

## Review: Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand Reference Floor Standing Speakers – Just Grand

July 7, 2021 Michael Lavorgna HiFi Reviews

Some people look at a speaker and see an accumulation of parts — drivers, crossovers, and cabinets. From this perspective, you can be fooled into thinking that a few photos and a spec sheet go a long way in revealing how a speaker will perform.



This point of view is assbackwards.

In the case of Vienna Acoustics, the company's founder and Chief Designer Peter Gansterer creates his ideal speaker for each model, which becomes the reference against which production models are measured to exacting standards. These tight tolerances demand customizing crossovers to perfectly match each tweeter's measured performance, which are sourced from Scan Speak. Tweeters are measured and sorted into four to seven categories of performance,

some are rejected and returned, so that crossover production can be fine-tuned for each driver group's specific response. Like I said, exacting.

The Beethoven Baby Grand Reference are part of the Vienna Acoustics Grand Concert Series, which sits below their flagship Klimt and Imperial lines, and above the Strauss in-walls. The Baby Grand are a bass reflex design, and feature a trio of the company's Spidercone drivers in a 3-way configuration, using one 6" midrange and two 6" woofers, paired with a 1.1" hand coated silk dome tweeter.

The company explains the reasoning behind their patented Spidercone approach, which was developed



specifically for the Beethoven Series:

*Not only developed in, but also produced near, Vienna, spider cones constitute a significant breakthrough in performance. Never before have we heard drivers of this size (7 inches) produce such prodigious bass response. Their unbelievable stiffness has been achieved by designing axial and radial reinforcement ribs that cover the cone like a spider web. The precise size, number, and location of these stiffening elements was derived through computerized Finite Element Analysis. Production by injection moulding demanded an expensive tool, but it pays: these cones move as a perfect piston, achieving the ultimate goal.*

The Spidercone drivers feature a flat composite cone, a combination of thermoplastics and polypropylene the company calls X4P, which surrounds an inverted coated fabric dome. Think light, stiff, and fast. Vienna Acoustics specifies the Baby Grand Reference's impedance at 4 Ohms with a 89dB Sensitivity, and they call for a minimum of 40 Watts of amplification. Frequency response is a claimed 33 Hz – 23 kHz, and the Baby Grands' slim profile at just a hair over 7" wide and 40" tall lend them a modest in-room appearance.



The real wood veneer over MDF cabinets, offered in Premium Rosewood, Cherry (like the review pair), Piano Black, and Piano White, are beautifully made with rounded front and back corners and furniture-grade solidity. The speakers sit on metal bases that are bit wider than the speaker proper, and include spikes for firmly grounding the Baby Grand. Protective metal cups are also supplied. A single pair of substantial binding posts reside near the bottom of each speaker's backside, and magnetic fabric grills are provided for those so inclined.

**Even a Baby Grand can be grand**

Fine tuning speaker placement, in room or even in Barn, is an exacting science. I use a combination of measurements, using a Stanley Powerlock, eyeballs, and ears to find the right place for speakers to sit. While I know roughly where most speakers will be happiest in Barn, the final placement takes some time, and I prefer to work in the dark. YMMV.



When I got the Baby Grands properly situated, they disappeared. Completely. This isn't hyperbole, this is an apt description of the Baby Grand's ability to project music into the barn in such a way as the source of said music was not attached to the speaker. I attribute this level of disappearing act to a number of qualities inherent in the Baby Grand, as well as the barn's ability to allow this to happen. In the end, the Baby Grand sat about 6' from the front wall, a bit over 4' from the side walls, which had them 7.5' apart, measured on center.

Since no passive speaker can sing alone, I coupled the Baby Grand with a number of amplifiers including the Ayre EX-8 Integrated Hub, Rotel RA-1592MKII Integrated Amplifier, Marantz Model 30 Integrated Amplifier, the Schiit Ragnarok 2 Nexus Integrated Amplifier, and the Parasound JC 5

Power Amplifier mated to the Marantz as preamp. The totaldac d1-tube DAC/Streamer was responsible for sending music to the amps. AudioQuest cabling was in play throughout.



I'm going to begin with my favorite. The Beethoven Baby Grand's loved, and I mean loved, the Parasound JC 5 amplifier (using the Marantz Model 30 as preamp). This combination, with the totaldac in play, made

<https://youtu.be/wef8pfFnCK8>

music that was at once effortless, powerful, and sublime. Bonnie “Prince” Billy and Matt Sweeney get it going and then some on *Superwolves* and the Baby Grand powered by the Parasound had the boys taking up some physical real estate in barn. If I played that album again, I’d have to charge them rent. I’m talking about a sound image that is as dimensional as the real thing, as rock solid as music reproduction gets, all with a sweetness and subtlety that poured music’s varied voices into the barn like the damn broke.



<https://youtu.be/igP1YW49-g8>

When it came time to test for crazy atmosphere and delicacy chops, I queued up “Playing At The End of the Universe (Orchestre univers Version)” from Labell’s *Orchestre univers* and the Baby Grand / Parasound held onto every last bit of sparkle, twinkle, thump, and thud like a firefly in a bottle. Effortless dynamics make me relaxed, pensive, and apprehensive simultaneously, which is where we want to be when listening to some music. Relaxed, at the edge of your seat.



<https://youtu.be/8dYSQoDkdgE>

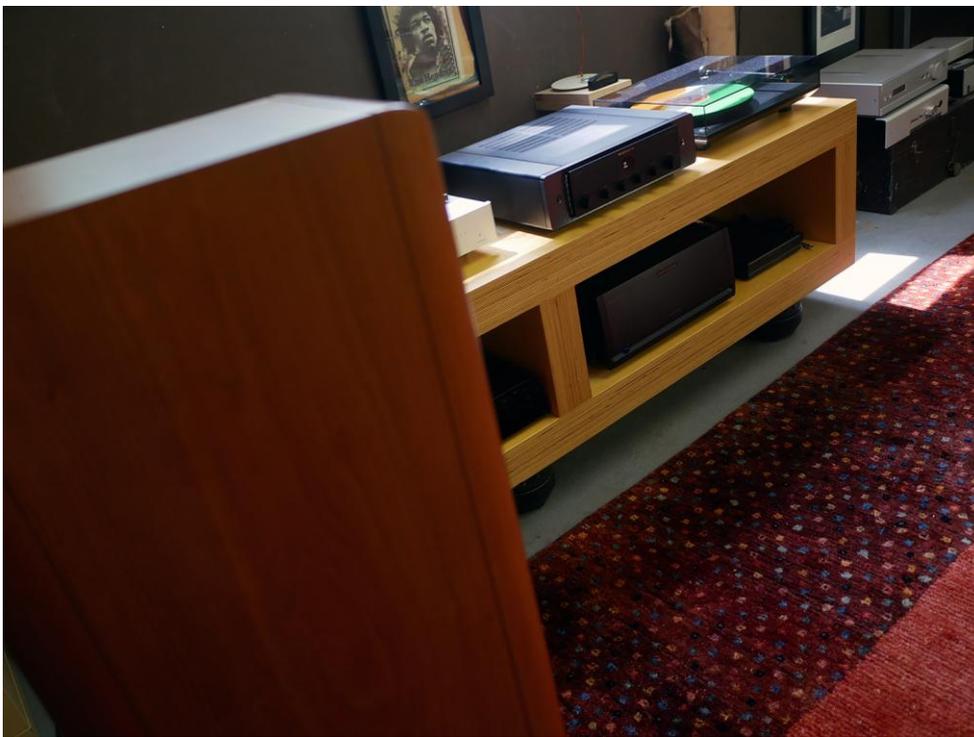
Moving to something with bit more oomph, OK a lot more oomph, Marie Davidson’s “Shaky Leg (Cristobal U and The Mole Remix)” from *Perte d’identité*, her stunning debut from 2014, is all whomp and bop, with synths, percussion, and Davidson’s vocals ghosting over the top and the Baby Grand / Parasound pairing delivered dance-inducing slamming dynamics. African Head Charge’s “God Is Great” from *Songs of Praise* features one of my favorite intros of all time, with voice over field

recorded chants, percussion, and then Bam!, that lovely, deep, elastic bass slam says hello. You want to listen to this music as loud as loud gets, and let the power and ritual shake you to your very socks, and the Baby Grand passed the audition with flying colors.

My second favorite Baby Grand dance partner from the group was the Ayre EX-8. While the Ayre did not offer the same level of unrestrained ease and slam as the Parasound/Marantz, it did deliver a very nicely lit up, turn-on-a-dime sound from the Baby Grand’s. With this slight sonic shift to a focus on speed and upper mid on up sounds, Aldous Harding’s quirky alluring vocals on “Horizon” from *Party* came alive in barn with a lovely spotlit quality, placing her well out front, center stage where she’s meant to be. The Ayre also showed off the Baby Grand’s ability to dig way into micro nuance, revealing the importance even the slightest shifts in tone and texture can have on conveying meaning.

The rest of the amplification gang, including the Rotel RA-1592MKII, Marantz Model 30, and the Schiit Ragnarok 2 made for OK pairings with the Baby Grand. To my ears, the Rotel made everything sound a bit reticent and a tad dark, the Marantz was a bit punchier but lacked the excitement of the Parasound and Ayre, and the Schiit offered a drier, thinner sound from the Baby Grand.

Here’s the thing — when shopping for hifi gear, we tend to focus on the piece of kit we intend to buy when listening to a system. Someone intent on coming home with some new speakers, for example, may very well listen to a pair of Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand Reference Floor Standing Speakers and think — “Yea, they’re OK.” Never giving thought to the accompanying gear or room. And this is clearly a mistake because, as we know, passive speakers have no sound of their own, and the accompanying amplification leaves its mark on the final outcome. Come what may.



Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying the Baby Grand are some fussy, difficult to drive speakers. They are, like most every other quality speaker I've heard, happiest when mated with like quality. To put it another way, the Baby Grand's are revealing of what's upstream which is exactly what you want from a loudspeaker. Otherwise, we'd be talking about a speaker with such a

strong voice of its own, it would drown out everything else.



I spent a few weeks just grooving along with the Baby Grands. Nina Simone, Count Basie, Françoise Hardy, Jef Gilson, Gregory Isaacs, Senyawa, and yea, even some Ludwig Van. I am partial to the Quartetto Italiano's take on Beethoven's Late String Quartets for all of their flourish, bravado, and vibrato. They are just so damned dramatic! Most of this swinging was done with the Parasound at the helm because this combination was just, so, good. My best guess is the Parasound HINT 6 Halo

Integrated Amplifier (see review) would make for a friendlier on the wallet pairing, and seeing as the Baby Grand do enjoy some real quality power, I'd add the Bryston B135 Cubed Integrated Amplifier (see review) to the list of possible perfect partners.

Since no review is complete without comparison, let's talk about the GoldenEar Triton Reference Towers (see review), which cost \$9,998 or about \$500 less than the Baby Grand. As I said in my review of the Triton Reference, they offer a lot of speaker for the money. With their self-powered subwoofers, they reach down to an earth shaking 12Hz!, while offering the accompanying amplification a relatively easy load.



As you can read and probably surmise, the Baby Grand are no match for the Triton Towers when it comes to full range power. Sheer brute force. While the Triton Reference are no slouch when it comes to music's subtler moments, which are imbued with tone, texture, and color, I found that the Baby Grand's offered a more delicate, nimble, and nuanced view into my music. They clearly can't go as low as the Tritons, they don't make music on the same scale, but they do everything they do so damn near exquisitely well.

I will also add that the Triton Reference were happier with more amplification partners, but my favorite was the Ayre EX-8 which brought out the best from them. When it comes to picking a winner, I'm at a loss and I have both speakers right here near me. It seems to me that a final choice will come down to individual preference, which is colored as much by things other than sound. Speakers, more so than the other hifi stuff, live with us, out in our rooms. So looks matter, and as we all know, a beautiful speaker is in the eye of the beholder. I also think some people like to dig into, and dig, the company behind the product, the story, the human side, which again has little to do with sound, but may add to pride of ownership just the same.

Since some people may find this uncertain reality maddening, the “Just tell me what to buy dammit!” types, if you want that answer, just look at the pictures and specs. Leave the listening and experiencing to others.



## Just Grand

**A**t the end of the day, I just wanted to sit down with the Baby Grand and listen more. Just for the fun it. Just to hear my music presented in such a captivating way. That’s about as high praise as I can think of.

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### Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand Reference Floor Standing Speakers

Price: \$10,495

#### Specifications

**Impedance:** 4 Ohms

**Frequency response:** 33 – 23000 Hz

**Sensitivity:** 89 dB

**Recommended Amplifier:** 40 – 300 Watts

**Drive Units:**

6” Woofer (2) Composite Cone: Flat X4P Spidercone with recessed fabric center-cone

6” Midrange Composite Cone: Flat X4P Spidercone with recessed fabric center-cone

Tweeter 1.1” Hand Coated Vienna Acoustics Silk Dome

**Bass System:** Bass Reflex

**Bass Function:** Impulse Optimizing QB 3 (Quasi-Butterworth)

**Crossover Components:** Polypropylene Capacitors, 1% tolerance, Coils 0,7% tolerance, Midrange/Tweeter Section Air Coils, Special Powder Core for Bass Section, Metal Film Resistors 1% tol., Inductance Free

**Crossover Function:** 3-way, 6 dB and 12 dB Bessel

**Weight per Pair:** 52 kg / 115 lbs

**Dimensions:** (W x H x D) inches 7,2 x 40,4 x 13,1 (without base assembly) | 10,2 x 43,1 x 13,1 (with base assembly)

**Dimensions** (W x H x D) mm: 182 x 1025 x 330 mm (without base assembly) | 260 x 1095 x 330 mm (with base assembly)

**Finishes:** Premium Rosewood, Cherry, Piano Black, Piano White

**Company Website:** [Vienna Acoustics](#)

**North American Distributor:** [Bluebird Music](#)