

Dynaudio Focus 380

Offering detail in abundance, this traditional floorstander hints at Dynaudio's professional monitoring expertise

Review: **John Bamford** Lab: **Keith Howard**

Standing a little over 1.2m tall and weighing 34kg, the Focus 380 is the top-of-the-line model in Dynaudio's middle-market Focus range. Sporting two 200mm woofers together with a dedicated 150mm midrange driver and a 28mm soft dome tweeter, it promises to deliver large-scale audio images and a sizeable bang for the buck if your listening room is not too cramped and compact standmount speakers simply won't do it for you, in your quest for audio nirvana.

OK, so it looks a little old-fashioned in today's world of CAD-CAM enclosures and elaborately sculpted baffles devoid of all fixings to give sleek, clean lines. Dynaudio's Focus models employ conventional enclosures – sturdily braced and nicely finished in real wood veneers nonetheless, built in its own Danish cabinet-making facilities – without such niceties as magnetically attached grilles and glossy trim rings to disguise driver fixings.

They're a bit of a throwback in this respect, although there's nothing old-fashioned about the design of the drive units and the attention to detail Dynaudio puts into its manufacturing. The consistency and reliability of Dynaudio's drivers is legendary in professional audio circles [see boxout]. And anyway, if it's ultra-modern-looking eye-candy that you crave, Dynaudio has that covered too, in its flagship Evidence series of high-end models.

All the Focus designs employ proprietary drivers manufactured entirely in-house. Dynaudio's distinctive bass/mid driver cones employ a magnesium silicate polymer composite that offers low mass, high rigidity and 'ideal internal damping properties', says the company, with supple rubber surrounds and a geometric form designed for smooth sound dispersion. The baskets are in diecast aluminium, ribbed for improved rigidity, minimal resonance and resistance to warping, and formed in a manner so as to reduce air compression and turbulence behind the drivers' moving membranes.

The motor assemblies feature neodymium magnets and large but lightweight voice-coils made of aluminium, with recently developed black Kapton formers. Using aluminium wire instead of copper allows for more windings

and a larger coil diameter without increasing mass. By positioning twin magnets inside its voice-coils Dynaudio says a larger and more homogenous magnetic field can be utilised, with less magnetic radiation.

Using two adjacent magnet rings creates a more symmetrical pole-piece design and aims to make the coil conduction constant regardless of voice coil position. Meanwhile the company's silk soft dome tweeters are hand treated with a proprietary coating, their aluminium voice coils suspended in magnetic oil (ferrofluid) to increase power (thermal) handling and to improve the high frequency dome's excursion capability. A damping chamber is integrated into the rear of the assembly to deaden back-wave energy through an acoustic absorber.

SINGLE-WIRE PHILOSOPHY

Throughout its loudspeaker designs Dynaudio employs first order (6dB/octave) crossovers to marry its driver complement. These feature oxygen-free copper air-coils, selected capacitors and ceramic resistors chosen for their temperature stability. 'Dividing the frequency sections through bi-wiring or bi-amping is neither beneficial nor optional,' states the user manual, since only a single pair of binding posts is fitted at the rear.

While ultra-conservative in appearance, the enclosures are braced in critical sections and internally damped to minimise unwanted resonances. Moreover, the fit and finish of the veneer, which the company hand polishes and coats, is top class. They are offered in a choice of maple, walnut, rosewood, black ash or glossy piano lacquer black or white. The enclosure sits on a slim but sturdy composite plinth section with damping compound between it and the main cabinet, its underside sporting threaded metal inserts in four corners for the supplied aluminium floor spikes.

The speaker has been designed to be not too fussy about room placement, although to

RIGHT: Styled with just a conventional grille and exposed driver fixings, the front baffle sports two 200mm bass drivers working in tandem, a separate 150mm midrange unit and 28mm soft dome tweeter. Everything is made in-house by Dynaudio





PRO HERITAGE

Visit a control room in a top-flight recording studio and you'll often find yourself sitting in front of imposing custom-designed monitors built into the walls featuring Dynaudio drivers. Founded in Denmark in 1977 to manufacture hi-fi loudspeakers, Dynaudio created a professional audio division in 1992 and formed a strategic alliance in 1999 with TC Electronic to provide digital signal processing and networking expertise [www.tcelectronic.com]. The TC Group later acquired Tannoy when it merged with TGI in 2002.

Dynaudio's soft-dome midrange and high frequency units in particular are highly regarded by professional sound engineers, thanks to the company's manufacturing consistency and strict quality control. The drivers boast good power handling and are largely bomb-proof. In cost-no-object monitoring rigs they are sometimes married to TAD bass drivers, with custom-built electronic crossovers allowing sound engineers to dial in a flat frequency response for critical analysis of master recordings.

create out-of-the-box images it will always sound at its best when positioned in free space. A minimum distance of 50cm from rear and side walls is recommended.

The vented enclosure has a large flared port at the rear which can be fitted with a foam bung if you have to site the speaker close to a back wall or if you feel the need to damp the lowest frequencies.

COMMANDING ATTENTION

The last speaker to visit my listening room of similar proportions to this Dynaudio column was Dali's Epicon 8 [*HFN* Sept '12]. But the Epicon 8 boasts truly luxurious build quality and consequently is twice the price. I loved its relaxed, easy-going sound, it's warm intimacy and 'gentle' and relaxed high frequencies combined with oodles of luscious, creamy bass.

By contrast, the Focus 380 is quite a different animal: rather less ambitious, with subjectively less bandwidth at both frequency extremes and a more forthright, up-front presentation. Generally you get what you pay for, so I wasn't expecting the Focus 380 to be anything like as accomplished or as refined as the £11k Dali, nevertheless I was impressed – and hugely entertained – by its dynamic music making.

It's a speaker that commands attention rather than seducing you with its charms. Listening to a 24-bit/88.2kHz download from HDtracks of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto performed by Andrew Marriner and the ASMF, recorded in London's Henry Wood Hall in 2004 [PentaTone Classics PTC 5186 048],

'With the Harry James LP the dynamic contrasts were explosive'

demonstrated the Focus 380's ability to vividly portray a believable sound image and track dynamic shadings in a musical performance. The sense of space around the clarinet was delightful, the speaker constantly surprising in its ability to describe varying timbres and textures of the colourful orchestration.

Despite being forthright and explicit it doesn't throw an image forward into a room in a hectoring fashion. The size of the Henry Wood Hall and its acoustic was described wa-ay behind the speakers, creating a 'walk in' sonic picture of

commendable scale that belied the Focus 380s' relatively modest size.

Those two 20cm Dynaudio woofers can shift plenty of air, too, the speaker creating a good impression

of thunder when playing Norwegian songwriter Anne Brun's eclectic *It All Starts With One* album [Ballon Ranger Recordings DEMCD12].

The thunderous bass notes in the song 'These Days' were handled with aplomb as the bass rolled across the listening room floor. The Focus 380 is an explicit monitor, the sound it delivers brimming with fine detail. The shuffling snare drum and 'old fashioned' electronic organ in the arrangement of 'These Days' were clearly resolved, and each element of the recording's slightly surreal production was patently exposed – such as the myriad electronic sound-effect treatments on Brun's voice and the timpani-style percussive wallops designed to catch you off-guard during the piece.

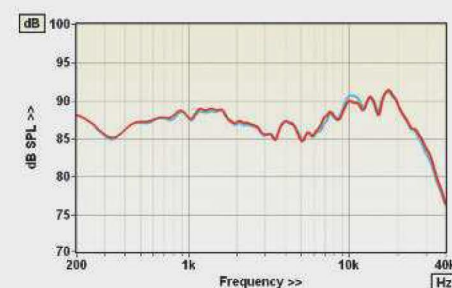
The Dynaudio also proved more than capable of transporting me to a 'rave' ➡

LAB REPORT

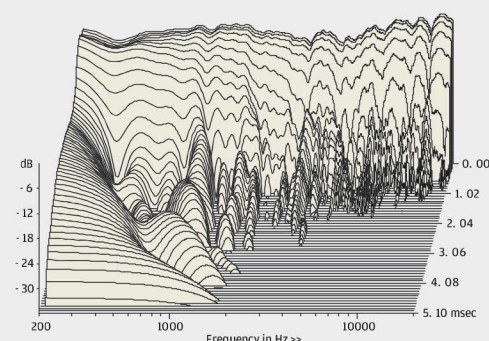
DYNAUDIO FOCUS 380

Dynaudio claims 88dB sensitivity for the Focus 380, a specification which accords well with our measured pink noise figure of 87.8dB. Although this is on the low side for a speaker of these dimensions it still requires a nominal 4ohm impedance to achieve it, a figure entirely in accordance with our measured minimum modulus of 3.5ohm. Impedance phase angles are sufficiently high to result in a minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) of 1.6ohm at 75Hz, so the Focus 380 is a moderately difficult load to drive without being a pig. Given the large cabinet size, the low-ish sensitivity and low impedance, a bass extension of 44Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz, diffraction-corrected near-field measurement) may seem a disappointment but the roll-off is notably slow for a reflex design suggesting that transient performance will be clean and room integration relatively easy. With careful placement relative to room boundaries it should be possible to extend the Focus 380's effective bass response to well below this 'anechoic' figure.

On-axis response errors of ± 3.4 dB and ± 3.2 dB respectively, 200Hz-20kHz, are a good result but the on-axis response trend is not entirely flat, with a distinct lowering of output through the presence band [see Graph 1, below]. This may tend to step back the stereo image and somewhat soften the sound quality. Pair matching error over the same frequency range is good at ± 0.9 dB. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [Graph 2, below], is characterised by fast initial energy decay across the band and mostly good control of resonances although there are a few low-level ridges visible from 1kHz up to the low treble frequencies. KH



ABOVE: The 380's forward response shows a loss in presence band output with a brighter extreme treble



ABOVE: Internal bracing keeps cabinet resonances damped though some driver modes are visible >1kHz

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms - Mean/IEC/Music)	89.0dB/87.8dB/87.4dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	3.5ohm @ 103Hz 19.5ohm @ 50Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	-56° @ 59Hz 29° @ 41Hz
Pair matching (200Hz-20kHz)	± 0.9 dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	44Hz / 30.4kHz/28.2kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.6% / 0.3% / 0.1%
Dimensions (HWD)	1225x246x385mm

LEFT: A large flared port vents at the rear of the floorstanding enclosure. There's just one set of high quality gold-plated multi-way input terminals provided for single wiring [see text]

to the cleanliness of the speaker's overall sound character.

Testing the speaker's mettle with high-resolution audiophile recordings showed that while it's not a seductive, flattering transducer it does score highly in its ability to portray the variety of character and expression in a musical performance. I was listening to Channel Classics' delightful recording of Vivaldi's Concerto in C performed by Rachel Podger with the Holland Baroque Society, taken from its *La Cetra* SACD [CCS SA 33412]. The image of the musicians, and the space they occupied, was noticeably open and lucid, the build, attack and subsequent decay of notes all dealt with in a most lifelike way.

THRILLS WITH HARRY JAMES

Similarly the dynamic contrasts in Harry James And His Big Band's *Comin' From A Good Place* [Sheffield Lab CD6] were explosive, the Focus 380 serving up a thrilling, seat-of-the pants rendition of this direct-to-disc audiophile LP. With 'Tuxedo Junction' the speaker proved perfectly at ease when blasting out the muted trumpet at a lifelike sound pressure level, once again its excellent imaging capability resulting in clear layering of the band's instrumentation in the recording venue. Only a very slight tubbiness in the lower registers belied the speaker's modest size and price. ⚡

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

It might not look particularly sexy, nevertheless the Focus 380 offers fine sound quality and can shift a lot of air if your room can accommodate its considerable bass output. It's explicit and refined-sounding in equal measure, with excellent dynamic capabilities and vivid imaging when given space to breathe. It certainly represents good value, since to better it you'll need to spend considerably more.

Sound Quality: 76%

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when I wound up the volume to an unsociable level playing the electronica soundscapes of Bassnectar's *Vava Voom* [Amorphous Music AM0012].

With the 'chillstep' track 'Butterfly' featuring Mimi Page, the Focus 380 once again served up satisfyingly deep and articulate bass, the harsh electronic edge and spitty high frequencies of the recording kept moderately in check thanks