

EQUIPMENT REPORT

Magico V2 Loudspeaker

Explosive Eloquence

Neil Gader



The Magico V2 sells for \$18,000 a pair—not an insubstantial amount by any means. But that’s not really the news—there are already a surprising number of components that bump up against the \$20k level. The real news is that this two-and-a-half-way floorstander—actually the *bottom* of the lineup in Magico’s Murderer’s Row of Loudspeakers—is Magico’s answer to the question of whether it can successfully translate the R&D that inspired its statement products like the V3, the Mini II, and the remarkable M5 to an “entry-level” offering. Can magic strike twice (or thrice)? Is the V2 a true Magico?

The best way to think of the V2 is as a slightly condensed and concentrated version of its Magico stablemates. But it is not stripped down. Similarities rather than differences abound. In construction, it most closely resembles the larger three-way, four-driver V3 (reviewed in Issue 179), with the notable difference that the V2 drops the 6" Nano-Tec midrange of the V3 and retains the pair of 7" Nano-Tec mid/bass drivers. Unlike the V3 however, the V2 uses the proprietary Magico 1" ring-radiator tweeter also found on the vaunted M5. Impedance mirrors the V3 at 4 ohms; sensitivity is 89dB, also roughly the same as the V3. The drivers are back-mounted to the aircraft-grade 6061-T aluminum faceplate, which is itself mounted to the front baffle via internal tensioning rods. The mounting screws only see aluminum, not softer wood contact points, thus ensuring a tight fit even after years of playing. Interestingly the V2 and V3 match each other in height at 42", but the V2 is considerably shallower and narrower making it a much more room-friendly speaker. The sophisticated crossover is a masterpiece to admire, with a parts list that rivals the entire cost of many loudspeakers!

The V2, like all Magico speakers, is an acoustic-suspension design in a seventeen-ply vertically stacked Baltic birch enclosure that almost imperceptibly angles back a few degrees to align the drivers for phase coherence. The heavily damped interior employs the aforementioned tension-coupling mechanism, where a trio of aluminum rods and rear-panel fasteners draws the aluminum baffle against the enclosure in the way a cylinder head is torqued into the block of an engine. The result is a cabinet

of such rigidity and aversion to flex it borders on overkill. A final comparison—the V2 weighs in at 120 pounds, the V3 at 160 pounds—like a super-bantamweight to a middleweight. To put things in full pugilistic perspective, the M5 at 360 pounds and Model 6 at 650 pounds would be the super- and unlimited heavyweights of the stable. But clearly, Alon Wolf and his team are not slumming with the V2.

From the moment the needle hits the groove, it’s plain to hear that their intentions are as serious as a heart attack. But the key word to describe the V2’s overall performance envelope is discipline. There was no single piece of music that could derail it or upset its composure (mirroring the demeanor of Magico’s unflappable creator, Alon Wolf). It’s also a paradigm of balance, striking a sweet blend of tonality, dynamics, imaging, transparency, where no single criteria attempts to grab more of the attention than another.

Tonal balance in the lower octaves is rich and fully realized although not plummy and overbearing. The mids are full-bodied, the treble region smooth and airy with just a hint of brilliance in the sibilance range. The character of the V2 steers clear of overt romanticism yet it never crosses the line into sonic sterility. Soundstage depth is excellent and on a par with its broad lateral spread of images. As dynamic as the V2 is, it doesn’t convey an overtly forward balance. In fact on some vocal recordings it almost seems to pocket the singer a row to two

further back than I’m accustomed to. If it’s not dead-bang flat, it never deviates very far from neutrality. Inter-driver transitions are seamless and there is little indication that floor cancellations are sucking out upper-bass energy. The Magico team places great stock in ameliorating these issues in its crossover design, but most particularly the infamous baffle-step—the 6dB difference in gain due to baffle reinforcement in the midrange followed by a comparable gain deficit as the longer bass wavelengths lose that reinforcement. Observationally, my in-room experience validates Magico’s approach, as transitions from roughly 200 Hz and below were essentially flat by listening tests and test tones, except for some typical room gain in the 40–50Hz range.

This is all a way of describing how the V2 drills deeper into the sonic picture, nibbling past the thin gauze and glaze that obscure transparency. Its sensitivity to low-level secondary details is, in a

word, *dogged*. It sifts through an orchestra and suddenly a harp or triangle seemingly buried alive in a far corner of the stage snaps into view. Or the fluttering skin sound off a drum head reveals itself. Zils on a distant tambourine no longer blur or, in the case of Linda Ronstadt's angelic harmony during "Under African Skies" from *Graceland* [Warner], her iconic voice—as deep in the mix as it is—appears luminescent. The same held true with large assemblages of voices, each individual distinctively reproduced within the penumbra of a multi-layered chorale. On Rutter's *Requiem* [Reference Recordings], the V2 captures the dual sensation of music vaulting heavenward into the church, as the anchor of a deep organ descends into the earth.

As I reflected on its resolving power, transient speed, and fidelity-to-timbre, I found the V2 became less identifiable as a cone-driver system. It began resembling an imaginary hybrid, reflecting the distortion-free speed and transparency of an electrostat panel with the turbocharger-ready thrust of a dynamic driver. Although its coherence can give even dedicated two-ways a run for the money, the V2 truly begins to shine when you start throwing complexities its way. The full-bore Atlanta Brass Ensemble and percussion section blasting out Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, for example. Like a juggler who is tossed one bowling pin after another from an offstage assistant, the V2 is acrobatically gifted in the way it manages to keep so much information in the air without dropping a note.

The V2 forces one to reconsider the entire micro-dynamic relationship. Even during familiar recordings, like Dire Straits' *Love Over Gold*, the most pin-drop quiet passages are quieter still, more fully revealing the unique tactile inflections of the nylon-string guitar during "Private Investigations" and the cascading toms of "Telegraph Road." And the loudest cacophonous instances are—mercy—louder still. During "Mars" from Previn's performance of *The Planets* [EMI], I found myself riding the volume control more than normal, a result of the outside of the dynamic envelope having been pushed just a bit more.

Quick story: Back in the 70s I became addicted to early Linda Ronstadt records, particularly her *Simple Man*, *Simple Dreams* and *Hasten Down the Wind* albums which featured hits like Warren Zevon's "Poor, Poor Pitiful Me" and loads of Karla Bonoff. The players were the cream of the crop of the acoustic singer-songwriter era, JD Souther, Danny Kortchmar, Russ Kunkel, and Leland Sklar. When I replayed those discs, the Magicos brought a low-level focus to details that I thought were hopelessly indistinct, either because of the pressing or the record's engineering or mastering. Not true. The V2 depicted every instrument in a uniquely layered perspective. No instrument seemed to exist at the exact same depth in the soundspace. Each was unique. But nothing was as breathtaking as the articulation the Magicos expressed with background singers. These voices, from Don Henley to JD Souther, were each so distinctive and identifiable that it was as if I were hearing these old recordings for the first time.

Weaknesses? No Achilles' heel here. Okay, the bottom half of the lowest octave is absent—a minor deficit that certainly doesn't hold the V2 back much. At a strong lower limit of 30Hz organ devotees could be thinking subwoofer (forget it, Magico ain't making one), but good luck keeping pace with those tight-fisted Nano-Tec drivers. Also, bass timbre could be characterized as dry, even overly controlled, and lacking the rush of resonant content

more typically encountered in bass-reflex designs. Admittedly, I'm an acoustic-suspension fan and thus prefer the V2 presentation, but neither iteration touches all the bases in quite a fully realized naturalistic way. Dipole bass, like the Jamo R909, still strikes me as more authentic, but when rock-level dynamics and output are required dipoles tend to run out of steam. At the other end of the spectrum, the V2 possesses a slow upward tilt in the lower treble that hones leading-edge information somewhat. Most prominently strings and brass. It's not a peaky coloration by any means and the added energy actually flatters most music. Unless you're deeply sensitive to such matters, you'll be too consumed by the tweeter's musicality to notice.

Note also that if there is something amiss with the chain of electronics upstream, the V2 will be happy to let you know. Suddenly that special amp that you once had so much faith in can't keep up with the broader demands and athleticism of the V2. It has a palette for highly refined power, and even a hundred high-resolution watts will barely elicit a wink from the V2. At around two-hundred it finally grumbles to life. Give it 250 or, better yet, 300Wpc, and the V2 jumps off the launch pad like its name implies it should. (A quick call out to the Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation cartridge—review to come—and Plinius Hiato integrated [Issue 201]. Their performance with the V2 contributed to the finest resolution I've yet attained in my listening room.)

Returning to the question posed at the outset of this article—yes, the V2 is pure Magico through and through. In many ways it's everything an audiophile could hope for from the high-end experience. The totality of execution is superb. Its performance echoes the musicality of the company's no-holds-barred efforts. Its reasonable size can't quite match the sheer majesty of Magico's heavies, but on so many levels there are few speakers I've reviewed that have ever been as satisfying. The V2 may be *the* speaker to beat in the under-\$20k bracket. **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Magico V2 Loudspeaker

Type: Two-and-a-half-way floorstanding dynamic loudspeaker
Driver complement: Two 7" Nano-Tec woofers, one 1" MR-1 ring-radiator tweeter
Frequency response: 32Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Impedance: 4 ohms
Recommended amplifier power: 50-300 watts
Dimensions: 10" x 42" x 12"
Weight: 120 lbs. (each)
Price: \$18,000

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Sota Cosmos Series III turntable; SME V tonearm; Sumiko Palo Santos, Ortofon, 2M Black; JR Transrotor Phono II; Simaudio CD3.3; Simaudio i3.3, Plinius Hiato, Magnum Dynalab MD-309; Synergistic Tesla Apex, Wireworld Platinum; Audioquest WBY interconnects; Synergistic Tesla, Wireworld Silver Electra & Kimber Palladian power cords