



SCANDIC CROWN

One of the top high-end speakers comes from Marten, based in Göteborg, Sweden, where the founding Olofsson brothers have just moved into new premises. STEREO went there to uncover their recipe for success.

developer Leif Olofsson tells us. His second name is „Mårten“, the little loop above the „a“ being blown up into the distinctive feature of the company logo.

A dream sound

And then comes one of these rare moments, in which you wish every Hi-Fi fan could get to sit down in this armchair for a second to experience the extraordinary listening experience. The sound is perfectly resolved, wide, deep and staggered to the ceiling, and appears entirely detached from the pair of speakers, around 110cm tall, which just stand there almost like spectators to the amazing performance. More than that, the presentation lives and breathes, is light as a feather, yet at the same time physical and substantial, and exudes an extremely appealing high-end aura.

A crowning achievement: the floor-standing Marten Mingus Quintet speaker (top), which was recently presented at the Munich High-End show, is certainly great, but the new listening and development room of the brothers Jörgen and Leif Olofsson, who are behind the design, takes the cake. No need to beat around the bush: in a space of about 70 sqm with a ceiling height of around 2.9 m, we had a rare listening experience.

This is the new home of Swedish speaker specialist Marten, which STEREO was the first HiFi magazine to visit – and we were welcomed with a blast to the ears, the signal flowing through a flagship MSB DAC/preamp to exquisite tube monobloc power amps, then via Jorma cables to the new Mingus. „At the moment I’m crazy about this recording of Mahler songs for organ and soprano, made by a Göteborg label in a church just around the corner“,

The Mahler recording really is first class, but when we played titles with which we were familiar they simply served to underline the class of the system and space. Tiny Islands' inspired adaption of the Taj-Mahal piece „When I Feel The Sea Beneath My Soul“ becomes downright hypnotic, the sounds rushing gently yet fleetly like darting fish below the surface, the timing wandering on the narrow ridge of relaxed concentration. Here, too, is the combination of supreme openness and transparency without masking effects, imbuing the music with tangible solidity and a bass as full as it is mobile.

As it turns out, the listening room – in which voices appear so present that you hardly have to raise your voice to be understood from the other end of the room – uses diffusers to scatter sound waves rather than absorbers to dampening them. The acoustics are correspondingly lively, and a great deal of effort was necessary to prevent the wandering sounds from blurring the sound: with a number of reversible elements available to fine-tune the character of the room, which can also be used for recordings.

This is primarily the workspace of Leif Olofsson, designed so he can really hear what his speakers can do.

Early passion for Hi-Fi

We enter the room through two heavy, insulated doors, in the small clearance between which you can see air-holes in the walls to the volumes on the side. The entire structure is a Helmholtz resonator, which the Swedish brothers have used to great effect to counter the 17 Hz resonance of their room. A second, identically constructed damper is installed in the front wall of the space: „This way we can ‚remove‘ any impurity in the lower registers,” says brother Jörgen. Responsible for administrative affairs at Marten, he is clearly also severely stricken by the Hi-Fi bug.

The brothers' passion and devotion has helped the company they founded in 1998 achieve an outstanding reputation, and their speakers have caught peoples' ears: today they export to around 25 countries, with Asia making up the main market. Buyers there especially appreciate the explicit clarity of Marten speakers, as well as their ‚personal' background: in nations were craftspeople mix with giant

The crossover of the Marten Django is soldered by hand (▶), the paint on the carbon housing of a Coltrane 3 is carefully polished (▼).



▲ Measurement and analysis programs are only used secondarily during development.



▲ Marten uses high-quality chassis with stiff, light ceramic membrane by the German specialist Accuton. Here, two deep/mid-rangers are being placed in a Miles5 (12,000 €/pair).

corporations, individual excellence seems to count even more.

Are masters born, or trained? Well, looking back, the path of Leif Olofsson appears to have been predestined: even before he was eight, he was fascinated by the stereo system of his brother, who's three years older. „I just caught fire“, he remembers, „and absolutely wanted one of those myself“. But money was tight, and so Leif wondered whether he could build himself speakers on the cheap: pre-fabricated kits bored him, so as a teen he began with his first designs and dug into the complex matter in both theory and practice.

„Considering I had no idea at the time, my first speakers, using an Audax mid/bass and Gamma ribbon tweeter, weren't all that bad“, Olofsson laughs. Obtaining a degree in electrical engineering, he

Two Martens, two characters: while the Django XL (right) combines its high-resolution tweeter with power, the Miles5 is very audiophile. ▶





▲ Marten's crossovers use selected high-quality components, including Mundorf capacitors and condensers from Danish company Jensen.

worked as project manager in residential construction and designed high-end kitchens, and only when he received a set of the first game-changing Accuton drivers with ceramic diaphragms, sometime in the mid-90s, did he find his way back for good: „The treble unified incredible resolution with the kind of dynamic range conventional drivers just couldn't achieve, while the midrange had a lack of distortion I'd never heard before.“

»I WANTED TO BUILD SPEAKERS EVER SINCE I WAS A KID!«

From this point onward, Leif Olofsson was filled with the desire to build the best speakers in the world based on those drivers, and finally founded the company in 1998 with the help of Jörgen and third brother Lars, who developed the design. To date, the connection between Marten and the German driver specialist remains tight and symbiotic: they exchange information and support each other in various ways.

The move to the new offices opened up new possibilities for the small team – in addition to the three brothers there are also four employees in production and administration – and they now have everything under one roof. In the shop, we watch as the inside of the housing of a Coltrane3 (right), made from highly rigid carbon, is covered in a layer of liquid damping material, and the black paint on the outside is polished to a high gloss. In addition, the crossovers are soldered together, using in particular components from German specialist Mundorf, and the ceramic drivers placed into a Miles 5.

All this is done with care and love: despite the eleven models they now produce, Marten has retained manufacturing

throughout the years. The monthly production is about 20 pairs, and this in-house construction comes at quite a hefty price. For instance, the new Mingu Quintet, equipped with Accuton's superb diamond tweeter, comes in at 48,000 Euro.

Leif Olofsson invests a lot of time and effort in development, listens to a lot of things, but not everything: „It's not possible to compare every capacitor on the market yourself“, he admits freely. He has a buddy for that who usually put him on the right track.

Elaborate, PC-based analysis procedures like the popular Klippel are a no-go at this Swedish company, Olofsson only using computers sparingly, and preferring to trust his experience and his hearing. This is how he found a breakthrough when Accuton presented their „CELL“ bass units, using a cone made

from a honeycomb shaped aluminum sandwich with a slight outward flare. They're now used in the „Coltrane“ and „Mingus“ series, and the

developer blushes with sheer excitement when he says „In connection with Accuton's other ‚CELL concept‘ drivers you get mostly time-homogenous emittance



▲ Leif MÅrten Olofsson with the Coltrane 3.



▲ The flagship Marten speaker is the 2m-tall Coltrane Supreme 2: selling for Å395,000/pr, it uses ten active drivers and no fewer than six passive ones

because all sounds are created on the same vertical axis“.

„This is not to be confused with correct timing“, he goes on, „since in all our large models, all drivers react to impulses in phase, while almost all other speakers on the market use a midrange driver of opposite polarity“. He says he is convinced this is good for clarity and long-term listening comfort because the brain isn't confronted with an unnatural mix of over- and underpressure in the rising sections.

But that's just one of many details playing their part in the quest for perfect speaker, and Marten feels its has got close with the ultimate Coltrane Supreme 2, at about € 395,000 per pair. But it's not all about the big picture: sometimes the devil is in the detail, such as the spikes and pucks the company uses for optimal stability and resonance control.

It seems you always have to do something special to win the crown in Scandinavian speaker production.

Matthias Böde