







Loudspeaker DeVore Fidelity Orangutan micr/O

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In a world where the "higher-faster-further" dogma is apparently still high on the agenda in business brainwashing schools, in a time where wars are getting closer and where the so-called smartphone is making people dumber and dumber, a little speaker from Brooklyn, NY, USA has a peacemaking effect on me.

0/yes

Are you aware of this? People, places or objects can have a specific impact on you, generating value that doesn't have to correlate with anything connected to their price? This is exactly what went through my mind when I heard the first bars of music through the DeVore micr/O speakers. These are not my first DeVore speakers, after all, and I am convinced that their impact comes from John DeVore's basic humane attitude, which I will discuss in more detail. First, let's take a look at the development history of the little cube.

For more than ten years, John DeVore had thought again and again about a more affordable model in his most popular Orangutan series. All attempts failed, especially the smaller mid-bass drivers he tried just didn't have the quality he was looking for. Then in 2018, a co-worker came to him with a complaint of sorts. The woman was working in the break-in area of the drivers, which were banging away all day in a metal rack with no enclosure, sounding rather horrible and tugging at her nerves. So DeVore put together a pair of small shelf speakers to fit into the rack and the stress was history. That laid the foundation for the micr/O, and when Covid came along, John DeVore had time for the real development. Thus he had Seas, his partner in chassis development, build various prototypes. The first was a 20cm bass-midrange driver like the ones he uses in his Orangutan models, but here as a full-range version with a whizzer cone in a slightly larger box than now. The result was ok, but still the cabinet was too big, because you could only connect the cables to the back so that the box stuck out a bit from the shelf. So he had Seas make more chassis: without the whizzer cone, with a dustcap or without, with a phase plug or without and then the complete driver in it's current width of just under 180mm in all those variants. The race was won by the version with the stiff paper dustcap instead of a phase plug as in the other speakers of the O series. The paper cone so typical of his speakers is simply "his" material: stiffness, damping properties, mass and how the paper combines with the rubber surround result in the most natural sound to his ears.

But the tweeter was still missing. DeVore did have to buy 1000 units from the development of the super tweeter for his 0/refer-





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rence. So he tried just that model in his prototype of the micr/O and that was exactly what he was looking for. He installed this 19mm tweeter with its rare-earth magnet behind a waveguide that allows it to be coupled to the mid-bass unit lower in frequency. Moreover, since the waveguide is milled directly into the front panel, that can be manufactured more economically. Basically, the micr/O and the O/baby share all materials, right down to the crossover, because he had to come up with a production process for the new, smaller models that would keep costs down while maintaining the DeVore quality, which is essential for the survival of his rather small business. The larger O/baby that was developed in parallel was a surprise. When DeVore got the mid-bass driver it shares with the micr/O, he immediately realized after a measurement simulation that the driver would work beautifully in a scaled-down O/96. So he separated the cube project into a most affordable O and the cheapest O, as he points out with a grin.

For the small micr/O he did not use hardwood as usual, but 19mm thick MDF for the body and 19mm birch plywood for the front panel. The MDF for the body is mixed with black pigments, which is more expensive than the ordinary material. That's all it takes for the perfect balance of stability, look and desired sonics, because standing waves don't play a role in the micr/O's small cabinet, unlike in the larger models. On the O/96, the different panels also have different densities and are treated differently to tune resonances. The front of the micr/O is veneered with "white oak", into which, as mentioned, the waveguide for the tweeter can be milled directly. This veneer also doesn't need any elaborate pairing like in the larger models and still looks great. Damping material is only found behind the mid-bass driver to counteract the rear reflections.

The micr/O is made for shelves on which its radiation characteristics are just perfect. The fact that they also work in the free field makes them all the more fascinating. The smallest speakers in the DeVore portfolio so far were the 3XL from the Gibbon series, which has shrunk to two models anyway,

while the O or Orang Utang series seems to be more popular. The 3XL was the oldest model of the line and it didn't sell that outstandingly either, as John DeVore wrote to me. His openness and honesty are always captivating, only with his crossovers the openness ends, but I'll get to that. Also, the 3XL was the only model he used the old SB/Ri tweeter in, that he was also was running out. So he either had to put out a new series or rebuild the speaker for the new gX tweeter. Neither was worth it for this model. No loss, I think, because I honestly wasn't the biggest fan of the 3XL.

So the micr/O has become a true bookshelf speaker, framed by records and / or books in real life to stand flush with the shelf wall and the record or book spine edges. This results in a sort of infinite baffle, making the small one an amazingly large one. Perhaps the biggest advantage of this placement is the fact that many room reflections don't even occur. Its frequency response drops nicely towards the bottom, real limitations are experienced, as always, by headbangers and large orchestral listeners with high sound pressure requirements. Upwards there are no limitations, I'll go into that in the sound section. I also asked DeVore about feet or so for under the speakers, but he waved them off. He had always placed the micr/O directly "wood on wood", leaving it for the customer to experiment with. Besides its ideal position on the shelf, it can also be placed on a sideboard or on stands in the free field. That's exactly how I ran them most of the time, because I don't have a fitting shelf for permanent listening. But I tried that of course and indeed they finally outgrow themselves sonically there. But they play superbly even in my rather large listening room of almost 28sqm; there somewhat more detailed, leaner and just not as „large“ as on the shelf.

I mentioned John DeVore's crossovers, which he cryptically calls "DeF-SVDX". Partly decoded that means that they are decoupled and vibration damped like in a turntable subchassis. However, the crossovers of O/baby and micr/O are not really decoupled, but encapsulated in a damping material.

Before that, they are hard wired and star-grounded with the shortest possible connections and his in-house cable. The speaker jacks as well as the chassis connections are directly connected to a crossover component. You can imagine that this is the most elaborate way to build a crossover - board building is something anyone can do. As indicated, DeVore does not talk about his crossover technology or the components used. One can assume that the parts he uses and has determined in long listening sessions are neither banal nor necessarily cheap. And to mention it again: all DeVore chassis are his own designs, built for him by Seas in Norway. So we find no matched or minimally modified types off the shelf but entirely his own chassis. But it is not done with a prototype. His circular development process takes years and includes extensive measurement and listening cycles - on average three per model. He tests every speaker and, of course, all prototype incarnations with every conceivable type of music. And he does this with a fantastic selection of amplifiers: transistor amplifiers with small (Pass Labs) and high power (Parasound Halo) and of course the same with tube amplifiers. There he relies, among other things, on a well known to me Air Tight ATM-300R power amp and a classic Audio Research VT-130SE with real power.

And now we come to a very interesting point. Of course, the micr/O does not exactly appear to be anything special. There are solid reasons for this, some of which I have already outlined. But let me quote John DeVore, who reacted in his typically calm way to an attack on an Internet forum - which he doesn't usually do. Someone had called him greedy and put up what he thought was a the cost to build

Partnering equipment

Turntable: PTP Audio Solid 9 "Special Stadshout **CD player:** Holfi Aria NFB **Tonearm:** Schröder No2 SQ **Cartridges:** Lyra Delos, Koetsu Black, Koetsu Urushi Black **MC transformer:** Consolidated Audio Nano/Copper 1:20; MK Analogue SUT-1L **Phono preamplifier:** Air Tight ATE-2005 **Preamplifier:** Air Tight ATC-1, ATC-2 **Power amplifiers:** Air Tight ATM-4, Acoustic Masterpiece M-101 **Loudspeaker:** Rogers LS3/5a Classic (15 Ohm); Greenwall Ivy **Cables:** Black Cat 3232, Isenberg Audio (LS cable); Black Cat 3202; Isenberg Audio; silvercore space cable (NF cable). Mains: Audioquest Niagara 1200; PLiXiR Elite BAC 150 **Accessories:** Acoustic Revive ECI-100 contact spray; Acoustic System resonators; bFly-audio Master Absorber / PURE / PURE-Tube / BaseOne equipment base; Critical Mass Center Stage 2M equipment feet; Levar Resonance Magnetic Absorber; Levar Twin record washer



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Far left: One of the main protagonists of the micr/O is the woofer designed by John DeVore and built by Seas in Norway. Like so much in the DeVore designs, it appears superficially unspectacular. However, its design is extremely sophisticated and serves only the great musical reproduction

Center: The main actor No. 2 is the outstanding tweeter of the micr/O, also developed by DeVore and built by Seas. He otherwise uses it in his reference system. Here it provides an integrative resolution that I have rarely heard. It is supported at the rear and protected from reflections

Right: John DeVore generally does not talk about any detail of his crossovers. Here you can see very nicely how he casts them mainly for resonance control of the components. And you can see two different cablings: the in-house DeVore type and the famous Belden 9497, that the late Ken Shindo appreciated so much

(for the O/baby), which apparently just happened to be close to the actual production cost, but of course not the selling price. John wrote: "Devore Fidelity sells the O/baby for thousands of dollars more because we have a worldwide dealer and distribution network. We prefer this network because it allows us to get our speakers out into the world and support knowledgeable people everywhere who offer system suggestions with the speakers for their local customers. Our rent in Brooklyn is around \$100,000 a year. Every speaker is hand-built right here - only our drivers are made in Norway. Every employee is paid a salary they can live on, not the minimum wage. Our margin is therefore below the industry average and I don't want to change that. I get offers every week from companies offering to outsource work steps, and there are many other ways to save on costs and therefore on quality. But that's not going to happen here."

I can't really add anything more to that. John DeVores' speakers may not look like bling-bling, although he does not use standard solutions, neither technologically nor from the materials and components perspective. Everything he does is well-honed, so to speak, culminated over decades of history and his own experience, and is incorporated by hand. And yes, you can't tell that by looking at the little cube, but that's what you have me for. Sure, you can buy comparable speakers that may be cheaper. But you can also decide to trust a man who is a musician and loves music. He knows how a snare drum sounds and his speakers have to be able to convey that. If you listen to John DeVore on his numerous YouTube videos, this becomes abundantly clear and here you also understand his thoroughly humane view of the world. All this flows into such a product that benefits from it and conveys exactly that to the listener.

On the amplifier side, one can already live excellently with the few good watts of my Acoustic Masterpiece M-101. All around ideal are the 22 watts of my Air Tight ATM-4 power amp. One should never consider a speaker isolated, but as part of a circuit with the amplifier, as DeVore always points out. The good efficiency and the friendly impedance curve of the micr/O helps of course. As mentioned, I don't have an ideal shelf for the little ones, and it's of course true, that the micr/O simply rise to colossal form there, which it must, or DeVore would have missed his mark. But the genius of this speaker is that it also sounds great in my open space. So if you can place it on a shelf or sideboard, superb - it sounds even better there.

And how does it sound? In a word: fantastic. Its greatness

makes you forget it almost immediately and from then on there is only music. I'm listening to Kenny Dorham's brilliant album "Matador" (Impex Records IMP6042, RE USA 2002, LP), as I have so often lately. His suite "Melanie Part One" absorbs me completely. I feel as if I've stepped into a movie soundtrack. Teddy Smith's bass solo is so deeply embedded in the room and I feel as if I can watch him play. Imagine walking into a theater through an open back door. You approach the music as close as possible without disturbing the musicians. You can watch and listen to him improvising a solo, just for himself - and for you. That's what it sounds like with micr/O.

The little one excels at micro dynamics (sic!), which I'll come back to in a moment. But can it also do the „rough stuff"? It can, and astonishingly so. Everybody knows „Little Red Corvette“ from the Princes double album „1999“ (Warner Bros. Records 92.3720-1, NL 1982, 2-LP). The hypnotic beat and Prince's distinctive voice still draw me into the music immediately, despite the '80s artifacts. In 1987 I saw Prince live in an unforgettable concert in Frankfurt and I feel as close to him and that feeling now as I did then.

I use Dino Saluzzi's Überscheibe „Rios“ (JPC 7531571, Germany, 1985, CD) as a crash test for the micr/O's resilience. I turn the amp up louder and louder and experience a level stability I had not expected. In addition, a bass - within the scope of its possible extension - that sounds colorful and tonally correct. And the fine dynamics let me shout "Ah" and "Oh" every few seconds thanks to the work of the fantastic tweeter. One more group I saw live is Pat Metheny's „80/81“ (ECM Records ECM 1180/81, Germany 1980, 2-LP). „Two Folks Songs“ begins with a guitar riff by Metheny, where you can clearly identify his nylon strings. Then Dave Holland and Jack deJohnette create an almost dangerous atmosphere with a lot of sound pressure with their bass and drums. Just before Michael Becker's tenor sax takes over with his lyrical genius. A loudspeaker must first be able to resolve THAT and then



It is precisely with such angled connections that the speaker cables can be attached at the back so that the micr/O can still sit flush on / with the shelf

hold it together. And lastly I listen yet again to Miro Tadic's „Window Mirror“ (MA Recordings M016A, USA 1991, CD), one of my reference recordings. The CD is incredibly well recorded, sounds utterly natural and transparent, so that just the tonal purity of a loudspeaker can be excellently measured against it. Moreover, its meditative character must be preserved, along with the many fine details that the fantastic tweeter shakes out of its dome almost in passing. This time my partner says about the last piece "Sadovsko Horo - From Milcho Leviev" that she has never heard such a realistic piano in our house. And that's exactly how it is.

My time with the micr/O ends and I am sad because I miss them already. Small box big time, I think. You can't buy more speaker per square centimeter anywhere. Nor is there more peace found in the end of one's search for ideal sound. I once resolved that when I grew up, I would buy a pair of DeVore Fidelity speakers. Which one almost doesn't matter. That should be the case now, right? ☐

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Principle: closed 2-Way-Bookshelf-Speaker **Drivers:** 180mm woofer; 19mm silk dome tweeter **Frequency response:** 50Hz – 25kHz **Sensitivity:** 89db/W/m **Impedance:** 8 Ohm (minimum .5 Ohm) **Finish:** White Oak **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 25,4/25,4/25,4 cm **Weight:** approx. 6kg **Warranty:** 2 years **Price:** 4750 Euro

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