



## DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O Loudspeakers | REVIEW

By Marc Phillips

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It's been a long time since I've had a DeVore Fidelity [loudspeaker in for review](#), maybe fifteen or twenty years. I had the Gibbon Super 8s at my home for six months, followed up with the Gibbon 9s for another six, and I really wished I had the cash at the time for either one because I would have pulled that trigger. The other bookend to this tale is the troubling fact that I've never reviewed one of John DeVore's Orangutan speakers, although they also seemed like my type of speaker—two-way designs with relatively high efficiency, specifically designed for tube amplifiers with modest power ratings. Perhaps that's why I'm so excited that I'm finally reviewing the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O monitors.

Words and Photos by Marc Phillips

The Orangutan Micr/O, at \$3,950/pair, is the smallest pair in the line. It's basically a 10" cube, albeit a gorgeous one, with a thick birch-ply baffle with precise CNC machining to show off the novel position of the tweeter. While somewhat familiar to the Trenner & Friedl Suns in countenance, they really have a distinctive look and will truly stand out in a room despite their diminutive size. Once I placed them on the massive Acora Acoustics SRS-G speaker stands, which turned out to support the speaker so that the tweeters were precisely at ear level, I had this distinct sense of shortness—as in a lack of height—and I found myself looking downward on them to admire their novelty.

It didn't take long for me to completely dig these dimensions. Two-way monitors tend to look the same after a while, even if they're gorgeous in some other way such as the finish or maybe even the cone materials. But the Orangutan Micr/O is gorgeous in its proportions. These are the type of two-way monitors that I enjoy looking at while I'm listening to music.

But these little cubes are from the mind of John DeVore, one of my favorite American speaker designers, and we should be discussing the *sound*. I couldn't wait to listen to them and finally bask in the glow of a true Orangutan. *Finally*.



### **Inside the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O**

The DeVore Fidelity website describes the development of the Micr/O in a very informative way:

“The Orangutan micr/O was designed alongside the O/baby and uses the same internal components. This perfect little sealed cube will fit anywhere, with response tailored to sound just right in a bookcase, record shelves, a desktop, or on a side table.”

I’ve heard (and admired) the O/baby twice in at shows in Munich. The O/Baby was developed straight from the Orangutan O/96, which until the advent of the Orangutan Reference models was the flagship in the line. The 7” woofer is actually made from the same uncoated German paper as the rest of the Orangutan woofers, which suggests that there’s a strong family resemblance from top to bottom. Same goes for the horn-loaded .75” textile dome tweeter. The purpose of the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O is to deliver that famous coherent and natural sound for people who don’t have a lot of space—hence the part about bookcases, record shelves, desktops and side tables.

The enclosure is solid and beautifully made. The main cube is fashioned from 19mm recycled MDF with black pigment mixed in, and the additional 19mm front panel, made from layers of birch plywood, allows for the tweeter opening to perform as a precise waveguide. Since the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O was designed to eliminate standing waves, the front baffle will act as an infinite baffle when placed in a tight space such as a bookshelf. I’ve noticed other “perfect cube” speakers (remember the Design Acoustics PS-10?) that also perform well in that tradition yet decidedly non-audiophile installation.



The frequency response for the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O is rated at 50Hz-25kHz, which according to my Brit-Fi upbringing is wide enough for plenty of listening enjoyment. (If I felt I needed more low frequencies than the Micr/O could deliver, I could just move up to the \$5,750/pr O/Baby.) The sensitivity is 89 dB, with an impedance of 8 ohms, which suggests that this speaker is a good match with low-powered amps like my [Naim NAIT 50](#) (25wpc), the [Allnic Audio T-1500 Mk. II](#) (10wpc) and the new version of the [Musical Fidelity A1](#) (25wpc).

## Set-Up

The DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/Os were another refugee from Scot Hull's [Desktop Audio](#) series—in this case, I told him that I wanted a shot at reviewing them after he was done. (Re-read the first paragraph above if you need to know the reason why.) That means I initially set the Micr/Os up on that tabletop system I've been using to test out the [Naim NAIT 50](#), the [Music Hall Stealth](#) and all the phono gear I've been hoarding as of late. After initial listening sessions, where the Micr/Os clearly excelled beyond expectations, I put them into the main system where they remained for some time.

The DeVore Fidelity Micr/O monitors were spoiled after that. Yes, I placed them on those Acora SRS-G stands. In addition, most of the speaker cables I used—[Ansuz D2](#), [ArgentPur](#), [Audience frontRow](#)—were more expensive than the DeVores. While the Micr/Os were a strong match with the Naim NAIT 50, which prompted me to recall all the great systems I've assembled over the years that take up very little space, I also rotated them among the many amplifiers I have in the house right now. I used the Orangutan with the [Burmester 909 Mk. V](#) stereo power amplifier, another cube, and I couldn't help but think how many Micr/Os could fit into that empty chrome box from Germany. (Since the Orangutan Micr/O is a 10" cube, and the Burmester is almost a 20" cube, I could probably fit eight in as long as I had a good rubber mallet.)

I also used the Orangutan Micr/O with the [Electrocompaniet ECI6DX MKII](#) integrated amplifier with the inboard DAC and streamer, which again fostered visions of a compact, easy-to-place system that also sounded amazing. Finally, the DeVores spent some time with the new GaN FET [ArgentPur](#) Monobloc amplifiers.

In terms of speaker placement, the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/Os aren't one of those monitors that can be plopped down just anywhere—they do thrive when they're close to room boundaries. (The website shows the Micr/Os placed on a bookshelf with a bunch of LPs, so I'm assuming that *does* work.) Placed out into the middle of my large listening room, however, the DeVores seemed to crave a nearby room boundary in order to lock down the bass and provide a well-defined soundstage. That's not surprising, of course, for a speaker this small, and I had similar issues with both the Triangle Magellan Duettos and the Audience ClairAudient 1+1 Mk Vs. The solution was simple—back them up a little closer to the rear walls, and the bass firms up and starts delivering a palpable punch, and soundstage width spreads out and crystallizes.

I was discussing the DeVore Fidelity Micr/Os with someone at a high-end audio show and they mentioned, in passing, that the Micr/Os were designed to be placed right up against the back wall. ("Haven't you noticed this is how John sets them up at shows?") The lack of soundstage size and low frequency extension were primarily caused by my capricious speaker placement,



and while I do have difficulties in placing speakers against a back wall due to an uneven floor (which is in the middle of being fixed), I started pushing them southward. It didn't take long for the low bass to emerge and supply a bigger platform for everything else to blossom.

I didn't wind them putting the DeVore Fidelity Micr/O loudspeakers *right* up against the back wall—there was still a foot or two distance between the back of the loudspeakers and the windows, which presented another challenge. My listening room sounds superb, despite the presence of a bank of picture windows behind the system. (I want to listen while looking at the incredible view beyond, and I'll put up with some reflections to do that.) My final placement of the Micr/O was based on that compromise, just after the point where the bass develops in a completely balanced manner and before I start hearing reflections from the glass.



### **DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O Sound**

I tested out the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O loudspeakers around the same time I reviewed the Audience ClairAudient 1 + 1 V5 loudspeakers, which were also evaluated in both my main system and the tabletop system. These two over-achievers both excelled on that big oak coffee table, especially when placed on isolation devices that raised them above the surface of the table. (I used a combination of Fern & Roby Isolation Feet and Les Davis Audio Entropic Isolation devices, as well as the tilted desktop stands that came with the ClairAudients.)

That doesn't mean the two speakers sounded the same, however. The Audience speakers seemed eerie in the way they could create a consistent soundstage despite their placement—the sound emanated high above and far behind the speakers, especially in the near field. The DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O loudspeakers were, as I mentioned, a little more finicky about placement—I couldn't make them sound bad, but I needed to consider the room more thoroughly before settling in. The ClairAudients had that neat trick, thanks to the back and side firing of the drivers and passive bass radiators, while the Micr/Os were far more sensitive about their proximity to the room boundaries.

In other words, the Audiences said, "Put me anywhere, and I'll take care of the rest." The Orangutans said, "You know, this is nice and all, but do you want to hear something *really* awesome?"

Once I settled on the placement I detailed above in the set-up section, the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/Os kept their promise by focusing on a natural and relaxed presentation that often reminded me of my favorite BBC designs. That thought, in fact, kept returning, despite the fact that I never once felt that those two Gibbon models I reviewed twenty years ago were anything like Brit-Fi. The Gibbons had a beautiful way of imaging that drew you into the music, and they backed it up with an ample supply of low frequency information—even though they were slim floorstanding speakers. The Micr/Os, however, made their first impressions based upon a realistic midrange performance—especially with the Allnic Audio T-1500 Mk. II integrated amplifier.



The Micr/Os, like many BBC designs, also had a smooth and refined balance with some warmth, but not an overabundance of it. This is where the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O and Brit-Fi part ways—I had more of an impression of neutrality and inner detail with these speakers, and that nothing was missing from my favorite demo tracks.

Finally, I don't want to give the impression that the Micr/Os were somehow bass-shy—you just need to use them in a space that doesn't overwhelm them. The low frequencies with the Micr/Os had plenty of slam, the kind of slam where you can feel the notes hit you in the chest. While many small monitors often obscure the layers of sound that can be discovered in low frequencies, the Micr/Os developed those details so that something new was always revealed in previously heard musical passages.

## Listening Sessions

Let's start off with the tabletop system with the Naim NAIT 50 driving the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O. My primary track for this system was Kane Mathis' *Geminus*, which has always been full of busy and complex tracks that can sink a system that lacks inner detail and clarity. (That's why this recording has become such a useful reviewing tool for me over the last few years.) With the tabletop system, the Micr/Os delivered the type of performance that made me sigh in relief and mutter, "what else did you expect from John DeVore?" It sounded so right. It sounded like it does when I'm listening to *Geminus* on a big system with big speakers. Perhaps that's because Kane Mathis surrounds himself with a purely acoustic ensemble with percussion that relies on speed and density over subterranean nuances. When I closed my eyes, I was listening to this album and it sounded like every other time I've listened to this album on a much bigger system with much bigger speakers.

A few weeks later, I listened to *Geminus* on the Micr/Os again, but in the big system with the Burmester 909 amplifier. I'm not saying that the Naim NAIT 50 is anywhere close to the kind of amplifier that the 909 is, but I was astonished that the strengths of this album were preserved in a very similar manner—once the Micr/Os were dialed into the room, that is. (Remember that the Orangutans are still sensitive to room placement, despite those similarities.)

Once I switched to the Allnic Audio T-1500 Mk. II integrated amplifier with its 10 watts of 300B tube power, I discovered why John DeVore says that the entire Orangutan line was designed for tube amp lovers. This was an amp-speaker combo for listening to romantic and seductive music, bathed by candlelight, imbued with the fondest of memories. You know what I haven't listened to in forever? The Acoustical Sounds 45rpm reissue of Dean Martin's *Dream with Dean*. I was reorganizing some of my LPs after the move and I found it, and it felt like I had just found a crisp \$100 bill in the pocket of an old jacket. "Have I ever listened to this on the Allnic?" I asked myself, knowing the answer was no, and I raced downstairs to the main system with Dean tucked under my arm and cued it up.

It was everything I hoped it would be. *Dream with Dean* can sound warm and slightly gooey on even the brightest of systems, but the Allnic and the Micr/Os teamed up to give me one of the best listening sessions I've had in a while. It was the finest combination of elements, the amp, the speakers, the analog rig (J. Sikora Initial Max turntable and KV12 tonearms, the Allnic Audio

H-10,000 phono stage, and the final *pièce de résistance*, a Koetsu Urushi Black cartridge), and I knew immediately that I had stumbled into a minor miracle of a system, one that could compete with some of the finest systems I've assembled. And no, it wouldn't have happened without the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/Os.



### DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O Conclusions

I can now check “Orangutan review” off my bucket list. Even though the Micr/O is the smallest model in the line, it gave me more than enough of that classic DeVore sound to feel completely happy and musically satiated once it was time to pack them up. There's a reason why the Orangutan line is so respected and loved in the world of high-end audio—John DeVore knows how to keep the designs simple and pure enough to deliver the music unimpeded.

Since I wasn't able to construct a big makeshift bookshelf and fill it full of books in order to test out its pedigree as a fine bookshelf monitor that thrives in such a location, but the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan spent enough time in the tabletop system, which exists in a fairly tight space, to convince me that this is the only way to get that true taste of DeVore loudspeakers when you don't have a lot of space. Well, I have a ton of space, and the Micr/O still managed to throw up an unbelievably big soundstage. It did need some reinforcement from wall boundaries to reach 50Hz reliably, but the midrange and treble were truly musical in a way that overrode any objections I had about the lowest octaves.



If you remember, I'm the audiophile who spent way too many years in apartments and condos. That's why I love two-way monitors—it's a way to get around those pesky one-year leases while still listening to quality hi-fi. The DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O seems to exist at a higher, more ambitious level than that. Time after time I felt like I had discovered a big secret, and that if I had the Micr/Os back when I was a young man living in LA I wouldn't have had upgrade fever all the time. These are little cubes that can make even the most spoiled audiophiles think hey, I had no idea that the DeVore Fidelity Orangutan Micr/O monitors could please me so much, but they do.

If you're already a fan of DeVore Fidelity, that shouldn't be a surprise. Highly recommended.





