

# Vienna Acoustics Strauss

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PRICE	£4000
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**The Vienna Acoustics Strauss is a speaker I fell in love with when I first saw it at a show last year. Since then, I've been trying to get opportunity to review it, which fortunately presented itself later.**

The Strauss looks a little unconventional at first sight, due to its trapezoidal shape from the side, while the front elevation presents what looks like a slender floor-standing speaker, albeit one standing 190mm x 1140mm x 410mm (w/d) and tipping the scales at 54.5kg (120lbs) each. With a midrange and treble driver array on its beautifully veneered 25mm thick baffle, you have to look at the side to find the bass driver, a 280mm unit which is side mounted to allow a slimmer baffle, a design choice claimed to reduce diffraction from the mid and tweeter, to allow more precise imaging with fewer spurious reflections. Around the rear, again a 25mm thick panel, a single port is located above the binding posts; very substantial items that certainly accommodated any cable I had.

My normal reference system was used, fronted by the Basis Gold Debut Standard with Graham 2.0 arm and Benz Glider cartridge, feeding a Klyne system 7FX 3.5 phono stage. Digits were provided by a Pioneer CLD-925 Laserdisc player (used solely as a transport) supported by a Musical Fidelity A308CR CD player, used both as a stand-alone CD player and digital transport, with Perpetual Technologies P1-A & P3-A Signature with Monolithic PSU handling upsampling and DAC duties. Amplification was provided by a Briston 14B-SST and 3B-SST, joined by a PS Audio HCA-2, with pre-amp duties carried out by Krell KRC-3 and PS-Audio PCA-2. MartinLogan SL-3 and Totem Hawk speakers were used for comparison. Cables were provided by XLO, Chord Company and Synergistic Research, with all mains filtered by an Isotek 2K Cube and Substation. Mains cables were all Isotek Elite and main distribution was via a Music Works block. All equipment was supported on RDC Aspect racks.

Set-up with these speakers was complicated by the side-firing bass driver, so I had to decide

## Unconventional styling but astonishing response from these Viennese whirls

whether this should fire inwards or outwards. Its performance was further affected by the distance the speaker was located from the side walls. After a little work, I quickly decided that the bass drivers had to face outwards in my room, as the bass had been turning into a congealed mess that just sat between the speakers when they faced inwards. They finished up 640mm from the side walls and 790mm from the front wall to the rear of the speakers. The next problem I faced was what to drive them with. I had the PS Audio PCA-2 at the time, so I decided to see how this speaker would fare with a switching amp. The results were very good, but the bass was a little wild, not boomy, but low notes from bass guitar, piano and double bass sounded like they were running into each other without the decay being allowed to run its course. After dancing around the room with the speaker for a while, thinking it was a speaker/room interaction, I tried changing amps to the 3B-SST. That fixed it. Suddenly the bass tightened up and the Briston grabbed hold of the bass drivers and they sang. Now I could really hear what this design could do.

Starting with The Dave Brubeck Quartet *Time Out* on Classic Records, the track 'Strange Meadow Lark' displayed an immediate shift in emphasis on each note being played. On the MartinLogan SL-3 the leading edge is very clear with a well-rounded envelope of the note portrayed until it decays. With the Strauss you not only hear the initial hammer hit the string, but the body resonance of the piano and the sound board within the piano are very clearly defined from the very lowest notes up. For me, this greatly enhanced the feeling of being in the room with the instrument – and a difficult to portray instrument at that. Moving from the piano, the drum work is portrayed with exceptional clarity and dynamic range. Not only do you hear the initial impact on the drum skin, but I became aware of the sound of the drum reflecting off the right hand wall of the studio. I confirmed this with my Stax Lambda Signatures and it was on the



recording; previous speakers had just never shown it before, such was the speed of this design. The imaging of the drum kit also deserves special mention as the location on the sound stage was absolutely solid and consistent, and the instrument was perceived as being the right size without being bloated laterally or stretched to Cinemascope proportions. The space and air around each performer was also outstanding, giving that real feeling of being able to walk around the performers on the stage. On this point the stage itself was solid across a very wide window, allowing you to listen two or three people wide without losing focus or precision. You could even stand up and still the image would remain locked into position, so clearly the narrow baffle and controlled dispersion was working exceptionally well, as this kind of flexibility is unimaginable with my SL-3s. The double bass was also a revelation, delivering a level of power and authority I'd not heard from any other speaker in the room except the Omen Ra 18:12 active system. But this was not an all-guts-and-no-brain design.

shimmer of the metal of the cymbal and the harmonic structure of the instrument, I have never heard cymbals so realistically portrayed. Gerry Rafferty's vocals are also a revelation; quite simply, male vocals have never sounded this good in my listening room. The vocals simply sound unforced and natural, with not just the sound of the singer's voice but the sound of the whole chest cavity on lower notes, I proceeded to work my way through all of Rafferty's albums in an evening. There was simply more weight and power in the lower registers, something which my panels simply can't achieve. The soundstaging was also very good, with outstanding placement on the stage, albeit on a stage which only extended just beyond the outer edges of the speakers, rather than through the walls laterally and likewise extended only as far back as the rear wall instead of through it as the SL-3s can achieve.

The final shock was with Genesis *Invisible Touch* (Virgin Records GEN LP2). This is a record I've listened to numerous times, yet the drive and power of the bassline on 'Land of Confusion' startled me. I have never heard this record sound

re-listening to many gems from your collection.

Despite the size, weight and stringent requirements for an amplifier that can control the mix of drivers, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with this speaker. In its ability to realistically reproduce harmonic structure, speed, and dynamic range, with good resolving power, this is an outstanding design. Only in its soundstaging does it seem to be a little behind the best, but I feel even more could be obtained from this speaker in a room larger than mine. In its reproduction of bass, this speaker is truly impressive, and its ability to handle effortlessly any material I threw at it makes this an incredibly versatile system. I feel that for its price point, it represents spectacular value for money. Given very high quality amplification and careful installation, the Strauss is capable of spectacular performance and at this price there is no other speaker I'd rather have. If you can accommodate this speaker, you must put this on your shortlist, and I'm delighted to give a very strong recommendation for this outstanding product. ■

David Allcock

## The reproduction of bass frequencies by the Strauss is among the best I've ever heard, worthy of comparison with the PMC MB-2 and Omen Ra 18:12

The Strauss could not only go deep and deliver outstanding dynamics, but it could also deliver the subtlest intonation, so that the slightest adjustment in weight on the kick drum pedal could be clearly heard. I consider the reproduction of bass frequencies with this speaker to be among the best I've heard to date, worthy of comparison with the PMC MB-2 and Omen Ra 18:12.

With Gerry Rafferty *Night Owl* (EMI FA4131471), the Strauss shook me with its rendition of 'Get it Right Next Time'. The midrange and high frequency reproduction are amongst the best I've heard, period. When you hear the cymbal at the start of this track, you don't just hear the initial attack, but also the

so good. The bass notes were delivered in an almost staccato manner which every other speaker I've heard has blurred. I'm sure with the Strauss I heard what was laid down in the studio, the incredible speed, dynamic range, and power of the two bass drivers was phenomenal. In this guise I would suggest they outperformed any other bass driver I've heard in my room to date.

For the first time I could clearly hear not only the synthesizer bass, but also a kick drum recorded low in the mix, but usually obscured. Again male vocals were spectacular. Many speakers, this one included, get female vocals right, but in my experience fewer seem to have this skill with male voice. But when a loudspeaker does get it right, it can be so addictive it has you

### Technology

The Strauss is constructed around an MDF cabinet which has been extensively braced with the aid of finite element analysis. The baffle and rear panel are made from a double thickness (25mm) MDF panel whilst the other panels are 12.5mm thick panels. The 280mm bass driver features an air-dried paper cone with longitudinally-oriented carbon-fibre inlaid into the cone, for added strength with little weight, sitting in a die-cast basket and mounted on the cabinet with medium loss rubber surrounds. The long-throw bass driver functions as a subwoofer as it crosses over to the mid bass drivers at only 70Hz and extends down to 26Hz. Two 180mm mid/ bass units are again air-dried paper coned, with carbon-fibre reinforcement and hand-finished damping treatment applied to the cones. Mounted in their own 9.4 litre sealed enclosure, these drivers are configured so both units run from 70Hz up but the lower driver tapers off allowing just the upper driver to handle the higher frequencies to the point where the 25mm silk dome tweeter takes over. The tweeter uses a stacked neodymium triple magnet system which, centre drilled to act as a wave guide for back pressure, guiding into a damping chamber. The whole assembly is mounted to the cabinet using a silicone rubber mounting system to reduce residual vibrations in the cabinet from smearing the high-frequency information. The speaker is magnetically shielded to allow it to be used in a home cinema system.

### Features

- Demands an amp with good bass control
- Side-mounted bass driver functions as subwoofer
- Excellent stereo imaging

