

# Vienna Acoustics Schoenberg Loudspeaker

by Roy Gregory

Vienna Acoustics have built an enviable reputation based on a range of exquisitely finished box speakers, each named after one of the great classical composers. But the quality of the finish and the conservative styling has tended to distract from the attention to detail and innovation that's gone into the designs. Now we have something of a departure, in the futuristically shaped and appropriately named Schoenberg, a tall, slim speaker with clear designs on the lifestyle market. Indeed, it comes with smaller siblings using the same clamshell cabinetry to offer centre and surround options, complete with some of the neatest and best executed mounting hardware I've ever seen.

But there's far more here than a pretty face and a few well engineered fixings, and the first shock comes when you pick up the speakers. If you are used to the flimsy construction of built to a price 'designer' speakers, the weight of the Schoenberg will come as a surprise. As will the obvious substance and rigidity of the cabinet. Built around two curved and carefully radiused aluminium plates, these speakers are seriously solid. The almost airfoil section that results has the effect of looking a lot slimmer than it actually is. In fact, the two 110mm bass drivers are full depth units built onto substantial cast baskets with equally impressive

magnets attached: No puny slimline drivers here.

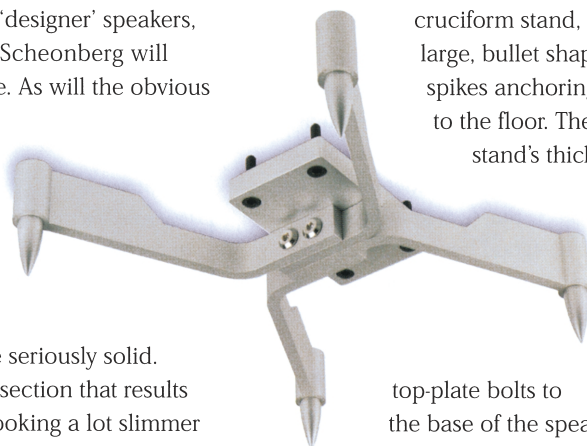
Likewise, the small faceplate of the soft-dome tweeter conceals a single point fixing and flying leads and plugs that connect into their own little sockets. Blown tweeter? Changing it is a matter of moments involving a single allen key. The black rubberised bodywork that joins the clamshell together is heavy and well damped, the vertical infills on each side carrying the twin reflex ports and the single set of speaker terminals respectively. The lack of a bi-wire option isn't a cost cutting exercise. It merely reflects Vienna Acoustics' preference for single wiring.

The speaker is supported on an extremely rigid cruciform stand, with large, bullet shaped spikes anchoring it to the floor. The stand's thick top-plate bolts to the base of the speaker with four large allen bolts, increasing the overall air of solidity. Indeed, once placed, for such a tall and apparently

slim enclosure, the Schoenberg is astonishingly stable.

Listening to the Schoenbergs is an equally surprising experience. They reward your efforts in lugging them into place with a rich, weighty presence that once again belies their slender appearance. But the bass power and substance isn't the kind of bloated, exaggerated, subterranean, single note excess that typifies cheaper floorstanders with AV pretensions. It's got pitch, shape and drive to compare with its more conventional competition, and a refreshing freedom from the bands of thickened opacity that infect the lower reaches of too many MDF cabinets. That clean, uncluttered sound carries over to the rest of the range, the mid-band clarity and treble integration making the speaker sound much smaller than it is – in the manner of a mini-monitor.

The result is an agile, direct sound that's underpinned with sufficient authority to give it a real sense of purpose. Eleanor McEvoy's carefully crafted and beautifully sung songs can sound lazy simply because of their sparse instrumentation and subtle rhythmic patterns. But play them on the Schoenbergs and you'll soon realise just how much feeling and insistent direction drives them along. It's not the songs that are lazy, it's the pace and bass timing of systems that should do better. ►



● EQUIPMENT REVIEW

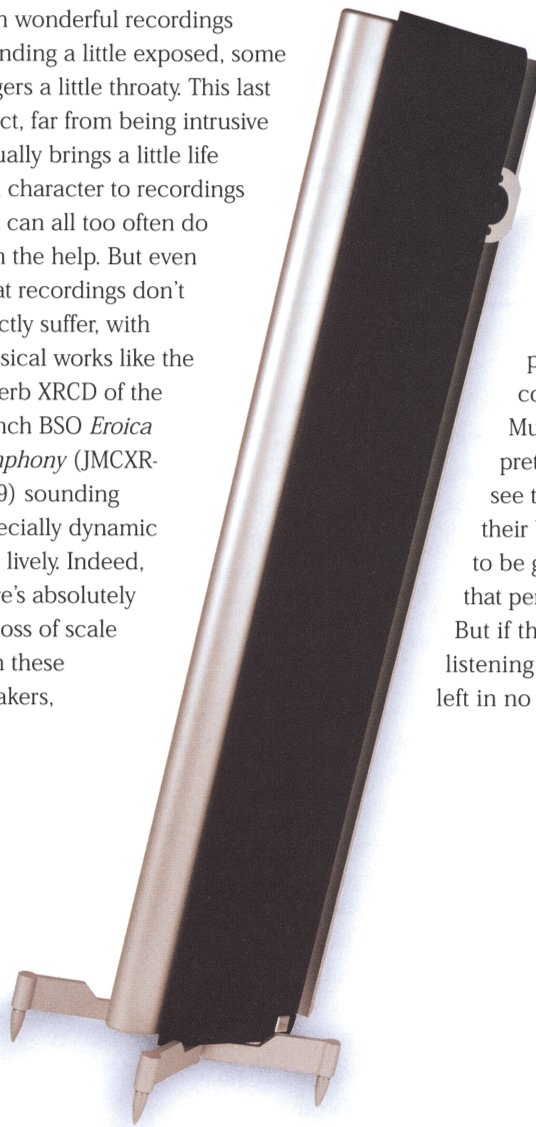
► The ease with which the Vienna Acoustics speaker delivers musical energy and delineates the tiny shifts in level that carry the expressive input of the musicians make it sound far more efficient than its specifications suggest. It's an indicator as to just how rigid the Schoenberg's structure really is. It actually sounds as if the energy you put in comes straight out as music – all of it.



Even dense, anthemic tracks like 'Forgiven' (Echo and the Bunnymen, *Evergreen*) don't phase it, retaining their stately pace and momentum without getting bogged down.

If there's a flaw to the Schoenbergs' presentation it's that their directness

and immediacy can leave less than wonderful recordings sounding a little exposed, some singers a little throaty. This last effect, far from being intrusive actually brings a little life and character to recordings that can all too often do with the help. But even great recordings don't exactly suffer, with classical works like the superb XRCD of the Munch BSO *Eroica Symphony* (JMCXR-0019) sounding especially dynamic and lively. Indeed, there's absolutely no loss of scale with these speakers,



unlike so many lifestyle products that rely on inadequate sub-woofers to deliver what weight and authority they can muster.

Stereo, under-pinned by that firm foundation, is good but only if you get

the toe-in exactly right, which kind of sums up this speaker's biggest problem. It looks like one thing but it's actually quite another. It looks like a lifestyle product but it performs as a serious piece of hi-fi, and is just as demanding as any other top notch speaker.

The Schoenbergs' clever cabinets give them striking looks as well as a serious sonic advantage over equivalently priced MDF boxes. That benefit is clear in their clean and uncluttered musical directness, their presence, drama and communicative quality. Much more than just a pretty face (and you should see the tiny Berg model!) their big problem is going to be getting people to take that performance seriously. But if they get as far as listening then they'll be left in no doubt.



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2431 FIFTH ST. BERKELEY, CA 94710  
TEL: 510.843.4500 . FAX: 510.843.7120  
WWW.SUMIKOAUDIO.NET