

Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand Loudspeaker

by Chris Thomas

The downside in selecting audio equipment through a shop demonstration is that you end up choosing on the basis of limited time and material. In the case of speakers, some models just jump out at you immediately and some don't.

That's the way of things when buying in comparative demonstrations; you prefer A to B. In many ways reviews start like shop dems. First impressions count and even taking warm up, run-in and system changes into account, often when you hear something exceptional, it lets you know from very early on. But not always, as there are creepers too; bits of kit that slip under the radar. They sound alright (but nothing really special) for quite a while and then, slowly, you begin to realise that you can and are listening to them for extended periods.

Now they seem quite a lot better than you first thought. You explore them musically and ask more and more questions of them. You use them in the right system, with a wide range of music, over a period of time and your ear tunes itself to them. Listening has crossed an invisible line between work and pleasure, and once you are listening for pleasure and not because there is a copy-date fast approaching, things sort themselves out in your head and producing that review becomes easy. And when you have done all your listening without knowing the price (which is the way I ideally like to work) and then you find that it is about a half of what you imagined, then you have some very good news for your readers. So, let me introduce you to the diminutive, but beautifully formed Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand and let the good times roll.

This is the smallest speaker in Vienna Acoustics' range. It seems a

rather conservative design but a closer look shows some interesting features and an attention to cabinet detail that belies their outward simplicity. This is a two-way bass reflex loaded stand-mount with 4 Ohm nominal impedance. Bass is handled by a 150mm transparent coned driver made from Vienna Acoustics' proprietary X3P cone material. Mounted above it is a custom designed 27mm hand-coated, Ferro fluid cooled, silk domed tweeter.

Unusually, this is mounted on a wedge shaped block that sits in the flared throat of the bass reflex port.

This has to be one of the most innovative arrangements I've come across. It makes for a tighter driver configuration with improved phase coherence. It also allows the tweeter a large venting chamber and a practically free-field mounting. I have always preferred small forward facing ports as they leave the speaker less prone to rear-wall effects. The wedge behind the tweeter divides the airflow into two smaller passages and there is none of the bloated chuffing that I hear from single big bore vents on some smaller speakers.

But it's the cabinet that gives this speaker that extra touch of class. They are really solid and their finish is truly exemplary, with beautiful quality veneers, rosewood in this case. I've seen speakers this size that cost well over £3K that weren't as immaculately finished.

There's a detachable grill built on an aluminium frame with a wedge-shaped central spine to avoid reflections. It has less sonic impact than most but I still preferred to use the speaker without them in place. The Haydn Grand is fully shielded and single wired.

Vienna Acoustics do make a stand for the Haydn Grand but as these were not supplied for the review I tried them on my favourite Quadraspire acrylics and found that they are an

absolutely perfect fit. Room placement is straight-

forward. You won't

need any help from the walls for bass quantity or quality as this is the Haydn

Grand's real strength and where that clever port arrangement

really pays off. With most small speakers, especially at this sort of size and price point, you can almost hear that the designer trying to wring

every last ounce of bass from the cabinet, going beyond what the bass driver naturally produces and into the world of internal cabinet colourations and oversized ports. The Haydn Grand is the very opposite. You will be more than impressed with the strength, weight and extension available but even more so with the tautness and control that these little speakers possess when driven properly.

Tonally they are evenly balanced although with a tweeter that isn't particularly extended by the latest standards they can seem slightly on the softer side. But what they do



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► have is a notable tonal richness and a full-bodied view of the music right the way down through the mid-band, as befits their name. This generous and colourful tonality is quite surprising and expands the Haydn Grand's musical range considerably, especially on those instruments that small speakers can traditionally struggle with. Piano and violin don't suffer from any leading edge clatter while note development is full-bodied, well focussed but with remarkable colour and harmonic warmth. It is encouraging to hear a speaker at this price which can show how the harmonics of a strummed acoustic guitar hang in the air around the instrument and beat against each other before gently decaying; or the way that a single undamped piano chord lives through several colours during its short life.

Part of this is due of course to its decent response to transient input. That moment when the musician energises his instrument needs to be believable and the Haydn does pretty well here. While this is not the finest tweeter I have heard and ultimately lacks a degree of initial bite and progression at this critical moment, it is never harsh or brittle and again represents a near perfect compromise when price is taken into account. Even under musical duress it maintains its composure and focus. It will add a smeared sheen to really top-notch ancillaries, but you can push them quite a long way before their potential begins to run out.

They create a deep and stable soundstage but it is not of the finely etched variety. Get their positioning right and they provide a solid-built wall of sound without too much happening beyond the speakers' outer edges. Toe-in

was critical in my room and required subtle adjustment every time I changed the amplifier, CD player or cables. The better they got, the less toe-in I needed.

To wring the best out of the Haydn Grand you are going to need to sit them on the end of a good system. Like any



quality speaker they won't respond well to a system that hasn't been thought out properly and installed with care. Any harshness in the chain will not go down well with that tweeter and any vagueness or softness in the bass or mid will result in a plumpish mess. But, get it right and the results are intriguing. Rhythmically, they might not immediately grab you and they lack a little of that small-speaker sharpness and

instant acceleration, but they are remarkably fluid and musically progressive. The more you listen and grow used to their slightly low-impact ways, the greater your respect for them grows as their flowing agility becomes more apparent than their sheer dynamics. I couldn't help thinking that if only that tweeter had a touch more eloquence about it and some more "air" and ambience how much better things



would be. But, as so often with the Haydn Grand, their finer qualities had me comparing them to small speakers from a much higher price range, like the Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor or the Reference 3A Dulcets, or even my Micro Utopia Bes. Which is quite a compliment to the Vienna Acoustics.

I ended up really liking and admiring these Vienna Acoustics speakers. They deserve better accompanying equipment than their price suggests. They enjoy power too, taut power that is. They will also need a decent set of stands and I can strongly recommend the Quadraspires. But, for me, their main attraction is the tonal strength and sheer colour that they bring to music, and that is more than a little unusual at this price. It makes listening to them for hours on end a relaxing yet still an involving experience. What criticisms I have really must be seen within the context of their astonishing price and an appearance and performance that suggest they cost so much more. I can't wait to see if Vienna Acoustics can repeat the trick with a larger cabinet at a higher price. ➤

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Two-way reflex loudspeaker
Driver Complement:	27mm coated silk dome 150mm X3P bass driver
Impedance:	4 Ohms
Sensitivity:	89dB
Bandwidth:	42-20000 Hz (±3dB)
Dimensions(WxHxD):	174 x 361x 265mm
Weight:	10kg ea.
Finishes:	Maple, Cherry, Rosewood Piano Black + £100
Price:	£795

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