

Tall order

Sometimes, size matters
and this striking system has
Ed Selley thinking big



Those of you with the same curious affliction I suffer from of remembering adverts years after they vanished from the airwaves may remember a commercial featuring a slightly Lecteresque Sir Anthony Hopkins opining that a: “Big world needs a big bank.” The argument that the esteemed Mr Hopkins made has been somewhat undermined since by the same big banks taking the world to the edge of worldwide financial meltdown, but at the core of the argument is more than a kernel of

truth. To do some things correctly, you need to think big.

In musical terms, ‘big’ can translate to power or size (or for the completionist both) and in the case of the system you see here, in size terms, we’ve really pushed the boat out. The Magnepan MG 1.7 is as near as makes no difference six feet tall, which makes it comfortably the tallest (and I suspect the widest) speaker I’ve ever handled as part of a *Beautiful System*. What is more, this isn’t a huge cabinet designed to impart a bit of mass to some conventionally sized drivers. A

COMPONENTS

CANOR CD2 VR+ £3,100

The CD2 takes the idea of a valve CD player and runs with it with both a valve regulated power supply and an output built around two ECC83 and two 6922 valves with an EZ81 rectifier.

CANOR TP106 VR+ £4,000

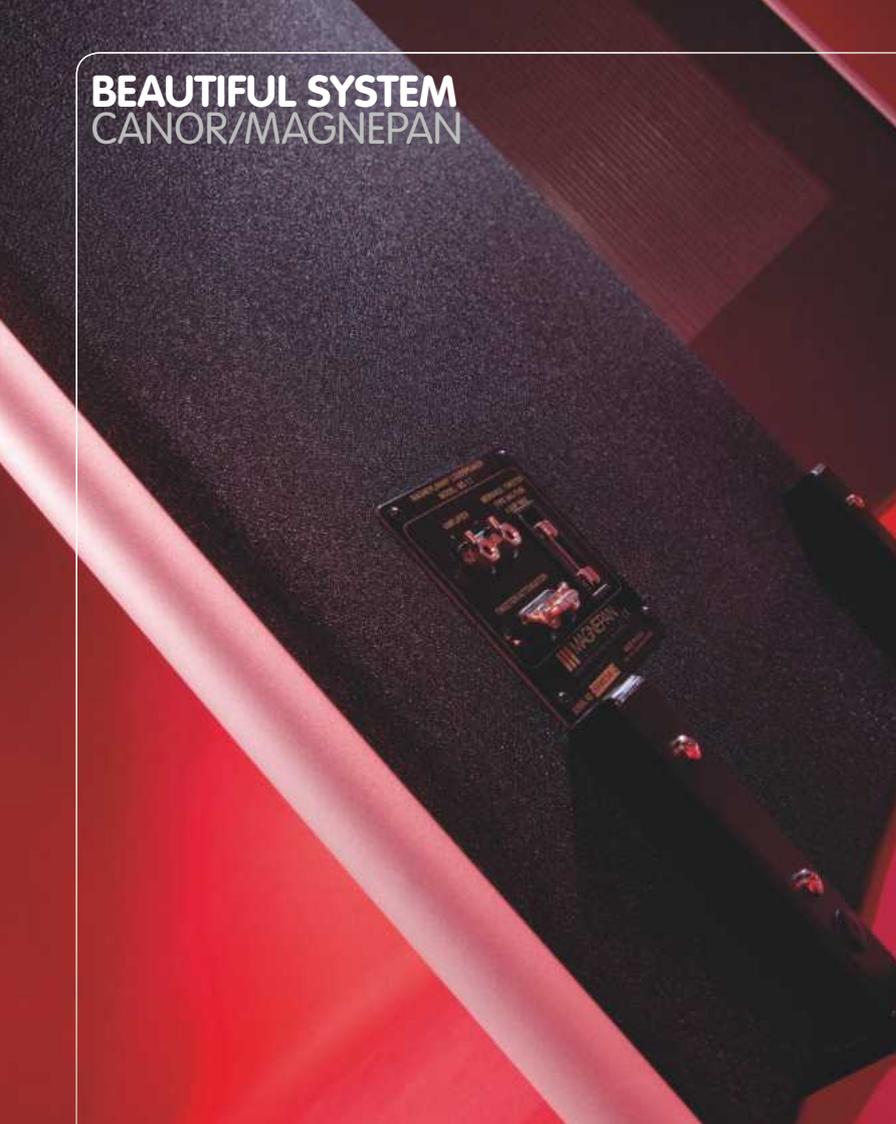
The largest amp in the Canor range, the TP106 VR+ is built around four 6550 valves with a strong Class A bias – the amp operates in pure Class A mode up to an output of 20W.

MAGNEPAN MG1.7 £2,700

A full-range electro planar speaker, the 1.7 is an impressive 65in tall and 19in wide, but only 2in deep. The panel is divided into tweeter and midbass sections and a variety of finishes are available.

The tonality is unfailingly believable, which further aids the sense of total immersion

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM CANOR/MAGNEPAN



good two thirds of the MG 1.7 is radiating area. Just to be clear, this is a big loudspeaker.

The reasons for these imposing dimensions stem from how the Magnepan works. Instead of a complement of conventional dynamic drivers, it works on the planar magnetic principle where a membrane is imprinted with a voice coil (or in this case, two). Magnets down either side of the membrane react to current passing down the coils and create sound. This principle gives the Magnepan two interesting characteristics. The first is that although it is tall and wide, it is also extremely thin – less than 5cm deep. The second is that the panel radiates in both directions making the Magnepan a true dipole.

Clash of the titans

You might think that such a burly speaker might need some monstrous electronics to make it sing, but this isn't the case. I'd hesitate to call the Canor TP106 VR+ amp and CD2 VR+ CD player small – they certainly aren't light – but they are perfectly normal in terms of dimensions especially when you consider that both units make use of valves. In the case of the amp this means a quartet of 6550 tubes running in ultra-linear configuration. Four of these valves

can be coaxed into outputs of up to 100W, but Canor has elected to bias them towards Class A, resulting in an output of 55W into 4ohms – which is fairly conservative.

The CD2 is also very distinctive in terms of how it makes use of valves. Whereas many 'valve' CD players boast a solitary device somewhere in the output, the Canor is entirely valve based and the power supply is also valve rectified for good measure. Combined with high-tech Burr Brown

With pretty much no mass to the drivers, the Magnepan is supernaturally fast

PCM 1792 DAC, the result is a CD player that is at once very retro and entirely modern. The CD2 is also unusually focussed for a CD player in this day and age. Not only is there no sign of a digital input, let alone a USB connection, the CD2 doesn't even have a digital output.

Although they come from opposite sides of the Atlantic, the electronics and speakers are a very happy visual match. The silver edges of the MG 1.7 mirror the black line that runs across the front of the Canors (other finishes are available) and the result is rather

Above: Tall, wide but incredibly thin, the MG1.7 is a very striking-looking speaker

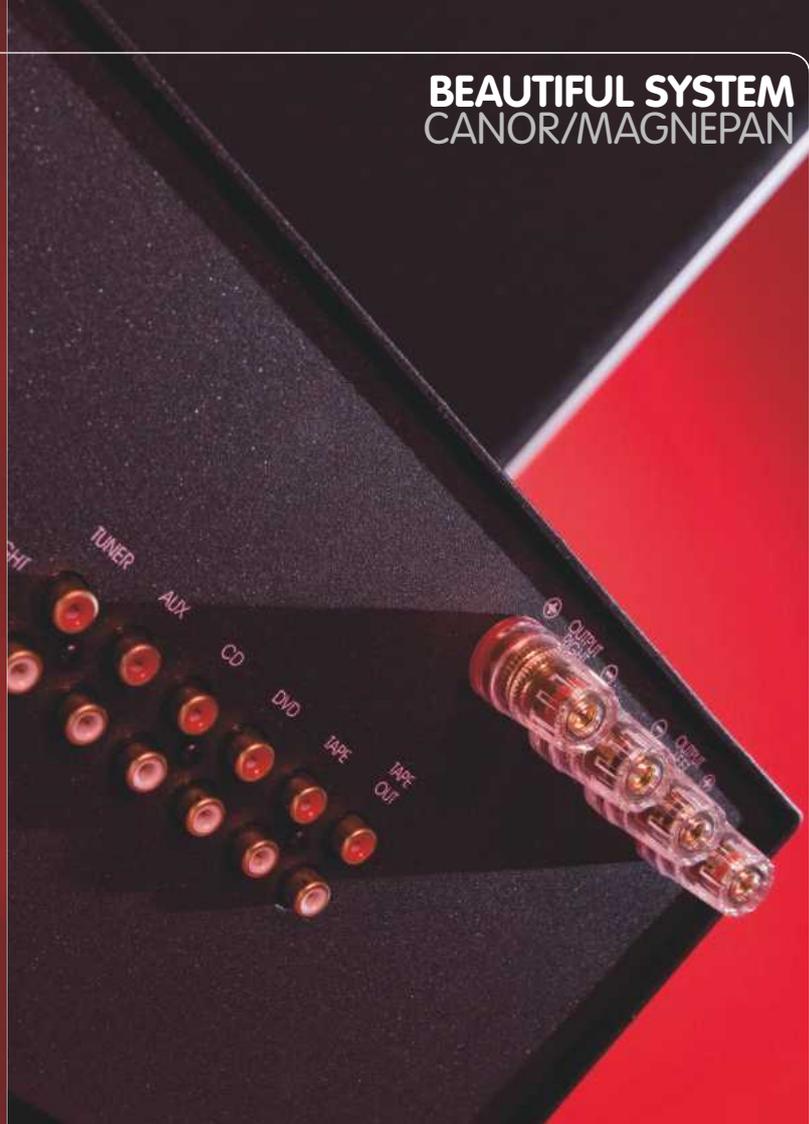
Above centre: The TP106 VR+ provides a frill-free masterclass in valve amp design

Above right: The dimensions might be sizable, but the fit and finish is top notch

elegant. The decision to use orange for lighting pays dividends too. The Canors look grown up in a way that electronics festooned with blue LEDs simply don't. As someone with rather less than 20/20 vision, the huge dot matrix display of the CD player that can actually be read across a room is welcome too. A final flourish is proved by the remote, which is a cut above the off-the-shelf efforts that small companies can find themselves stuck with. There is little point in any manufacturer trying to conceal something as large as the Magnepan, so I think that the very clean, almost minimalist lines of the MG 1.7 are the most sensible way of handling a speaker of this size.

Having it large

Into the 86dB sensitive Magnepan, the 55W of the TP106 VR+ might not sound like the most promising power plant and the internet is littered with tales of the trials of trying to make the dipole panels work in a normal room. In reality, although there is no escaping the fact that the Magnepans will look fairly prominent in a normal UK lounge (they certainly do in mine), in the case of this particular system I have experienced more positioning issues with some standmounts than I do with the panels. Furthermore, as Mr Hopkins



noted, there are some compelling reasons to go big.

The recipe for understanding the appeal of this system is simple. Choose a recording that needs a little scale to shine – in my case, I make a beeline for Daft Punk’s phenomenal *Tron Legacy* soundtrack – and then sit back and let this trio redefine what you can expect from home hi-fi.

The performance that results is vast and unconstrained in a way that is so removed from box speakers there is little real point in comparing them. As the panel in the MG 1.7 extends well past the seated ear height of anyone who isn’t a professional basketball player, there is genuine height to the performance. With orchestral performances in particular, the result is astonishing and lends a realism to the way this system sounds that is utterly compelling.

Keeping it real

Were this the only skill the system possesses it would still be fairly extraordinary, but there is rather more to it. The tonality of the setup is unfailingly believable, which further aids the sense of total immersion. Not only do voices appear from nowhere, they do so with exceptional reality. I’ve listened to the Canor amplifier before in a different system and the most noticeable trait is the complete



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absence of softness or warmth or indeed any of the usual vices you might expect from a valve amp. Instead, it uses those glowing bottles to present unfailingly real music with a soundstage that is something you can all but walk around in. Adding the CD2 to the mix only serves to emphasise these traits and elegantly demonstrates that Canor’s unusual combination of old and new is no mere marketing puff. When you combine this mastery of space with a speaker that already redefines scale, the result is captivating.

It is also something that captures the intimate as well as the grand. Smaller works like Fink’s *Distance and Time* are not rendered inappropriately huge, but still benefit from the near complete absence of the sense that sound is being beamed at you from two boxes. The closest parallel I can easily draw is that the presentation is like having everything performed at an intimate venue. There is a sense of the live that I’ve rarely experienced in other systems. I suspect that as well as the scale that comes out of the front, the fact that almost the same amount of sound is coming out of the back helps to give this impression, more accurately replicating the process by which sound reaches you.

As a final party piece, the speed with which dynamic swings are

handled is almost unsettlingly quick. With pretty much no mass to the drivers, the Magnepan is almost supernaturally fast. Going back to conventional dynamic speakers afterwards is disappointingly leaden by comparison.

In case you hadn’t worked it out, beyond the charm and appeal that all beautiful systems bring, this one has me scratching my head and looking at what passes for my personal finances wondering if there is any way I can keep this unique sound in my life.

Panel beaters

I have nowhere to put a pair of speakers this big and I suspect that there are limits to how useful they are for reviewing, but this formative experience with panels has been an intoxicating one. The experience has been boosted by a Canor duo that demonstrates just how good a well implemented pair of valve-based components can be. Beyond the individual superlatives, this is a system that makes all music an event. I cannot see how anyone could tire of how voices simply appear from the ether without any real sense of something so mundane as electronics being involved. The jury is still out on whether a big world needs a big bank, but the world of music certainly loves a big speaker ●