

Sound for Small Spaces

By Jeff Dorgay

After years of hifi taking over my life, office and home, with speakers, cables and racks everywhere, I've made a big change in my life. I've moved to an apartment. In the effort to simplify and downsize, I'm on a quest to find great components that take up a minimum of space, yet still offer up high quality sound with a minimum of fuss. I must admit, this job has made me pretty spoiled, but I firmly believe the words "lifestyle" and "good sound" can comfortably coexist in the same paragraph these days. Managing editor Rob Johnson lives in an urban environment as well, so between the two

of us, we will help those of you who are space-challenged – but not quality-challenged – wade through the options.

Pamela was a real trouper, helping me lug various speakers in and out of the new living space, from new to vintage, large and small, but she drew the line as I made noise about the Acoustat 2+2s. Of course, my logic being with 9 ½-foot ceilings, these 8-foot monsters would "fit right in." Cross does not describe the look I got back. Interestingly, the answer was right in front of our faces all along – the new XEO 4s from Dynaudio that are currently in for review.



These small marvels are only 6.7 inches wide, 11.1 inches tall and a little more than 9 inches deep, so they truly will fit anywhere. With a three-position switch on the back, optimizing the bass response for corner, wall, or neutral (free standing) placement you can make the ported enclosure work anywhere, and we were shocked at how well the XEO 4s filled the room – even when just sitting on a dresser, beneath the flat screen. Of course, not letting my audiophile sensibilities slip too much, I did have them isolated from the dresser surface with some cone-like devices!

Available in black or white, at \$2,399 per pair with matching stands for an additional \$350 these small speakers might seem a bit expensive at first, but keep in mind they each have a pair of 50 watt amplifiers inside, digital signal processing for the lower frequencies and Hdue to the Pulse Width Modulation amp design they do not require an external DAC. And they're wireless. Well, mostly wireless – each speaker does require a power cord.

An end to the past

While the mix and match part of being an audiophile is a big part of the fun for many, at some point it's worth getting over, especially in the case of the XEO 4s. It's been an especially freeing experience not stressing over power cords and interconnects. And it's amazing to see how far Dynaudio has improved their wireless delivery in just a year since we took a look at the XEO 3s. *(continued)*

FEATURE

Granted, some audiophiles will require DSD and 24/192 capability, so for them the XEOs will not be a fit. But those who can live happily ever after with 24/96 resolution source compatibility of the new XEO Hub will be pleasantly surprised at how well this entire system works. It only takes about five minutes to integrate into your home network, and if you don't have one, you can actually hardwire your favorite source to the XEOs via digital (S/PDIF or optical Toslink), USB or a pair of RCA analog line level inputs. This came in handy incorporating a vintage Thorens TD-125 table/SME tonearm and Shure M97 cartridge into the mix, via the incredibly compact Monk phonostage, reviewed in this issue.

A small amount of the analog magic is lost in the digital conversion, streaming the analog signal digitally and wirelessly; however, it is incredibly fun to place a vintage turntable across the room where it can be righteously displayed, out of the way of acoustic feedback and stream your favorite LP. In many aspects this can be the best of both worlds for those loving the tactile aspect of the vinyl medium.

The XEO 4s possess enough resolution to discern the difference between analog and digital recordings, and injecting a bit of tubey goodness from the Monk phonostage adds a bit more to the experience, even though some may pooh-pooh this as coloration. *(continued)*



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PASS

“Moderation is a fatal thing... Nothing succeeds like excess.”

Oscar Wilde



Xs 300: Dual chassis monoblock
Xs 150: Dual chassis monoblock
Xs Preamp: Dual chassis preamp
Xs Phono: Dual chassis phonopreamp

FEATURE

Auditioning a slew of CAN LP's prove trippy enough to do this band justice, with interesting electronic effects bouncing everywhere.

A flip of the switch

Setting up the XEO 4s is remarkably quick and easy. Position the Xeo Hub in a strategic spot to make it easy to plug in whatever ancillary components you require and the speakers in a space that makes sense for your living environment. Thanks to the internal DSP, bass response can be optimized for neutral, corner or wall placement. All three worked incredibly well in my very large listening space.

The amount of clean bass these tiny speakers provide is impressive, yet should you require more low end grunt, adding the XEO Link to the system will transform any subwoofer you have on hand into a wireless one, thanks to its line outputs. The supplied remote will bind the link to the Hub and set your subwoofer free from annoying cables that can limit its placement. For the better part of this review, RELs S/2, which we reviewed here, augmented the lowest register of the XEO 4s incredibly well in my now large 19 x 32-foot living and listening space. Whether on the desk, next to the bed, or out in the living room, the XEO 4 is up to the task.

Top of the line components

Using the same core driver technologies that are employed in Dynaudio's flagship speakers, the XEO 4s not only look like top shelf speakers, they perform like them too.

(continued)



FEATURE

As I've mentioned before, because these are self contained, they do not require any speaker or interconnect cables, and I didn't notice a substantial upgrade to the sound by using aftermarket power cords, but I did notice a smoother, more delicate high end by investing in a modest power conditioner – in this case the IsoTek EVO3 Sirius power strip. But now you're headed down the path of the crazed audiophile, so beware!

Implementation of the rest of the XEO 4 is also flagship speaker quality in a small, compact package. These modestly sized speakers are as exquisitely constructed as the \$82,000 Evidence Platinum speakers residing in the *TONEAudio* studio. The longer I listen to the XEO 4s the more the family resemblance comes through. The same smoothness throughout the tonal range, coupled with a dynamic punchy sound that is never harsh or overbearing makes for hours of un-fatiguing listening.

Dynaudio specs bass response to be down 3dB at 45Hz and the XEO 4s deliver, especially when placed in close proximity to the walls or corners.

(continued)



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Climbing the Ladder

Climbing the ladder of AudioQuest interconnect cables leads to better and better performance, thanks to less and less interference from the cable.

This is made possible by the use of superior materials and the implementation of increasingly more sophisticated construction techniques, such as: the progression from Long-Grain Copper to solid Perfect-Surface Silver, from Foamed-PE insulation to FEP Air-Tubes, from Metal-Layer Noise-Dissipation System to multi-layer Carbon-Based NDS, from low-distortion Gold-Plated terminations to extreme-purity Red Copper plugs with Hanging-Silver plating, and more.

Despite their differences, our Bridges & Falls, Rivers, and Elements audio interconnects are all closely related. **Follow the color code:** Chicago is a bigger, better version of Evergreen, but PSC copper-based Golden Gate is clearly better. Red River is a Triple-Balanced bigger, better version of Golden Gate, but doesn't offer the further advantages of Big Sur—and so it goes, on up to Wind.

The reason for the two sides of the ladder is simple: The Double-Balanced **Bridges & Falls cables can be fitted with a choice of RCA plugs, 3.5mm mini-plug, 3.5mm female, or DIN plugs** (usually for Naim electronics). The Triple-Balanced (except Chicago) **Rivers & Elements cables can be fitted with RCA or balanced XLR plugs.**

The Triple-Balanced progression continues upward through top Element Series cable **Fire**—a remarkable cable **fully deserving its nickname "WEL Jr.,"** as it uses all the same materials and construction techniques as the Wild and WEL models, at a smaller scale.

Start at the bottom, where the AQ value system is already 100% evident, or climb as high as you like. Keep climbing until the incremental cost of the higher model is no longer the **least expensive way to make the most improvement**—but beware, you might find yourself at the top of the ladder or beyond before reaching that point.

Sincerely,



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As with any traditional mini monitor, moving them out in the room makes for a bigger, more spacious stereo image, with a slight compromise in low frequency extension, though Dynaudio's DSP engine does an exceptional job at compensating. If anything, the XEO 4s still deliver excellent bass response out in the room; they just won't play as loud, because the woofers and amplifiers run out of power and excursion. So you can enjoy the Bombay Dub Orchestra, just not at discotheque levels.

With a wide range of wireless speakers to choose from, Dynaudio has entered the game later than other players, but they have arrived with a top of the line contender. There are a number of options in the \$400–\$1,000 range, but none feature the combination of aesthetic elegance and audio performance combined with the engineering depth and prowess that Dynaudio brings to the table.

If you want top quality sound with a minimal footprint, Dynaudio's XEO 4 is the way to roll. And should you need more bass without going to a subwoofer, consider the XEO 6 floorstanding system. We'll have a pair for review soon.

www.dynaudio.com

