

hardware

marten

FormFloor loudspeakers

as reviewed by Victor Chavira



Speakers that incorporate ceramic drivers tend to be robustly constructed and, as a result, very expensive to manufacture. The ceramic driver's extremely low levels of coloration and instantaneous transient response demand meticulous attention to enclosure materials and engineering as exemplified by my one hundred pound, double walled Marten Miles Twos. Although no longer in production, lessons learned from the Miles 2 led to the development of the highly acclaimed carbon fiber Coltrane and "if you have to ask" Coltrane Supreme speaker system.

The FormFloors were created to deliver Marten's precision and transparency to a broader market and range of listening environments. With their triangular prism shape, the FormFloors look like they came from an alternate universe where people drive three wheel cars and homes have three walls. My exquisitely finished piano cherry samples were very pleasing to look at. No computer display could possibly do justice to the richly grained veneers and high gloss luster of the triangular towers. The piano black versions must be stunning. Three sided towers might seem unconventional at first but what more efficient way is there to reduce the negative effects of cabinet resonance than to remove one of the panels? The results are

immediately apparent. What the two way FormFloors lack in terms of low end impact of the twin ported three-driver Miles 2, they more than make up for in image transparency and depth of perception.

Setting up the FormFloors correctly is critical to achieving the maximum level of performance. This procedure can also seem unconventional if one is accustomed to measuring distances from the back panel because the FormFloors have no back. In general, FormFloors were placed where my Marten Miles 2 stood previously. Then, I spent about 90 minutes listening to familiar tracks of music and experimenting with various degrees of toe in, always careful with the measuring tape as to not to come into contact with the speaker's luxurious finish. About 25 degrees of toe in seemed to offer the best imaging and field of sound.



As mentioned above, the Marten FormFloor's image transparency and depth of perception are truly exceptional. Try this experiment with your speakers or any speaker in this market sector. Turn off all the lights until the room is nearly black. Sit in your listening seat and press play on the remote. Then try to locate the speakers in the room. The FormFloors simply vanish into the black as the room is filled with layer upon layer of musical flavors. Handel's "Musette" from *Il Pastor Fido* as performed by the English Baroque Soloists directed by John Eliot Gardiner was panoramically present like a rear projection movie across the entire width and height of my front living room wall. Delicate acoustic outlines of strings and recorder floated in spaces before me totally unassociated from the speakers on the floor.

"Behind the Lines: III, Cortège" by Cecil Coles as played by the BBC Scottish Symphony conducted by Martyn Brabbins is my must hear selection for this review. This music is epic and emotionally engaging. The piece begins with massive drum roll on tympani that vibrates the pit of your stomach. A forlorn muted horn and solitary snare in the distance marks the slow steady march of weary soldiers returning from the front. The contrast between the somber strings and big brassy fanfare is evocative of Edward Elgar's finest work. In the absence of boxy cabinet distortions, the FormFloors impeccably illustrated the depth and scale of this orchestral music. Bass performance is generous for a seven inch woofer in a modestly sized enclosure. The bottom port has a resonance of 34dB. Electric bass sounded dynamic and punchy as in "Diaraby" from *Talking Timbuktu* by Ali Farka Toure and Ry Cooder. The impulse and rhythm of the fretless instrument was felt intensely throughout my 13 by 20 foot living room. Add a subwoofer and set it to lowest possible crossover point for that final tinge in the bottom of your feet.

One of the most rewarding attributes of the FormFloors is its seamless integration between the ceramic woofer and ribbon tweeter. Ribbon tweeters sometimes have the side effect of calling undue attention to themselves by emphasizing transient edges, brightness, or unnatural overtones. This is not the case with the FormFloors. Rather, the listener is treated to effortless high frequency extension, clarity, and ambiance. Listen to Ibrahim Ferrer's "Guateque Campesino" from *Buena Vista Social Club Presents Ibrahim Ferrer*. The late Cuban crooner begins the song unaccompanied before rhythm section chimes in with a cymbal that seems to be stroked by a feather so light and airy the musician's touch. The soundstage extends back and beyond the confines of my listening environment. The instruments and voices occupy defined locations in space. "Excuse me, Mr. Ferrer. I need to get around you to adjust the volume."

Piano music also benefited from the FormFloor's transparency and dynamic responsiveness. Schubert's Impromptu number 2 in A flat from K935 as played by Aldo Ciccolini is musical bliss. The Marten's speed and agility match the performer's fleet fingers, dynamic contrasts, and emotional affect. Compare Aldo's interpretation with Andras Schiff's performance on You Tube. The FormFloor's musical clarity of line and natural harmonic tonality allows one to appreciate the piano and performer rather than the speakers and the system.

I love guitar. Sylvain Luc is a fine French jazz musician I recently discovered. In 2000 he recorded a trio session called Sud. For acoustic nylon string guitar, bass, and small drum kit, the trio's rendition of "Night in Tunisia" swings hard! Sylvain strums and picks Dizzy Gillespie's most famous musical line as drummer Andre Ceccarelli punctuates phrases with sharp rim shots, cymbal strikes, and tom frills. Bassist Jean-Marc Jafet aptly builds and supports the tunes rhythmic foundation. The Marten FormFloors expertly embody the energy and dynamic interplay of the trio. In fact, the speaker's deep transparency and clear palette allowed me to appreciate something new in all I guitar based music I frequently listen to.

The *King's Speech* uses the second movement from Beethoven's Symphony Number 7 as a dramatic device in the film's climax scene when King George courageously broadcasts his country's rationale for entering into World War II. Terry Davies' abridged version of the movement is measured, deliberate, and perfectly synchronized to the drama unfolding on the screen. In contrast, Herbert Von Karajan's performance with the Berliner Philharmoniker on DG is more fluid and melodic in pace. After the initial theme of the Allegretto is developed, a counter melody is played by clarinet and echoed by muted French horn about 3'20". The clarinet sounds absolutely woody, alive, and hauntingly beautiful. The orchestra sounded so massive, layered, and full of rich instrumental tones. The Marten FormFloors give your ears much to appreciate.

In closing, as a long time Miles II owner, I applaud Marten for packing so much performance in a smaller lighter product. The no longer in production M2 continues to be a phenomenal speaker. However, the FormFloor's near absence of cabinet distortions and deeply transparent high frequency extension have the advantage. Conversely, the FormFloors unusual appearance does take some time to get used to. Keeping in mind, though, the many bizarre members of the ugly speaker hall of shame, the FormFloors are geometrically beautiful. If you are in search of a speaker with exceedingly clear voice and dynamic force to fill a medium sized room with panoramic sound, put the Marten FormFloors at the top of your list. Highly recommended! **Victor Chavira**

FormFloor

Retail: \$6500 a pair

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