materials you wouldn't normally expect to find in a typical speaker – the cabinets are constructed out of bamboo and partially wrapped in high-grade leather. You get a choice of caramel or natural bamboo, and black or white leather. My active Talisman review pair, measuring 8" high x 5" wide x 6" deep, came in a natural bamboo and white leather configuration and looked decidedly beautiful on my computer desk.

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A nice, attractive enclosure is of course only a part of the equation here. If you're observant, you'll notice from the picture that these speakers utilize a single, 3 inch full-range, long-throw drive unit that's lightweight and quick. A single, compact driver like this isn't capable of reaching the same frequency extremes as a driver/tweeter combo but it does come with its own major advantage – it does not require a crossover network. Serene Audio uses only a minimalistic baffle step compensation filter in its design. The absence of a crossover translates into a seamless, less distorted sound across its frequency range capability, rated from 70Hz to 20kHz (+/- 3 dB). Power for the Talisman comes courtesy of a 2 x 20 watt digital amplifier with a dedicated DSP chip, housed inside the right channel speaker. In addition to the amplifier, the rear panel of this speaker offers a volume knob (which also serves the on/off function), a subwoofer output, output to the left speaker, a mini-jack input, a headphone output and a power jack. The headphone output utilizes an internal class-AB amplifier. If you listen to the Talisman while sitting at a computer desk, as I did for most of this review, you will of course get the benefit of near-field listening. With your ears this close to the speakers the sound will reach your ears before it bounces off any walls, resulting in a cleaner audio presentation without the negative effects of a room's acoustics – which can be a great advantage.

Unpacking the Talisman was nothing short of a pleasure. These speakers were not only very well packed, the manufacturer cleverly uses the bamboo left over from cutting of the speaker panels inside the box. Right off the bat, potential buyers should feel a pride of ownership. Unlike other speaker manufacturers, Serene Audio says that its speakers require only a few hours to break-in properly. The Talisman can be connected directly to a computer's soundcard using a 3.5 mm mini-jack cable, but if you really want to hear the full quality that these speakers are capable of, you'll definitely want to connect them to a decent external digital to analog converter (DAC). I setup my review pair with the ADL GT40 USB DAC, capable of 24-bit/96KHz playback and listened to a wide array of music, ranging from classical to live performances to rock. This

sidebar

Take your pick – Serene Audio offers the same sonic characteristics from three distinct models: the Talisman (pictured at the top of this review), as well as the Pebble and the Paisley (pictured below).



DAC not only hugely improves the playback quality from the computer, it also offered the convenience of a front-mounted volume dial, so I didn't have to reach for the volume dial on the back of the right speaker.

performance

I launched my music listening session

with a number of familiar recordings that I've been listening to lately including Alanis Morissette's "Jagged Little Pill Acoustic", Florence + the Machine's "MTV Unplugged", Air French Band's "Moon Safari", Led Zeppelin's "Mothership" and various Best Audiophile Voices albums. The Talisman quickly had my head bopping and my body doing a chair-dance,

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thanks to their sweet sounding and engaging midrange. Voices and instruments sounded natural, the tonal accuracy was excellent and my ears could not detect any colouration or distortion. The Talisman produced a slightly laid-back perspective, with voices and instruments emanating from just behind the speakers. I was delighted to hear that these speakers were also capable of laying out a respectable soundstage that offered great imaging. When listening to the “Jagged Little Pill Acoustic” and “MTV Unplugged” albums, the instruments and voices were placed accurately within a three dimensional space, making these albums a joy to listen to. I found that both the perspective and the soundstage deepened even further as I leaned back in my chair.

As I was writing this review, Serene Audio realized that my Talisman review pair does not have the latest version of the firmware installed, which offers a better overall tonal balance. This agreed with my review notes, as I found that my initial review pair did not extend particularly high in the treble region and didn’t offer the same richness and level of detail as I’ve come to expect from familiar recordings. I also found that the initial pair lacked a little in the lower frequencies. Serene Audio expedited another pair of the Talisman speakers to me with the latest firmware version installed and I’m glad to report that the new firmware fully addressed the tonal balance. The replace-

ment pair offered a wonderfully clean high frequency extension, which translated into a higher extraction of details, with a slightly increased amount of air between voices and instruments. Many small speakers produce a rather tizzy, unnatural sounding top-end that can quickly become tiring but I’m glad to say that I didn’t hear any of that with these speakers. Low level, high level and extended listening sessions all brought pleasure to my ears, without ever fatiguing me. The updated Talisman pair also offered a noticeable improvement in the mid-bass and lower frequencies. The bass notes sounded cleaner, fuller and tighter, offering a great foundation for most tracks that I listened to. Serene Audio of course realizes the limitation of compact enclosures and hence provides a subwoofer output for those who desire to extend the bottom-end response even further.

While spinning up Rebecca Pidgeon’s Spanish Harlem from the “Best Audiophile Voices Volume 6”, the Talisman once again delivered a clean, musical midrange with great coherency and offered a nice sense of presence of the recording space. Pidgeon’s voice echoed realistically, exposing the size of the space, with a good amount of air around the vocals and the instruments. The violins played smoothly with a gentle treble that rolled off pleasantly at the top.

Switching grooves, I listened to some rock selections including City and Co-

lour’s “Little Hell”, Social Distortion’s “Greatest Hits” and Johnny Cash’s “American IV: The Man Comes Around”. Again, all of the tracks I listened to from these albums demonstrated the Talisman’s remarkable tonal accuracy. They conveyed the energy of harder rock tracks well and were able to play quite loud. I also appreciated their large sweet spot and ability to maintain imaging when I moved off to the sides.

There aren’t many competitors in the \$500 powered speaker space but there is one that should be mentioned – the Audioengine 5+, especially since I own its original brother, the Audioengine 5 which normally sits on my computer desk. The biggest advantage this speaker offers is its tight, deep bass extension. But it does come at a cost of desk space as these speakers have a far larger footprint and overall dimensions than the Talisman. Also, the Audioengine 5+’s conventional design can’t compete at all with the styling of the Serene Audio speakers.

The Serene Audio Talisman is a powered speaker that brought me lots of listening pleasure during the time it spent on my computer desk. It performed very well with a mix of musical genres including acoustic, vocal, live, rock and jazz. The only area in which the Talisman lacked was with highly dynamic and bass heavy music. If you’re looking to purchase a compact speaker to seriously enhance the music from your computer, smart phone or tablet, this is certainly one speaker you should listen to. The fluidity and accuracy of its mid-range can easily be compared to larger, more expensive speakers. And if you desire more bass energy, you could always supplement them with a little subwoofer. Serene Audio offers a 30 day in-home trial, so there’s absolutely no risk if you choose to purchase them online.

quickinfo

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Serene Audio Talisman Active Speakers
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Anthem Statement D2v 3D A/V Processor

Suave Kajko

If you have ever wondered what advantages a separate A/V processor and a dedicated multi-channel amplifier can bring to the home theatre experience, then you've come to the right place. As the publisher of an audio video magazine I've had the delight of sitting through demonstrations of some remarkable home theatre systems over the years. From modestly priced setups with small speakers and flat panel TVs to outrageously expensive systems with studio-quality speakers and gigantic screens, I've seen just about everything. But none left a lasting impression on me quite like the home theatre installed at the Paradigm/Anthem headquarters. What was it that captivated me so much about this particular setup you ask? It was the system's uncanny ability to transport me right in front of a live musical performance and offer one of the most immersive movie experiences I had ever watched. Since then, my own home theatre system has never brought me the same pleasure. Okay, that's a bit of an exaggeration but the fact is that I've desired to own an Anthem A/V processor and a matching amplifier ever since.

Naturally then, when the Anthem D2v 3D A/V Processor arrived at my house, I was filled with joy. It came very well packed in a double box and despite the large dimensions of the package, it tipped the scale at a manageable 27 lbs. Anthem is considered by many, including myself, to be one of the top home theatre component makers in the world and so it should come as no surprise that its top-gun



A/V processor comes with a price tag of \$10,499. If you compare it to other A/V processors out there it might seem a little pricey, but if you compare it to a high-end audio preamplifier, the price makes much more sense. That's because the Anthem D2v is a machine engineered to deliver not only the highest level of audio but also uncompromised video performance. Like most Anthem components, the D2v is designed and built entirely in Mississauga, Ontario (Canada).

design features

Unlike many of today's A/V receivers, the D2v doesn't offer a long list of features, many of which you'll probably never use anyway. Instead the D2v focuses exclusively on performance. If the D2v was a car, it wouldn't be a family sedan or even a sports car – it would be a purebred racing machine with a single goal, to outperform everyone else on the circuit. At its core the D2v is a 7.1-channel audio and video processor that offers 3D compatibility, the company's renowned Anthem Room Correction (ARC), a Sigma Designs VXP broadcast quality video processor and state of the art audio processing. It offers decoding of all the latest audio formats including Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, as well as PCM

24/192 playback. All channels in the main zone are upsampled to 24-bit/192 kHz for improved fidelity and as you might expect the D2v is equipped with top-notch DACs and ADCs, chosen carefully for their synergy with other components. Finally the D2v also features a built-in AM/FM tuner for all you radio listeners.

The D2v's rear panel offers a great wealth of connections. For starters there are 8 HDMI inputs and 2 parallel outputs. There are also 4 component video inputs, and 2 outputs, along with more S-video and composite video inputs than you'll know what to do with. On the audio side, the D2v has a plethora of inputs: 7 digital coaxial, 3 digital Toslink, 7 analog RCA, 1 balanced XLR as well as dedicated 8.2-channel analog inputs (which include 2 centre channels and 2 subs). Its main audio output section offers outputs for 8 channels, plus dual subwoofers, in both RCA and balanced XLR formats. In addition to the main zone, the D2v offers two additional stereo zones.

There are so many technical aspects to talk about under the hood of the D2v, that this review could easily run for many pages. I'd like to refer the highly technical readers to get more detailed technical information from the D2v product page on www.anthemav.com, and instead I'll



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focus here primarily on the music that I listened to and the movies that I watched, through the D2v. This should serve greater value to all readers.

The initial setup of the Anthem D2v is a little more involved than setting up a typical A/V receiver. There are more connections to be made and the ARC setup process takes a little longer. I set up my D2v review sample together with a multi-channel Axiom Audio ADA-1500 amplifier, which you'll find a review of in the next issue of CANADA HiFi. This is a very powerful and wonderful sounding amplifier capable of putting out 300 watts per channel with 5 channels driven (8 ohms loads), and 214 watts per channel when driving 7 channels. Anthem of course offers its own matching Statement series of amplifiers, with three different ranges to choose from – the A series, M1 monoaural, and P series. The speakers used in this review consisted of my reference 5.1-channel system of the Monitor Audio GX Gold series, while the picture was provided by the best Pioneer ever offered, the PDP-6020FD 60-inch KURO plasma TV. My source was the Cambridge Audio Azur BD751 universal Blu-ray player.

With everything connected, I initiated the ARC setup. I'm quite familiar with the ARC setup as I own Anthem's MRX 500 A/V receiver and have ran the calibration numerous times in different environments. The D2v comes supplied with all the components you'll need to make the ARC work: a microphone (with a stand), a USB cable, a serial cable, a USB to serial adapter and the ARC software (for PCs only, although can be run on Macs using Windows emulator software). The only thing you'll need to supply is your own laptop. Unlike pretty much all A/V receiver room calibration systems in the market, the ARC sophistication requires computing power that A/V receiver chips aren't capable of – hence the need for a laptop. Once everything is connected, the ARC plays test tones on each speaker as the microphone is repositioned a number of times around the room. The system then adjusts the frequency curve for each speaker in the attempt to provide the flat-test response. This process takes about 20 minutes to run and is extremely effective in correcting acoustic room problems – which nearly all rooms suffer from. In

fact, the ARC is the most effective room calibration system I have personally used to date. To learn more details about the ARC set up and calibration procedure, please check out the Anthem MRX 500 review on www.canadahifi.com.

After connecting your sources to the D2v, you can enjoy music and movies in a matter of minutes. But to take full advantage of the D2v's capabilities, you'll definitely want to take the time to fine tune its settings. The D2v offers advanced audio and video processing – likely far better than your sources and display – so you'll want it to perform all the decoding, scaling and processing of all audio and video signals. The settings for each source can be adjusted individually and there are no shortage of adjustments to tweak – various levels of audio processing, video scaling, noise reduction, detail enhancement, just to mention a few. The D2v offers more audio and video settings than any other A/V processor or receiver I've ever configured. The control and customization options are seemingly endless. In fact some users may find the sheer choice of settings overwhelming, in which case the solution might be to ask your Anthem dealer to set up the D2v for you.

performance

With the initial setup in the rearview mirror, I finally hit the couch to do some listening. Given my level of excitement, I wanted to start with something that I knew was a quality recording. When I put on the AIX Records 3D Music Album Demo & Audio Calibration Disc (Blu-ray), I was rewarded with some amazingly stimulating musical performances. In addition to being extremely well recorded, this disc offers a 5.1 channel Dolby TrueHD soundtrack as well as a two channel presentation in 96kHz/24-bits. Plus you can listen to the disc in one of three mixes – a stage mix, an audience mix, and a stage & audience perspective. I listened to the 5.1 audience mix. This was without question the most engaging, musical performance I've heard in my home theatre to date. The first track, Laurance Juber's solo acoustic guitar performance, is a playful song that sounded breathtakingly real. The guitar strings played with the fullness and richness that I'm used to hearing when I play my own guitar. Every string

picked, every chord strummed, played with a remarkable texture. The next track, Rita Coolidge's "Play Something Sweet (Brickyard Blues)" offered a wonderful female vocal performance backed by an 11-piece band. Despite the number of instruments in this recording, the vocals along with each instrument were presented in their own clearly defined three dimensional space. Coolidge's voice was exceptionally clean and contained the tiniest nuances that a lesser system would conceal. The D2v processor's transparent quality allowed every instrument to shine through with superb tonal accuracy, offering all the textural details. I enjoyed this disc many times before through various A/V receivers in my system but this was an almost entirely new experience. The Anthem D2v processor, along with the Axiom Audio ADA-1500 amplifier presented me with a heightened level of realism, which resulted in a hair-raising musical performance. I loved every part of it.

Switching gears, I listened to several 2-channel classical recordings, including Holst "The Planets" performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestra. Personally, I find that the vast majority of A/V receivers out there today simply don't sound musical enough when it comes to 2-channel performance. Most A/V receivers will show their limits especially when playing highly dynamic classical music. During demanding musical passages, the soundstage presentation can collapse and result in a congested mess that's simply unpleasant to listen to. Even if you don't listen to classical music, think of how many movie soundtracks rely on dynamic orchestral scores. So I was really curious how this Anthem/Axiom Audio duo would fair. When listening to "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity" in stereo, this duo once again showed its true strengths and demonstrated the benefits of using separates in a multichannel system. I rarely ever listen to classical recordings in my home theatre simply because they don't sound nearly as good here as they do through my two channel system. To my delight however this was the very first time that I was presented with a true high-end two channel performance in my home theatre. All the best qualities of a great two channel system were offered here in spades: tonal accuracy, soundstaging, dynamics,

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detail extraction and overall engagement and musicality. Even when listening to the loudest of passages at high volumes, the soundstage kept its composure, along with its impressive depth and width. The overall presence and dynamics of the sound were superb. The macrodynamics – orchestral crescendos and bass drums – were presented with a great sense of impact and power. The microdynamics, such as small percussion instruments and triangles, were delivered with fine, realistic textures with proper decay. When classical music sounds this good, it leaves you – at least it left me – air conducting.

To see how the D2v handled albums with somewhat lower standards of recording, I tried a few popular live albums such as Florence + the Machine's "MTV Unplugged", Nirvana's "MTV Unplugged in New Year", Alanis Morissette's "MTV Unplugged" and "Jagged Little Pill Unplugged". All of the tracks that I listened to from these albums played with a great balance, with instruments never overpowering one another. Some of the digital harshness that I associate with these recordings on lesser quality systems was virtually entirely cleaned up by the D2v. The soundstaging was also more three dimensional here than I would ever expect from a home theatre component.

Following such delightfully musical performances, I deemed it was time to watch some video. I watched a wide range of scenes on Blu-ray from Spaceballs, The Dark Knight Rises, Tron, Unstoppable, Sherlock Holmes and The Pacific HBO series. Spaceballs has long been one of my very favourites, and I was thrilled when it finally came out on Blu-ray a few years ago. Its iconic combination of sci-fi and comedy never ceases to amaze me and always puts a big smile on my face. Oh, how I've always wished Mel Brooks followed up with a sequel. As soon as the movie began, I felt something special about the sound. The DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack sounded cleaner, better defined and flowed more effortlessly than I've heard it before in my home theatre room. Jim Morris' orchestral score was presented by the Anthem D2v/Axiom Audio ADA-1500 duo with a great dynamic range, something you could never expect from an A/V receiver. The bass response was remarkable, with each note

articulated very well and with great tightness. I knew I had the D2v's ARC system to thank for this. Not only does the ARC clean up the frequency response from all the speakers unlike other room calibration systems I've tested, it does a remarkable job at flattening out the bass response as well. The sonic benefits of the ARC are just awesome.

The dramatic opening scene of The Dark Knight Rises combines the rumble of aircraft engines, character dialogue, gunshots and a loud orchestral score. The Anthem/Axiom duo did a remarkable job when tasked with sorting out all of the individual components of this challenging passage. Each of the sonic components was clearly defined within its own space, yet combined seamlessly into an exhilarating audio experience that carried the movie forward. Yet amidst all the action, the character voices were presented with the outmost clarity. The D2v demonstrated an uncanny ability to transport me sonically right into every scene. From a ballroom dance to the sewers beneath Gotham city, I was always placed right in the middle of the action.

When watching scenes from The Pacific, every part of it seemed a little more real. The audio was hyper realistic and so transparent that I felt emotionally connected to the characters during the quieter chapters. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the battle sequences felt frighteningly real with bullets zooming between the channels and explosives blowing up all around me. The presentation offered bountiful power and fantastic dynamics.

The D2v offers an exceptionally large number of video processing options to help make even the poorest quality sources look good on a big screen. Inside the video source adjustment menu you'll find various picture controls (brightness, contrast, colour, detail enhancement, noise reduction, etc), input cropping options, output scaling options, gamma correction and even test patterns. What I really enjoyed here is that as you fine tune any of these adjustments, the menu disappears from the TV screen so that you can see the difference they're making in the video. I found these processing options particularly useful with 1080i sources, standard DVDs and non-HD channels from my satellite box. While watching Alien on

DVD, the D2v was able to clean up some of the picture noise and increase the level of detail, especially in the darker parts of the picture.

If I had to point to some things that could be improved with the D2v, it certainly wouldn't be anything to do with its audio or video capabilities. But a few items could use some attention. The setup menu looks and feels antiquated and could certainly use a modern refresh. The remote, although backlit, is rather plain and doesn't offer the same sense of pride as other remotes included with high-end audio gear. Perhaps a brushed aluminum case with a small LCD screen would be more suitable. Some users will find the initial setup and ARC calibration time consuming and daunting. Then again the D2v is designed for home theatre enthusiasts, rather than the average movie viewer, who might enjoy the setup and tweaking process. Finally, we hope that the D2v will be hardware upgradable to support 4K video in the near future.

The Anthem D2v is a highly advanced machine that brought me pleasure unlike any other A/V processor in my home theatre. Two-channel music, multi-channel Blu-ray concert discs and movies have never sounded better. Every time I sat down to enjoy music or watch a film, I was rewarded with a remarkable sound performance. Thanks to its top-notch video processing lower resolution and interlaced video sources also looked fantastic. If you desire nothing but the very best for your home theatre, I can't think of a better component to place at the heart of your system. The Anthem D2v A/V processor is a winner in every regard and hence deserves our highest level of praise. For being the best A/V processor we ever tested, we proudly award it the "Editor's Choice" recognition.

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SVS SB13-Ultra Subwoofer



Malcolm J. Gomes

For the longest time since the advent of the home theatre category of products, for many people, the two biggest differences between the experience of watching a movie in a well equipped theatre compared to enjoying a movie at home, was the size and resolution of the picture, and the quality of the bass reproduction.

The largest available screen sizes of television sets have grown steadily from the standard 21-inch screens of the early 1980s to the 100-inch and even larger sets that you can access today, with exponentially better resolution, albeit at a price that is not exactly within everyone's reach.

By using projectors, you can obtain an even larger picture that runs into several hundred inches, although you would need to be living in a mansion with a purpose-designed home theatre to optimize this luxury.

On the quality of home theatre bass reproduction, things have been different. During the 1990s, we saw the subwoofer become an integral part of the home theatre audio package and even budget priced models were considered incomplete without having at least a modest subwoofer. This made the subwoofer quite ubiquitous while at the same time garnering them a reputation of delivering boomy and turgid bass that did not exactly harmonize too

well with the rest of the audio delivery.

We then saw many specialist speaker companies invest more of their R&D into subwoofer technology which resulted in the introduction of much higher quality subwoofers. Over the past decade many subwoofer models appeared in the market that delivered bass performance that came amazingly close to what you would expect to experience in one of the better commercial theatres. The problem with these high-end subwoofers was that they carried price tags that made your heart sink as low as the frequencies that they were able to deliver. For those without deep pockets, it was therefore a real Hobson's choice if you wanted true high-end bass performance.

Luckily, we saw a few specialist subwoofer manufacturers emerge into this environment. These companies were able to bridge the gap between affordable but lousy sounding subs, and high-end subs, which thrilled your ears but drained your bank balance. They introduced subs with performance that compared well to their exorbitantly priced counterparts while maintaining prices that were not exactly cheap but definitely a lot more affordable to home theatre fans without deep pockets.

One of these brands is SVS, which was founded in 1998 by a couple of audio-philosophers with a refreshingly different motto - give the customer a truly high-end bass performance at an affordable price. Their products accurately reflect this focus, which is why they have very nicely filled the hitherto vacant 'good performance/great-value' niche in the subwoofer market. This being the case, I was not surprised to see their products quickly gain in popularity and respect not just with the ca-

sual home theatre enthusiast but also with the aficionado crowd who were looking for the best bang for their buck and quite weary of paying obscenely high prices for thoroughly satisfying bass performance.

design features

The introduction of the new SVS SB-13 Ultra subwoofer (\$1,599) created quite a few waves in the market and prompted many readers to write me, requesting that I review this new model to see if it measured up to the buzz that it has caused. I contacted SVS and was sent a unit to review for CANADA HiFi. I was also pleasantly surprised at the promptness, professionalism and friendliness with which my request was handled. It is obvious that these guys love what they do and are proud of the products that they offer. Their drive to achieve maximum customer satisfaction is amply reflected in the tool that they offer on their website called “Merlin” which helps you select the most suitable subwoofer from their line-up based on the front speakers that you use or intend to use. All you need to do is to enter the make and model of the front speakers and “Merlin” displays the SVS model that will be the best match. Sigh! If only on-line match-making sites were as quick, simple and accurate as “Merlin”.

While unpacking the SB-13 Ultra, what immediately struck me was the build quality and the finish of the unit, which belies the fact that it is made in China. SVS are one of the few companies that I know of, who have managed to take advantage of the cost savings of manufacturing in China, with minimal compromise in build quality and finish as compared to units manufactured in Europe and North America. This got me quite excited because it made me wonder if this also applied to the performance of the unit. But to get to that stage, I had to get this very heavy sub into my listening room, which is easier said than done. The shipping weight is a back-breaking 100 pounds plus and the courier will only help you get it from the truck to the inside of your front door. I am not as young as I used to be so I did not want to tempt fate, flirting with a potential hernia by carrying it alone. On the other hand I was too impatient to wait till my son returned so I called up a neighbor who very kindly helped me carry the sub up a flight

of stairs to my home theatre. The clever packaging eliminates the need to lift the sub out of the box. Instead you open the top of the box and flip it so that you can then just lift the box off the sub. Very helpful indeed.

I put the unit through 100 hours of break-in while I perused through the technology and specifications. The SB-13 Ultra is a sealed design box made of thick CNC cut panels to increase rigidity and minimize resonance. It measures 17 inches on all sides and utilizes a 13.5-inch front firing driver unit that is driven by a 1000-watt RMS (3600-watt peak) Class D amplifier. It delivers a frequency response of 20 to 460 Hz plus or minus 3 dB, weighs a chunky 92 pounds and offers a 5-year unconditional warranty that is a good reflection of the confidence that SVS has in their products. You can choose from a real wood veneer black oak or a piano-gloss finish. My review sample was the latter and I must say it is impeccable. The grill is a truly innovative design in that it is curved and made of metal. It does give the SB-13 Ultra a unique and very distinctive look. It may not be to everyone’s taste but it did appeal to me.

The driver unit is optimized for a sealed enclosure application and has a special motor geometry and voice coil with a custom gap extension plate to give it higher thermal power handling and more symmetrical force/displacement profile, lower distortion and increased linear stroke. The amplifier is complimented with a well planned DSP control with a whole host of menu options which are accessed via a simple one button/knob interface and a back-lit LCD display. This feature is more than I have seen even in subs at twice the price of the SB-13 Ultra and is

great for integrating the sub with your main speakers. It even offers a high-pass filter with a delay option to compensate for the group delay if you place your sub further away from your listening/viewing position as compared to your main speakers. The roll-off profile lets you take advantage of the available room gain and under the right circumstances can extend the performance to around 15 Hz, which are frequencies that you can feel more than you can hear. The connections on the rear include stereo line-level RCA and balanced input and output.

I utilized balanced connections because of the long run of cables. Merlin Music front, center and surround speakers were used for the review and I used the “crawl around” test to decide the location of the subwoofer in the room. The delay in the high-pass filter combined with the DSP controls were very useful in harmonizing the SB-13 Ultra with the front and center speakers.

performance

I began the review with the usual suspects in terms of movies. First up was ‘Master and Commander’ and the first cannon shots were so startlingly real, they made me sit up in my seat. I followed this up with War Horse and that did not disappoint either. I also viewed passages from the Die Hard, Terminator, Jurassic Park and the Transformers movie series. In every case the bass was taut, authoritative





and visceral. What was very pleasing is that the SB-13 Ultra did not call any attention to itself like some lesser subs do. It added great dimension to the movie viewing experience and added a lot of aural soundstage depth to compliment the picture on the screen. It proved that a lot of spatial cues lie in the bottom octaves of the audible frequency spectrum.

Gauging from the way this sub shook my room; it became quite obvious that a lot of sub 20Hz energy was being generated. I could feel these sub-sonic frequencies go through my whole body and could feel the impact in my bones. Try as I might, I could not make the SB-13 Ultra lose its composure even when my trusty Pyle SPL meter read 110 dB, which at sustained levels could result in hearing loss. At these sound pressure levels, every other sub in this price range that I have reviewed hurt my ears. The SB-13 Ultra was different. This goes only to show that if your ears hurt, it probably has more to do with the distortion rather than the loudness in the

sound reproduction of a sub.

The second round of the review comprised movies with my favourite music soundtracks. These included 'Cadillac Records', 'Walk the Line', 'Chicago' and 'Ray'. Here again the SB-13 Ultra did not disappoint. The bass was not just deep, coherent and powerful but also unusually tuneful for a sub in this price range. Beyonce Knowles' portrayal of Etta Jones, Jamie Foxx's depiction of Ray Charles and Joaquim Phoenix interpretation of Johnny Cash delivered many goose bump moments and the SB-13 Ultra had a lot to do with it. I can confidently say that I have not heard another sub at this price that made viewing musicals so incredibly enjoyable. The pace, rhythm and timing were spot on and I found my head bobbing and my feet tapping as if they had minds of their own.

At \$1,599, the SB-13 Ultra is not exactly chump change, but the value it delivers in terms of build quality and performance at this price is, in my opinion, unmatched. In

terms of features, it offers more than many subwoofers at twice and even three times the price. This feature set will really come in handy if you do not have the coin to invest in a separate outboard crossover, where the better units cost significantly more than the SB-13 Ultra.

So how does SVS manage to deliver such great value for the asking price? I suspect that it has a lot to do with the fact that the products are manufactured in China, even though all the R&D is done at the ultra modern SVS facility in Ohio, United States. Their direct to consumer/end-user sales and marketing model must also help in establishing and maintaining their status as the value leader in the subwoofer segment.

If you are in the market for a sub with a budget of \$1,600 to \$2,500, you would be well advised to give the SB-13 Ultra a try. I would be very surprised if, after experiencing first hand what this sub can do, you decide to return it. I suspect that SVS also know this, which is why they offer a guarantee of satisfaction or your money back, and they pay for the shipping both ways. This makes it a totally risk free option and a true win-win situation in every

sense of the word.

Editor's note: SVS will demonstrate its line-up of subwoofers and speakers for the very first time in Canada at the Toronto Audio Video Entertainment Show (TAVES) 2013, this November. This will be a great opportunity for all of our readers to hear SVS products in person – so be sure to check them out at the show!

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Sonus faber Venere 2.5 Speakers



George de Sa

When I think of Sonus faber, I think of opulence and sophistication, the fusion of wood and leather, and without a doubt - of music. An Italian heritage has served to birth creations of form and function, a melding of tradition with art and invention. The company, Sonus faber (from the Latin words, “sonus” meaning sound and “faber” meaning crafted, artisan or smith) had its humble beginnings in Italy, in 1980, with a group of audiophiles led by Franco Serblin. Since then the company has introduced many unique prod-

ucts, while garnering much attention and acclaim from music lovers and audiophiles alike.

In 2007, Sonus faber became part of the Fine Sounds Group, a holding company that has been acquiring well-known high-end companies ever since, including: Audio Research (2008), Wadia Digital (2010), Sumiko (2011), and most recently McIntosh Laboratory (2012). As a whole, Fine Sounds Group is among the world’s largest high-end audio product companies, having an international presence and influence.

In 2010, Sonus faber ushered in a new product era with the introduction of their reigning flagship loudspeaker, originally named Fenice, it

is now known simply as “the Sonus faber” (\$200,000 US). The Sonus faber speaker is the result of a development project that sought to establish a new benchmark and as a result brought with it a number of technical, design and construction innovations, including a shape inspired by the lyre instrument. With 2012, came the gorgeous Aida loudspeaker (\$120,000 US), once again reflecting the shape of the lyre and balancing tradition with innovation. Later, in 2012, Sonus faber launched their new Venere line (pronounced Venair-ay; meaning Venus). The lute shape

has dominance in the Venere line styling, analogous to the Aida and the Sonus faber. The Venere line encompasses six models, known as the Venere: 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, Wall and Center. This line brings Sonus faber to a broader consumer audience through more affordable pricing and the competency for both purist stereo as well as home theatre application. This affordable price level has been achieved through a common industry method that is a first for Sonus faber, i.e. “Designed by Sonus faber in Italy – Made in China”, as stated in small print on the rear terminal plate. I expect, Sonus faber’s “Built in Italy” propensity, will depend much on the success of Venere.

design features

John Paul Lizars and Dany Poulin of Sumiko, the North American distributor for Sonus faber, kindly took care of the arrangements to get the Venere 2.5 loudspeakers (\$2,800) out to me. They arrived in a pair of boxes, well packed and unmarred. Inside, along with the speaker were a manual, a tempered glass base plate, mounting hardware with instructions and hex key, adjustable aluminum spikes, and a small polishing cloth. Putting them together was relatively easy and was explained well in the accompanying instructions. Interestingly, the spikes were of different sizes, long for the front and short for the back, resulting in a rearward lean of the speaker - higher in the front, lower in back. This provides a poised and graceful stance but will also serve to time-align the output of the individual drivers to the listening position for overall better integration.

Sitting before me in my room the Venere 2.5 looked striking. This pair was in a fashionable gloss white but the Venere 2.5 is also available in a stately looking gloss black and for a premium (\$500) in wood veneer, the latter in better keeping with Sonus faber’s tradition of rich finishes. The



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Venere 2.5 cabinet has a lute or teardrop shape and a gracefully up-raked top with a gently curved front baffle thus, leaving no parallel panels. These stylistic lines not only add greatly to the overall beauty of these speakers but have the important function of providing greater strength to the cabinet, reducing vibration and preventing the generation of internal standing waves, which would impair the accuracy of sound reproduction – once again form and function in a Sonus faber design. A knuckle wrap test did expose some uncanny hollowness in the cabinet, about half-way back on the side, which gave me some concern about compromised performance. The materials seemed to all be of high quality – from the inlaid tempered glass top, glass base and aluminum outrigger feet, right through to the paint, robust five-way staggered binding posts, and satin plastic front baffle. Fit and finish was superb, a testament to the manufacturing and quality assurance, despite the stereotypes associated with Chinese manufacturing. The magnetic grills though a little flimsy, looked attractive and secured very well – no slipping off here. I must say that the Venere 2.5 is most striking

from an angle, rather than straight on, as it emphasises its generous curves. And, then there is the backside – other than Sonus faber's own Amati Futura, the butt on the Venere is about the sexiest I've seen... on a speaker, that is.

The Venere 2.5, as the name implies, is a 2½-way design that pairs a 1" silk dome tweeter with two 7" drivers, the lower one handling frequencies up to 250 Hz before rolling off and the upper one reaching up to 2,500 Hz, where the tweeter kicks in. The tweeter is a pre-coated silk dome, without ferrofluid, that is built by the German company DKM, well-known for their manufacturing.

The woofers are textured and made of a material called Curv – a proprietary polypropylene composite. The 2.5 is a bass reflex design that uses a non-conventional front slot-port, versus the more common round port design. A twin pair of high quality five-way binding posts is provided on the back with removable metal jumpers that allow for bi-wiring. Frequency response is quoted as 40 Hz–25,000 Hz with an 89dB (2.83V/1m) sensitivity and a nominal impedance of 6 ohms. Recommended amplifier power is quoted as 40 - 250 Watts, unclipped. Each speaker weighs in at 19.45 kg and measures 43.6" H x 13.4" W x 17.2" D.

performance

The gentlemen from Sumiko recommended at least 100 hours of break-in, with more being better. My experience confirmed this recommendation. Out of the box, the treble frequencies on the Venere 2.5 sounded staccato, not bright but rather brittle, as though lacking completeness. The midrange was vague and there was a lack of cohesiveness between the drivers. This was cured in the first 100 hours of use; however, as told, additional time

yielded additional improvement. This improvement continued to a lesser degree over the next couple hundred hours or so and was most noticeable in terms of smoothness and fine detail retrieval. Given my experience, I would recommend not making a judgement on the Venere 2.5 with anything less than 300 hours of use.

Before I get into specifics, I wanted to comment on the general character of the Venere 2.5 relative to what I've perceived as the Sonus faber "house-sound". My exposure to Sonus faber has always left me with an impression of finesse and civility combined with sumptuousness and warmth. The Venere 2.5 definitely shares in some of these qualities but it also takes a step in a new direction. It has an overall tone that is more neutral, though still carrying some extra warmth in the midrange and fullness in the mid-bass. Its treble is well-mannered but will be assertive when the music calls for it – unlike my experience with other Sonus faber's that are intrinsically polite. The Venere 2.5 also has a greater ability to demonstrate authority in the areas of dynamics and output, better accommodating fans of hard rock, hip-hop or movie sound effects. So if you've never been a Sonus faber fan, the Venere might convert you.

For my auditioning of the Sonus Faber, I primarily used my Bryston BP6 / 4B-SST2 fed by Squeezebox Touch through my Musical Fidelity M1-DAC with Kimber Kable Hero and PBJ interconnects and 8TC speaker cables.

One brilliant recording that I recently discovered is The Imagine Project by Herbie Hancock. I've ripped this CD in WAV format to my PC, which my Squeezebox streams to my kit. The track, Don't Give Up, through the Venere 2.5 came across in an unpretentious manner. It was not unnaturally sharp or over-cooked in the treble, but rather had a pleasant darker quality. Piano keys playing had lovely detail and were heard with their eerie bloom as well as lifelike sparkle and reverb. Vocals were delivered in-the-flesh, which is to say that they did not have any perceivable thinness, rather, voices sounded whole and humanlike with more attention directed to the singing then to the recording itself. Moving over to the wonderful rendition of one of my favourite Dylan songs, The Times, They Are A'Changin', the pia-

no keys again were portrayed with a mesmerizing radiance and warmth that made them sound both believable and beautiful. Cymbal play on this track involves a lot of light pattering and the Venere 2.5 did not mask the metallic character. The singer's whispery voice was manifested in a carnal way versus a more forensic exposition. This track includes the use of an Affrican kora, which is a string instrument that has a unique sound. The Venere 2.5 drivers were up to the task of delivering the kora with speed, while revealing the tension in the strings and their texture. Tonal density is not a weakness in the Venere 2.5; music comes across with detail and fullness. The bass was full bodied though a little overripe to my ears, carrying some extra bloat and lacking some detail; however, the trade-off between fullness and warmth versus articulation was quite acceptable and really didn't reduce my enjoyment of the track. I also found that the 2.5 could image very well – I was able to locate voice and instruments in space both in width and depth, with some variation in height and the image remained stable, which always increases my appreciation for a speaker. In comparison to my much more expensive reference loudspeakers, the Audio Physic Sitara 25 (\$5,000), the Venere 2.5 had a fuller tonal character, albeit with some veiling of detail and lost transparency, as well as some rounding of transients. That said, overall the Venere 2.5 was thoroughly enjoyable in its own right and without a direct comparison these details would likely be overlooked. Given the substantially lower price of the 2.5 and the need for it to accommodate both stereo and home theatre applications this is understandable and perhaps beneficial, given the typical system and source material they might be paired with.

I moved to a Coldplay album, Viva La Vida and the track named 42. Here, the immense soundstage that this recording can produce was capably handled and served up by the Venere 2.5. On this track the piano keys took on a little extra fullness, grand and gong-like in their portrayal, while stretching across the huge soundstage. This soundstage reached substantially beyond the outside of the speakers, producing height and an enveloping soundstage. Chris Martin's voice had inviting warmth to it. The bass was dense

with a little mid-bass plumpness. As the track picked up, I was quite enthralled by the dynamics and the ability of the Venere 2.5 to sort through the complexity of this piece. The 2.5 handled dynamics with aplomb though I did perceive a slight softening of transients.

Moving to the album, The World's Greatest Audiophile Vocal Recordings, and the track Spanish Harlem by Rebecca Pidgeon, I found Rebecca's voice came through with an attractive tone, not as light, airy and angelic as I've typically heard it but still delightful. I perceived some calming of the higher frequencies and some downplay of the surrounding air, resulting in greater focus on the main elements within the song – the voice and instrumentation. All the significant details to enjoy this rendering were there. As mentioned, her voice had a little more warmth but not to the degree that it might raise objection and I expect that some might prefer this rendering. I also found that her voice was a little more forward in the mix, giving way to a more personal feel and less theatrical quality. On the track, Isn't She Lovely, the guitars were exposed with lovely richness and colour, giving up only a touch of sustain and tightness that I'm used to hearing with my Sitara 25. This extra density from the Venere 2.5 is very attractive and involving in its own right.

On the Tron Legacy Soundtrack, the opening drum strikes on the track "Rinzler" were impressive in their weight and dynamics and energized my room, with the reverb enlightening the soundstage. The impression was of fullness and power. There was some perceived slowing of pace though anything lacking in speed was compensated for by heft. On the track, the Game Has Changed, the opening drum synthesized beats were rendered with exciting slam. There was good depth and weight to the bass notes with only some marginal loss in ultimate grip and articulation on the lowest notes, which I would guess would fall around 50 Hz and down. It also seemed like bass was quickly abated below the 50 to 40 Hz range, which is this speaker's rated frequency range. I suspect these performance limits are a result of tuning as well as enclosure colouration, i.e. the hollowness I mentioned earlier when wrapping

the side of the cabinet.

The Venere 2.5 is a remarkable, multi-purpose, sub-\$3,000 loudspeaker that most certainly punches above its affordable price in performance. It's a veritable Swiss Army knife in its capacity and delivers the goods across a wide range of music genres, including movie soundtracks. During my time with the 2.5, I noted its knack for accommodating less-than-optimal upstream sources, including poorer music material and equipment. This in no way implies that the Venere 2.5 is opaque to sources; rather, the Venere 2.5 exemplifies a lovely bedside manner by balancing truth with kindness. In essence, this speaker can make the most of what you give it – forgiving that which needs forgiving, while telling of greater quality sources – a quality of much appeal. I have mentioned a few limitations in the Venere 2.5 and though buyers would do well to consider these, it must be noted that these admonitions never detracted from the musical enjoyment the Venere 2.5 provided – I always welcomed my next listen. If you haven't yet heard them – seek them out for an audition, they may be just the speaker you've been in search of. Congratulations to Sonus faber for bringing something new to the stage!



quickinfo

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