

REVIEW: VIENNA ACOUSTICS BEETHOVEN BABY GRAND SYMPHONY EDITION LOUDSPEAKERS



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28 August 2017

Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand Symphony Edition Slim Floorstanding Loudspeakers

Certain countries have gained a particular and quite individual notoriety when it comes to making a distinguishable and often unique audio hi-fi signature.

The Brits have a long and established audio heritage and favour a neutral, faithful kind of sound. Over the Atlantic in the United States, it's generally less reserved – lots of lows and

plenty of highs, with something in between.



Most of Asia tends to be super analytical and here in Australia, well, we have our own distinct tastes and preferences. It's fair to say Aussie audio tastes have developed over the years in a melting pot of all the above.

Austria isn't a country that instantly springs to mind when it comes to quality hi-fidelity audio gear. Its musical heritage, however, is second to none; such a small country giving birth to some of the world's most famous classical composers.

Vienna Acoustics is a relative newcomer in the overall musical heritage that the Austrian capital boasts; first appearing in 1989. It came up with some early audio marvels, pulling out all the stops with designs such as the lauded Silver Shadow in the mid-1990s.

As well as its mainstay in loudspeaker design, the company also dabbled in amplification, producing a KT-88 based valve amplifier named Cubus.

Loudspeakers was where it was at for the designers at Vienna Acoustics, so they stuck with what they knew best and today we see a comprehensive range, culminating in the Reference Klimt Series.



Equipment

The Beethoven Baby Grand Symphony Editions are a slim floorstander and part of Vienna Acoustics' Concert Grand Series.

They come substantially packaged and take a bit of box-wrangling and setting up before hooking up in a system.

This review pair was finished in a cherry timber veneer, with other options including Rosewood, Piano Black or White.

Build and finish are both excellent – these are superbly crafted loudspeakers. A knuckle wrap of the cabinets tells you just how solid and inertly constructed these cabinets are, plus at around 27kg per speaker, they are reassuringly weighty for their compact size.

A three-way design, the Beethoven Baby Grands incorporate the essence and key element of Vienna Acoustic's design philosophy - namely that of driver development.



Removing the grilles (which are fitted super tight) reveals dual 254mm 'Spider Cone' woofers, a 254mm midrange driver and 28mm silk dome tweeter, boasting a Neodymium magnet which was specifically developed in conjunction with Danish driver manufacturer, ScanSpeak.

The cabinets are bass reflex, with a rear-firing port. Big, I mean, really big, floor spikes attach to a machined metal base for each cabinet, raising them some 90mm off the ground. The bases also give the slim cabinets a much wider and stable footprint.

Physically, the Beethoven Baby Grands are designed to work in your average sized living room and don't take up a lot of living space. Positioning-wise, it's best to give that rear-firing port a bit of distance from the rear wall and a little toe-in towards the

listening position.

Another key element of any loudspeaker design is the crossover and here, it's always 'the simpler, the better'.

Big, gold-plated binding posts provide cable connection, but there's only a single pair - there's no bi-wiring facility here.

Many speaker designers prefer the option of a simple crossover network and this is just the case with the Beethoven Baby Grands.

Performance

Speaking of specifications, the Beethoven Baby Grands are reasonably amplifier friendly with a nominal four-ohm impedance and high sensitivity of 90dB. They are the sort of loudspeaker that demand decent amplification - poorly driven and you'll not hear them at their best, but feed them suitably quality source and amplification and the rewards are there to be heard.

Any speaker is environment-sensitive and the Vienna Acoustics are no different, especially with regards to bass performance. Too close to the rear wall and those rear-firing ports will be compromised, resulting in too much bass bloom.

Give them a bit of room and things snap into shape. To a lesser extent, the same goes for overall clarity and imaging - these are a loudspeaker that performs best when not constrained by room placement.

While our review pair was brand new we had two to three weeks to run them in properly. Even fresh out of the boxes though, you can gauge a loudspeaker's capability straight from the first few notes that are struck. It was immediately apparent the Beethoven Baby Grands are something quite special.

I was expecting refinement and the sort of poise that a loudspeaker of this pedigree would deliver. In this regard, the Beethoven Baby Grands don't disappoint, but there's more to these Austrian floorstanders than simply sounding divine with a well-recorded piano concerto or laid-bare acoustic material.



These, admittedly, are bread and butter to the Vienna Acoustics - they sound wonderfully open and natural with such. **Rachmaninov's** glorious *2nd Piano Concerto* perfectly demonstrated this with a fabulous tonal balance across the upper bass, midrange and lower high frequencies. As the orchestrated moments of the piece subside and the piano solo emerges, the instrument

sounds as harmonically rich as you could wish for.



The Beethoven Baby Grands take you right into the heart of the performance, and as the orchestra builds, so does the dynamic capabilities of these loudspeakers. Give them a full-blown crescendo and you're in for a treat - big, bold, and impressively in control.

Similarly, well-recorded female vocals also show just how fluid and articulate these Viennas prove. **London Grammar's**



latest album *Truth Is a Beautiful Thing* highlights lead singer Hannah Reid's fabulous vocal talent. Tracks such as their cover of **The Verve's** *Bitter Sweet Symphony* sound sublime here with deft clarity of her voice together with perfect delineation between vocals and the simple instrumentation of this delightful pop track.

In high resolution audio, the whole album is just spell-binding to listen to on these speakers - the music may not be to everyone's taste, but there's no escaping the almost perfect balance these Vienna Acoustics strike with such material.

Changing musical tack, and perhaps not what prospective buyers of such a loudspeaker would be listening to, I was pleasantly surprised to discover there's absolutely no point pigeon-holing these Austrian beauties.

A spot of new **The Jesus and Mary Chain** see Scottish psychedelic rockers somewhat mellower, but no less an interesting listen.

For their slim dimensions and relatively small drivers, the Beethoven Baby Grands are capable of ample bass.

Super taut and well controlled, the third track *All Things Pass* off the band's latest album *Damage And Joy* is a ton of fun. Laced with a lot less guitar feedback than normal but still a rollicking rock song, the Vienna Acoustics don't mind letting their hair down a bit.

We're hardly talking head-banging material but The Beethoven Baby Grands are still quite at home with such raucous rock.



The same goes for rhythm-driven pop, no better demonstrated by **New Order's** return to their Balearic beats best on the album *Music Complete*, released a couple of years ago.

The infectious pop tracks *Plastic* or *Tutti Frutti* both sound best with the volume cranked. Synth basslines pump, Bernard Sumner's vocals image and drop focussed in a wide soundstage while the highs are delivered with a combination of velvet

smoothness and ample snap.

You could listen to this sort of music all day, so unfatiguing is its delivery, something I found myself doing one cold and showery day.

Conclusion

What's not to like about these Austrian orators? Beautifully crafted, they ooze quality craftsmanship from every angle.

The boffins behind their component design and implementation have produced a loudspeaker that is every bit as poised as it is refined, but not to the point of only delivering the sonic goods with a small cross section of music.

Sure, they demand quality source input and amplification, but this is a supremely capable loudspeaker that will only give as good as it gets.

The Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grands are perfect quality floorstanders for a typical living room and sound every bit as sumptuous as they look.



For more information
visit the Vienna Acoustics brand page
<http://www.vienna-acoustics.com/>.