

Audience 42



Cigar Aficionado, February 2002
Shoebbox Speakers, Matt Kramer

You don't need the behemoths from your college days to enjoy great sound.

It's a well-worn mantra: everything is getting smaller. This miniaturization is expected for everything, it seems, except great stereo speakers. Somehow, the old notion of "bigger is better" still clings to stereo speakers like nostalgia at a college reunion.

So you'll have to forgive me when I tell you: whatever you thought (and what I once thought, too) about great stereo speakers is simply not true anymore. Size doesn't matter. Well, not that much anyway.

The best small speakers - what audiophiles call "high-end mini-monitors" - defy belief. If you close your eyes and listen to the music, you won't believe what you see when you open your eyes. It doesn't seem possible that such a small speaker-a foot-high box about nine inches deep and maybe eight inches wide-could make such a big, beautifully defined, resonant sound. Yet it's so.

The last decade saw a revolution in speaker design "What people once thought was essential in a speaker, especially to achieve good bass, is no longer true," says Paul Paddock, a speaker designer whose design credits include the highly regarded (but now-defunct) Linnaeum speakers. "They thought you had to have size. You don't."

Paddock is a pro. And he has a pro's clear-eyed view of speakers, devoid of the oohing-and-aahing of enthusiasts. "Let's take bass reproduction," he begins. "That's always the biggest challenge in designing small speakers. And it's what everyone is dubious about."

According to Paddock, substantial bass in a small speaker-an enclosure little bigger than the proverbial breadbox-is both possible and easily explained. "First, you need high-power amplification, by which I mean 100 watts per channel or higher. Twenty years ago that was rare and expensive. Today it's relatively cheap and easy to find.

"The reason you need that kind of power is simple physics: you need a lot of oomph for bass extension," he says. "A small speaker has a four-inch or five-inch woofer. To get good bass it's got to physically extend-literally push itself out of the speaker box--pretty far. That takes sheer amplification guts."

The second feature is the woofer (the bass speaker) itself. "Twenty years ago a four-inch woofer could travel 1.5 millimeters to two millimeters," says Paddock. "Today's woofers can travel six millimeters." This linear movement is called "x-max" among speaker designers.

Why is this important? "To go one octave lower at the same output requires four times the amount of cone travel," explains Paddock. "At the same time it's got to resist distortion, as well as dissipate heat in the process. Today's woofers can do all this."

To test this, I enlisted a friend in the high-end audio business, Kurt Doslu, who co-owns Echo Audio in Portland, Oregon (www.echohifi.com). Doslu is what the geeks call a "golden ears." He hears things most dogs don't. And because he specializes in used high-end gear, he listens to a far greater array of stereo equipment than conventional retailers, who know only the handful of lines they carry.

The challenge was simple: assemble a half-dozen or so of the highest rated minimonitors on the market today and give 'em a listen. Are they really worth the price, typically \$1,500 to \$5,000? Moreover, can tin-ear sorts such as myself, along with a bunch of cronies I invited over for the all-day listen, really hear a difference!

The lineup was formidable. Of what tire arguably the 10 most highly rated minimonitors on the market today, we had seven of them; Proac Response One SC (\$2,100 it pair), Joseph Audio RM7si Signature (\$1,800), Sonus Faber Concerto (\$1,900), JMLab Micro Utopia (\$5,000), Dynaudio Audience 42 (\$700), Totem Model One (\$1,650) and Totem Mani-2 (\$4,000). The speakers were placed on stands filled with lead shot (Atlantis Reference 24-inch, \$400), the better to hear them at "ear level."

The accompanying electronics (which certainly affect how it speaker sounds) were chosen for their "neutrality": a Plinius 8200 integrated amplifier (\$ 3,000) and an Arcam FMJ CD 23 compact disc player (\$2,200).

OK, so much for geek-speak. How were the speakers? Were there any outright winners and losers, especially at this vaunted level?

As everyone knows, tastes in speakers are highly subjective. Some are "warmer," with a coloration that makes music sound liquid and round. Others are almost clinically neutral, which can sometimes fatigue you after it while. Yet others are exaggerated with boomy bass or shrill, sibilant highs. Everyone's overall impression was simple: Wow! It was mesmerizing how much sound -not just quantity but quality from these shoebox-sized wonders. No two were alike, either.

One of the big favorites (mine, too) was the Sonus I Alter Concerto. A modest-looking speaker made in Italy, this minimonitor had the magic to make you forget it even existed. You got caught up in the music (we played the same six tracks for all the speakers, from vocal to instrumental to choral). What's more, the louder you played the Sonus Faber Concertos, the better they sounded: sweet, liquid and bass-rich with lovely "musicality."

Another fave was the more neutral-seeming Proac Response One SC. On the first go-round it garnered respectful appreciation. But it wasn't love at first listen. However, after we heard all the speakers, and then returned for a second listen, the virtues of the Proac came immediately into focus. They were simply so clean, pure and transparent. They seemed "weightless." The same, by the way, applied to the Totem Model One. Their speed, transparency and bass response were outstanding.

A Surprise winner was the Dynaudio Audience 42. This was by far the cheapest speaker among these thoroughbreds, but it was easily the smallest, too: roughly the dimensions of a standard sheet of paper in height and width and about 10 inches deep. They are really small.

Yet the sound front these Danish-made speakers (the company's literature declares "Danes Don't Lie") was astonishing. Sure, they lacked the bass of some of the other larger speakers, but for sheer delineation of sound-what audiophiles call "soundstaging," in which you hear the placement of instruments-the Dynaudio 42 was a marvel.

I asked Robert J. Reina, a reviewer for Stereophile magazine who specializes in small speakers, just how these speakers could be so convincing. He ticked off the reasons in quick succession:

"First, you've got new materials that have appeared in the last decade or so," he says. "Things, like Teflon capacitors, magnesium woofers, titanium tweeters and aluminum/nickel/cobalt magnets.

"Then, there's been a big improvement in the cabinets. Designers have learned how to brace the cabinets and line them with damping material. If you knock on the cabinets, you'll get a 'thunk.' They'll sound dead. That's good. This gives greater clarity and deeper bass response, as well as its naturalness throughout the frequency range.

"Not least," he adds, "is design talent. This is really important. Previously, the best designers specialized only in the most expensive equipment. But in the past decade, there's been a trickle down. Top designers have turned their attention to smaller, less expensive speakers. And they've gotten very good at designing small speakers."

Speaker designer Paul Paddock agrees. "Even though I am one, I really have to say that the designer is critical. And there's something else that's happened recently that, truly revolutionary that adds to that: computer software.

"A designer can now buy computer software for about \$ 1,000 that replicates perfectly the effects of a large anechoic chamber. You can test your designs in a way that was previously available only to researchers at very big companies or large universities. Today, talented amateur designers, can really compete at the very highest levels and create amazing speakers, if they're good enough.

Today's best speakers are not the big honkers we all drooled over in our college days. Sure, they're still being made, and some of them are swell. (And if you have a really big room, you do need a good-sized speaker.) But the "genius speakers," the ones that can rock your world (and your rock music), are now the high-end minimonitors. Give them a listen and you'll agree for yourself.

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Hi-Fi Choice, June 2001
Audience 42

A well established Danish company originally known for its unusual main drivers, Dynaudio has become increasingly successful with its relatively upmarket complete speaker systems, and enjoyed very good results in recent Hi-Fi Choice reviews. The Audience 42 is the company's smallest and least expensive model, and the immediate successor of the Audience 40, which received a Best Buy rating in HFC 189. It actually looks exactly the same as its predecessor, from the outside at least, though apparently there are significant crossover changes, a strengthened enclosure and minor driver improvements. Matching centre and surround channel variations on the 42 theme, plus a subwoofer, are now available for multichannel installations.

Given it's tiny size, and the vinyl finish, f400 seems rather hefty - Dynaudio justifies this on engineering grounds, not only with its proprietary driver technology, but also in the solidity of the cabinetwork - arguably an even more important ingredient in maximising all-round performance. Happily, the vinyl woodprint looks better than most, even from close up, though it still fails the strokeability test. Ours came in an attractive reddish cherry, but rosewood and black ash are also available.

This is a classic two-way 7-litre "miniature" stand mount. The main driver has a combination cone/dome 100mm plastic diaphragm, driven from an oversize (75mm) voice coil, and built on a cast chassis. The tweeter is Dynaudio's own design, with a 28mm plastic dome. The rear carries a port, and a pair of foam bungs are supplied to tune the ports if desired. Although the in-room measurements confirm the expected lack of deep bass, the Audience 42 still has sufficient midbass output to avoid the need for wall assistance - so use the bungs if you want to place them close to a wall.

SOUND QUALITY

Like its predecessor, the Audience 42 was a firm favourite in the listening tests, in part it would seem because the panel had become somewhat disenchanted by the box colorations of a string of floorstanders. The 42 might not have had as much bass as the preceding models quantitatively, but it left them for dead qualitatively (assisted, it must be pointed out, by high quality, quite costly stands).

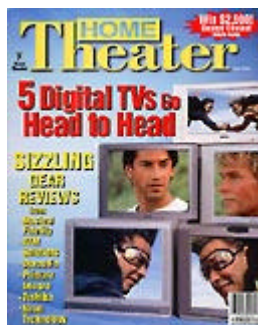
Because the bottom end is so well controlled, the speaker has an impressively wide dynamic range, and considerable midband clarity, and even though it doesn't pack a great deal of genuine dynamic punch, it seems forgivable in view of the fine midband voicing.

CONCLUSION

The Audience 42 might be expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but I'd be surprised if there's a better small speaker around for the price. The small size does limit the bass grunt and loudness capabilities of course, but that's true for any small speaker. The Audience 42 therefore clearly deserves to carry the Best Buy rating.

THE LAB REPORT

Though the narrowband response shows a slight prominence after the (1.8kHz) crossover point at 2.5kHz, the in-room 3rd octave trend is typically flat but slightly depressed through much of the upper bass, mid and lower treble. Taking the overall sensitivity from 500Hz-8kHz yields a figure of 86.9dB but extending this from 200Hz-20kHz gives 88.0dB, reflecting the increase in bass and upper treble energy. In this regard, the Audience 42 bears more than a little resemblance to the Audience 40 (HFC 190) which possessed a similar response, sensitivity and very high Q port tuning at 60Hz. In-room extension remains unchanged at ~50Hz though there is a slight increase in bass/midrange distortion (re. 96dBA) from typically 0.6% to 1.2%. This could be explained by changes in crossover component selection as much as changes in the driver construction, for example. The speaker load is easy enough through mid and treble despite dipping to 3.7 Ohm at 245Hz - an improvement over earlier Dynaudio speakers.



Home Theater, June 2001

Dynaudio Audience 42 Speaker System

It's not how big it is but what you do with it.

By Michael Trei

One thing that those of us who deal with equipment on a daily basis tend to forget is that the people who actually buy the stuff we evaluate live real lives, in real rooms, and often have real spouses and families to contend with. Back when I was working in a retail store, it was usually the guy who wanted the huge speakers and the wife or girlfriend who was hoping that all of the equipment could somehow just disappear. Let's face it: Most of us don't have the space for a dedicated home theater room, and we still need to live in our living rooms when we're not watching movies. To avoid having our home theater system take over our living space, many of us end up settling for a puny home-theater-in-a-box or,

even worse, a shelf system. What if you could get a setup that had most of the qualities of a big home theater system but that didn't dominate your space? As long as you're willing to make certain compromises, it can be done.

I've looked at several tiny speaker setups. In almost every case, the diminutive size of the speakers is due more to cost restraints than a wish to make something in a small package that will perform impressively. The Audience 42 is Danish manufacturer Dynaudio's least expensive system, yet it could hardly be called cheap. There are plenty of packages with huge speakers that you could get for the same amount of money, but they wouldn't approach this level of quality. Dynaudio's goal was to make the speakers smaller, not necessarily cheaper. Most of the cost concessions are in cosmetic areas rather than performance-related ones.

If you browse through a directory of hi-fi companies, you'll see that anyone and his brother can start a speaker company. All you need to do is slap some drivers and a crossover in a box, then go find some sucker to buy it. Dynaudio, on the other hand, is one of the few speaker manufacturers that makes all of their own drivers. These raw drivers are so widely respected that they are used by some of the best high-end companies around, including Wilson Audio and Totem Acoustic. The five main speakers in the Audience 42 system all use a 5.75-inch woofer that incorporates a characteristically huge 3-inch voice coil, along with a custom-designed version of Dynaudio's famous Esotec soft-dome tweeter. Although the main, center, and surround speakers have been carefully designed to perform best in a specific role, by using the same driver complement in all five speakers, the timbral match is likely to be excellent.

The main speaker I used was the Audience 42, a small, ported design that uses a narrow front baffle to give possible focus to the stereo image. The port is on the back, making it best-suited for use out away from the wall on stands, although a wall bracket is available. Because many folks are likely to be tempted by the urge to put these speakers near a wall or on a bookshelf, Dynaudio has included a foam plug that can be stuffed in the port to reduce the bass-loading effect of boundary positioning. When I used them on a pair of 24-inch metal stands placed well clear of the walls, I found I got the best results with-out the plugs, as this allowed the speakers to blend more effectively with the subwoofer. Although the cherry finish is about as natural as Anna Nicole Smith's bust-line, the quality of vinyl used is about as good as it gets, and for a minute I was fooled into thinking a real tree was involved in this speaker's manufacture. It's a pity that Dynaudio couldn't put this stuff on the front baffle, as I did find that there was a small but worthwhile sonic benefit to using the speakers naked, sans grilles.

The Audience 42C center channel uses the same two drivers as the main Audience 42. Note that I said two drivers. That's right: Unlike most center speakers that have two woofers flanking the tweeter (seemingly in a desperate attempt to preserve symmetry), the 42C gets along just fine with a single woofer and probably benefits from a wider listening window because of this approach. The problem with side-by-side woofers is that an off-center listener is going to hear rather ragged midrange response, due to the comb fil-tering created when two drivers reproducing the same signal are different distances from your noggin. One way to get around this issue is to make a three-way center channel, which allows the crossover to the woofers to be low enough so that it won't matter as much, but I actually like Dynaudio's approach more. As this speaker is more likely to be used in a cabinet near a TV set, the company decided to move the port from the back to the front, and again there is a foam plug you can stick in the port to dampen the woofer's movement in the low bass.

Although some people like to use in-wall models as stealth-like surround speakers, getting their sound to blend properly with the front speakers can some-times be quite a challenge. Dynaudio's solution is the Audience 42W, which they describe as an on-wall speaker. This specially designed model uses a wider, shallower cabinet, allowing the speaker to be placed on the side walls without sticking out too far into your room. Again, the ports have been moved around to the front, and the bass can be further tuned using the provided foam plugs. Although the wider baffle is likely to make pinpoint imaging more difficult, this is not such critical requirement for surround speakers, where you typically want a more-diffuse image. The 42W can be hung directly on the wall using the keyhole on the back or mounted using a bracket avail-able from Dynaudio. The review samples were finished in the same petroleum-based cherry as the other speakers, although any of these models can be ordered in a white laminate with white grilles (for an additional cost), making them even less conspicuous.

Rather than jumping on the bandwagon to make one of those tiny subwoofers with an immensely powerful amplifier, Dynaudio has stuck with a more-conventional approach. The SUB-20A uses one of Dynaudio's large-voice-coil 10-inch woofers in a moderately large ported cabinet. This makes it pretty efficient. The built-in 90-watt amplifier is enough to drive it to loud levels in a small- to medium-sized room. Flexibility is the SUB-20A's strong point, with separate mono and stereo RCA inputs, a high-pass output with a switchable 80-hertz filter, plus a low-pass filter that can be adjusted continuously between 60 and 120 Hz and even rotated continuously in phase through 360 degrees. This adjustability should make it easier to get a good blend between the small Audience 42s and the subwoofer in a wide range of rooms. Although the power amp stays on continuously until you turn off the power switch on the back panel, it draws only 10 watts at idle - that's less than, say, a VCR draws when turned off.

I've always enjoyed the sound of a good two-way mini-monitor in my stereo system, and the Audience 42 certainly fits that bill. As I was breaking in the other speakers, I spent a week with the Audience 42s in place of the usual Quad Electrostatics in my two-channel setup, and I never really found myself missing my regular speakers. What struck me immediately was how refined the sound was. The high frequencies, in particular, had a combination of impressive detail and exceptional smoothness that you only hear in a speaker with an exceptional tweeter. As you would expect with a speaker this tiny, bass was somewhat curtailed, dropping off quickly below about 60 Hz. Up to that point, however, the bass was tight and tuneful, and the speaker was very communicative, tuneful, and engaging. Midrange detail was a strength, lending a transparency to the overall picture. With the wrong material, though, the upper midrange could sound a little forward at times. Little boxes are usually a good ingredient for achieving a focussed stereo image, and the Audience 42 delivers with an open, spacious sound capable of impressive depth.

Luckily, in a home theater system, we can hand the bass-playing requirements over to the subwoofer, and I found that I needed to play all five speakers in the small mode to get the best overall balance from the system. Sensitivity is not the Audience 42's forte, so don't get the impression that you can drive these little speakers with some puny little receiver. Because of the exceptional dynamic demands of many movie sound-tracks, I'd suggest a minimum of about 100 watts per channel to get a good sense of dynamic punch. Even then, dynamics are not going to be the Audience 42 ensemble's strong suit.

As I found with the two-channel setup, this system was at its best with more-natural-sounding movies and music, rather than when it was attempting to be an aural assault weapon. A movie like *Fight Club*, with its amazing surround effects and ambience that changes dramatically from scene to scene, really takes on a naturally relaxed quality that

makes it simple to listen to for hours without suffering fatigue. This sense of ease was especially impressive with the center channel, and dialogue like Mr. Hand's voice in *Dark City* was amazingly clear and articulate. This center-channel speaker would perform well in many systems, even if the rest of the speakers were not from Dynaudio.

After considerable experimentation with the level and phase controls, and in getting the best possible placement, I found I was able to get an essentially seamless blend between the SUB-20A and the rest of the speakers. It's a pity that Dynaudio doesn't allow you to bypass the internal crossover in favor of the one in your pre/pro, as this would probably make the adjustments somewhat easier. Once you do have it locked in, the SUB-20A does a good job of filling in the bottom two octaves, although without the air-moving capabilities of some of its competitors. As with the main speakers, the SUB-20A's strengths are its tunefulness and pitch accuracy - a far cry from some of those 12-inch cube woofers that have become the rage.

For someone trying to fit a home theater into a real living space, the Dynaudio Audience 42 system fits well into the often-neglected niche of really small speaker systems that don't skimp on quality. While it won't rouse the neighbors or assault your eardrums quite like some bigger systems, I suspect that these are not the qualities a potential purchaser will be looking for. Recommended.



E-Gear, March/April 2001

Dynaudio Audience Home Theater Speaker System
Well Balanced for Your Audio Protection
By Mike McGann

In a small factory in Denmark, Dynaudio has spent most of the last 17 or so years turning out speakers, slowly. In an average year, only about 30,000 speakers leave the factory. Like a fine wine, Dynaudio takes its time. Such patience has won the company fans, including the BBC, which is using its drivers for monitors in its recording studio in London. Sony, of all companies, uses Dynaudio speakers in its studios in New York and Tokyo.

In fairness, this high level of quality has generally come at a pretty high price. Thankfully, the company has slowly and quietly been moving toward somewhat more affordable price levels, without resorting to mass production methods. This introduction of the Audience line of speakers a couple of years back was a nice foray into the mid-priced speaker market.

We were able to get the new, updated Audience 62 towers (which replace the well-liked 60s), with Audience 42 monitors for the surround, matched to the 42C center-channel speaker. The low-end grunt comes from the Audience 20A sub, which features a 90-watt amp powering a front-firing 10-inch driver. While the entire system, at just under \$4,000 is not exactly budget minded, it makes sense to spend a bit on speakers if you've already spent \$3,000 to \$4,000 on electronic. I matched the new Audience system to Onkyo's TX-DS989 a/v receiver, in art for its ability to handle six-channel DVD-Audio inputs.

Not being the patient type, I put off my usual testing of the system in stereo mode and instead dove right in using JVC's wondrous XV-D723GD DVD-Audio player (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Using Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Brain Salad Surgery*, an album programmed into my head by my older brother Jim back in the days of Nixon, I was completely blown away.

In part, I was wowed by the whole DVD-Audio thing, which I address elsewhere in this issue. Mostly, I was seriously impressed at how well integrated this Audience system is. A lot of the first DVD-Audio releases use pans and rotation, as John Kellogg of Dolby did in his loving remix of this title. If the rears of centers are not perfectly matched to the mains, it would be pretty obvious quickly.

Thankfully, Dynaudio's 42 and 42C work exceptionally well with the 62s. It took a bit more work with the 20A subwoofer to get it to sound good, mostly fiddling with the crossover point and the gain (volume). Since you can't easily fix any speaker system shortcomings with your receiver (the DVD-Audio path runs directly through the amps, bypassing the digital-to-analog converters), this Audience system is perfect for matching with your brand-spanking-new DEV-A player.

Eventually, I did get around to listening to primitive two-channel audio, resorting to my usual test discs, Queen's *A Day at the Races* completely cooked, with warm bass and a strong midrange. The sound stage was very deep and wide, and detail was nothing short of miraculous. Once in a great while, I did notice a bit of spittiness on the high end, and some vocals, such as Freddie Mercury's in *Somebody to Love*, sounded a tiny bit brittle, but not enough to really bother me.

Not surprisingly, I found the Dynaudios even better with movie soundtracks, such as *Star Trek: first Contact* and *Dances With Wolves*. The 42C, with its single woofer, delivered sharp and clear dialogue and kept audio pans around the front very smooth. I did notice that the sub seemed to lack punch slightly once in a while, something that seemed more noticeable while watching movies that were listening to music. If it were up to me, I'd have probably opted for the slightly more powerful 30A sub, which would probably resolve my issues. The 20A seems better suited to a smaller system, maybe on made up entirely of Audience 42s.

The more I used these speakers, the more I found they lacked any serious weakness, no matter how I used them. Considering the number of systems I've heard that are either excellent for music or movies but merely competent for the other, Dynaudio has done a nice job creating a product that seems to suit any audio purpose.

While I picked a couple of very minor nits, rest assured that the Audience system is right at the top of the class for this price range. I've heard systems that are better, but only at prices that would drain the blood from you face in a nanosecond. Keep in mind, I've heard system that cost more than twice as much as the Dynaudios but don't sound half as good.

If you've been thinking about upgrading to an audiophile-grade home theater system, the Dynaudio Audience speaker line is a great place to start, although opt for the bigger subwoofer. From what I heard, you'll be very happy, whether you love movies or music.

The Hartford Courant, March 2001

Dynaudio's Bookshelf Answer Pleases

By KEVIN HUNT

What's the difference between a pair of \$200 bookshelf speakers and Dynaudio's new Audience 42 bookshelf speakers - besides \$500? Externally, not much. Let's just call the Audience 42, in black vinyl wrap, unpretentious and leave it at that. It's underneath the grille, and inside the cabinet, that counts.

Dynaudio, a Danish manufacturer once known primarily for its high-quality drivers supplied to other loudspeaker companies, has developed a noteworthy series of 20-plus speakers in recent years. The Audience 42 is the baby, with the monstrous new Evidence taking over the top-of-the-line spot at \$85,000 a pair.

The Audience 42 is an update of the Audience 40, named speaker of the year in 1999 by a consortium of European consumer electronics magazines. In this case, "bookshelf" is a misnomer. Stuffing such a high-quality speaker into a bookshelf would compromise its sonic performance. No, this "monitor" belongs out in the room, preferably on stands. Monitors are the free-range chickens of bookshelf speakers- they need room to breath, to act naturally.

The best monitors are characterized by precise imaging, with vocalists and instruments clearly identifiable in the soundstage, and crystalline high frequencies. They are limited, however, in low-frequency output because of the small bass drivers and the tiny cabinets - the Audience 42 is only 11 inches high, 61,2 wide and 10 deep. For that reason, they're often paired with a subwoofer to create a full-range system.

The 10-pound Audience 42 has a stronger, three- quarter--inch-thick front baffle and more solid cabinets than its predecessor to counteract some of the problems caused by vibration in smaller speakers. (The more vibration, the more muffled the sound.) Once the front grille is removed, the Audience 42 is a thing of beauty - technically, at least. Each speaker uses Dynaudios Esotec drivers, a 1-inch soft-dome tweeter and 6-inch polypropylene woofer.

The tweeter extends to an ungodly - and, to human ears, undetectable - 28 kilohertz. That's way, way up there. The typical speaker is rated to 20 kilohertz. If nothing else, the number suggests a fleet and flexible tweeter. The woofer is far more restricted. It doesn't go any deeper than other monitors, but a rear port on each speaker allows increased power handling and a bit more bass. Dynaudio (www.dynaudiousa.com) also includes foam plugs for the ports, a practical way to tame excessive bass when the speakers are placed too closely to reflective surfaces like a rear wall.

The Audience 42 can be used in a traditional two-channel system, but it's also part of a Dynaudio home theater series that includes the Audience 42 Center (\$399) and the Audience Sub-20A (\$1,099) subwoofer. I listened to the Audience 42 in a two-channel setting and also as the front-channel speakers in a home theater with PSB Alpha Mini surrounds and a PSB subwoofer.

A movie soundtrack is no way to challenge your two front-channel speakers. The center channel does most of the strenuous work. In a home theater, I could not detect much difference between the Audience 42 and the speakers they replaced, the PSB Alphas, which remain one of the best available bookshelf speakers for under \$250 a pair.

But isolated as a reproducer of two-channel music, the Audience 42 not only breaks free from the budget pack, but also deserves comparison to far costlier speakers. Bring it on. The Audience 42 speakers are so good that someone wishing to put together a megabuck system could dish out the \$700 for these speakers, then go wild on the rest of the system. I made arrangements for such an extreme test, inserting the Audience 42 into a system surrounded by \$7,000 in boutique vacuum-tube electronics, with a Joule Electra LA100 Mark III preamplifier and a Music Reference RM200 amplifier.

The Audience 42 can definitely play in this league. With the Dynaudio's upper-frequency dexterity, Jack DeJohnette's cymbals absolutely sparkled driving the beat of "Concentration," a George Shearing tune on the two-disc "Whisper Not" (ECM Records) from the most finely tuned working jazz trio today: Keith Jarrett (piano), Gary Peacock (bass) and DeJohnette (drums). The sense of space between instruments on the Audience 42 simply cannot be reproduced with such lifelike clarity by a budget speaker. On this live recording, the listener can even sense the depth of the hall - the Palais des Congres in Paris - as the audience applauds between solos of Bud Powell's "Hallucinations." And with a two-channel system in a smaller room, the Audience 42 puts out sufficient bass to go without a subwoofer.

It's too harsh to say the Audience 42 would be wasted on a home theater, but these speakers deserve to be heard with music. Want a semi-exotic two-channel system? Try the Audience 42 with the JoLida JD202A, a 40-watt vacuum tube integrated amplifier (\$750), then add Sony's SCD-C775 SACD multi-changer - it also plays regular CDs - due in July at about \$400. For \$1,850 retail, you'd be combining the precision of the Audience 42 with the warmth of JoLida's tubes and the best new recording format, the Super Audio CD.

It wouldn't take up any more room than the average minisystem, either.



What Hi-Fi? February 2001

New 42s take Dynaudios to a higher level

Rating: **5-Stars**

For: Clarity and punch; openness and dynamics; solid build.

Against: Not a great deal.

Verdict: Stunning performers and easily among the best at the price.

Some speakers come carrying the weight of expectation, and as the follow-up to the highly successful Audience 40s, the 42s have much to live up to. In designing this new model, Dynaudio has constructed a stronger front baffle, to make the cabinet less resonant, and it has also added a number of tweaks to the crossover design.

The build of the cabinets is excellent - the vinyl wrap is neater than on the 40s - and although they're not the prettiest design you can get for the money, this is a well-made and solid pair of speakers.

Anyway, it's the sound for your pound that really count, and the Audience 42s have that in spades. A fabulously clear and detailed midrange makes for a totally involving listen, from a chamber choir to the chainsaw rock of Nine Inch Nails' Things Falling Apart set.

The tonal balance in particular is exceptionally even, from the seriously sweet treble to the deepest bass. For cabinets of their size, they have great low extension, and the 12.5cm polypropylene mid/bass driver has a lightning-quick response to even the very lowest frequencies. Powerful and punchy, the 42s make light work of the ribcage-rattling baselines on Add N To (X)'s Add Insult to Injury set.

The interesting thing about these Dynaudios is their curiously low crossover point of 1.8KHz. That gives the 28mm silk-dome tweeter a lot of work to do, but it does it in style. The integration between drivers is seamless, and the presentation as a whole is open, clear and truly musical.

Don't be put off by their sensitivity of 86dB/W/m or their impedance of 4ohms. Any equivalently priced amplifier will have no trouble driving these speakers.

The Audience 42s throw off the weight of expectation with ease, delivering a performance that is revealing, powerful and dynamic. A big sound in a small box, the 42s look set to follow in their predecessors' starry path.

The Audiophile Voice, Volume 7, Issue 3

Dynaudio Audience 42 Loudspeaker

By Mike Driscoll

It's the age-old question for budget-conscious audiophiles: How do you achieve high-quality sound in a music system without having to sell a kidney in order to pay for it all? I am here to tell you that it can be done.

For the past couple of months, I have been doing most of my listening through a very modestly priced pair of loudspeakers made by Dynaudio, the Audience 42s, using a 40-watt integrated tube amplifier from Jolida, their SJ202a. This combination costs less than \$1,500 retail, far less than what many audiophiles spend on just interconnects or speaker cables! An entire system could be put together around these two products for about \$2,000, which, I am told, is the most money the average music lover believes he or she ought to spend on a system. If the general (listening) public had any idea of the level of musicality attainable at this level, the purveyors of mid-fi dreck would have to find another line of work.

For the past eight weeks or so, I have used these diminutive speakers from Dynaudio with a wide variety of associated equipment, from 25-watt tube amps to 1 25-watt solid-state units, and with a variety of source units, both digital and analog. No matter what they were paired with, the speakers always sounded great. Don't misunderstand; these speakers are the products of good engineering, but they won't perform magic, even though their sound may fool you into thinking Dynaudio has somehow gotten around the laws of physics. There are limits to the low-frequency response of the 42s, ones imposed by their size, which mainly centered on the bottom couple of octaves, therefore, these are not the ideal choice for a person whose music collection contains a great deal of pipe organ. They did, however, at least in my listening room, produce reasonable output into the mid 30-Hz region, and (using the Stereophile Magazine test disc) had diminished, yet audible output into the high 40-Hz region. I have to say, I almost never missed that last octave or so, except when I tortured the Dynaudios with a CD of Saint-Saens Symphony #3 (organ). With chamber music, blues, jazz, blue-grass, even most symphonic music, the bass they produced was certainly adequate, if not prodigious. While playing a CD of Holst's The Planets (London 417 553-2), a rather unfortunate early digital recording, which nevertheless has a prodigious bass, I was actually startled by the fullness of low-end response from these little monitors. (And that's the end of my nit-picking, friends.)

Setting Them Up

I initially positioned the Dynaudio speakers in roughly the same position in my listening room normally occupied by my Mirage M3si's, that is 6.5 feet from the back wall, with 5.5 feet between the pair, leaving 5 feet from each speaker to the side wall. The speakers were toed in so that only the front of the cabinet was visible from the listening position,

which was six feet back from the speakers. I played with moving the Dynaudios in small increments forward and back, as well as increasing and decreasing the space from the side wall. I also tried varying degrees of toe-in, but they ended up sounding their best right back where they started¹ so that's where I left them. When I first received the speakers, I had no stands on which to place them, but Wayne Yee, an audiophile friend of mine, had a pair of prototype stands he had built, and lent them to me for evaluation. I was later able to use a pair of Target stands for comparison. I actually preferred the sound of the Dynaudios when they were used with Wayne's sand-filled stands. I cannot give any details of the design of the prototypes, as Wayne has sworn me to secrecy, since he hopes to someday market his rather unique design. All I can say is that they appear to work exactly as they are supposed to.

In Pull Color by Karl Shiflett and the Big Country Show (Rebel REBCDI772), a CO which was recorded using a basic three-mike setup with one more mike (used sparingly on the bass for fill, was recorded "live" in a studio, with no overdubbing. The musicians move forward to the center mike to play or sing their featured part, then move back and to the side in order to allow the next man his turn. The front-to-back movement was clearly audible through the Dynaudios. The sound of the acoustic bass came through extremely well. Attack and decay of the banjo were reproduced with aplomb, and tonal balance top to bottom seemed very natural. Likewise, the piano on Live at the Blues Society by Sunnyland Slim (Mapleshade 56302) sounded very natural and "right."

The famous air-conditioning duct on "Mining for Gold," from The Cowboy Junkies Trinity Sessions (RCA 8568-2R,) was audible, and right where you'd expect it to be. Likewise, the tambourine on Holly Cole's "Heart of Saturday Night," (Temptation, Metro Blue CDP7243 8 31653 2 2,) my favorite Tom Waits song, was suitably far back in the soundfield. Well-recorded orchestral works, such as the Mozart Symphony p29, by Jane Clover and the London Mozart Players (ASV CD OCA 717), displayed a very large, deep, and well. Defined soundstage, extending wall to wall, well to the outside of the speakers.

The general tonal balance of the Audience 42 was neutral to very slightly tipped towards the highs, at least in my room and system. That impression seemed to carry through when they were used with the other equipment, but high frequencies were not overemphasized. The aforementioned Karl Shiflett CD, I have noticed, reveals any glare or undue emphasis in this region, and "in repeated playings, it proved to my satisfaction that there aren't any problems in that area from this loudspeaker. Pace and rhythm, two areas which contribute mightily towards the elusive "musicality," were maintained as well as I have ever heard.

Overall, I often found myself wanting to forget taking notes, and just settle back and enjoy what I was hearing. Dynamic range was astounding for such a small speaker. Whether being driven by a 25-watt Signature Sound tube amp or 125-watt R. E. Designs solid-state monoblocks, they never seemed to be over-driven or, for that matter, did they ever seem hungry for more power. The more clean power one can give them, however, the happier they seem.

The Match-Ups

I was particularly impressed with their performance with the Jolida SJ202a, a 40-watt tubed integrated amp. This combination did not, of course, equal the level of sound quality achieved by many systems costing thousands of dollars more, but I have heard many much more expensive systems that didn't equal the sheer musicality of this pair. It's all in component matching, and this particular one sums to be a match made in heaven, at least for cash-starved audiophiles looking for great sound. An excellent starter system could be built around these two components, and upgrades made at a later date to the electronics, as the speakers are good enough to be used with, and reveal, the merits or deficiencies of much higher priced ancillary equipment.

Although not a videophile, I do have a stereo TV in my soundroom, against the back wall, midway between my loudspeakers. When I rent movies, I play the sound through my stereo in stereo only, no 5.1 or any of that. I have found that with surround-encoded sound-tracks, surround material will be thrown against the sides of the listening room, to my left and right, giving a sort of "passive" surround effect. The Dynaudios reproduced this effect extremely well, so well in fact, that I heard sounds coming from well behind me on some soundtracks. Upon playing a "home movie" that I made at Mid-Ohio racecourse, the video and audio seemed perfectly linked. In one sequence, the Indianapolis-type cars are seen at the start coming from far back at the left of the screen, and come then forward and to the right, disappearing off the screen at front right. The sound during this sequence followed the action perfectly, actually jumping forward of the speakers and up the right side of the room, following the exact path of the cars. Anyone intending to use these speakers in a video system, should, however, be forewarned that they are not shielded, and thus must be kept some distance away from the monitor. (This would seem to be required for my "passive" surround effect anyway, as this only seems to work when the loudspeakers are placed well out into the room.)

The Audience 42 uses a 15-cm mid/woofer, and a 28-mm soft. dome tweeter, with a crossover point of 1.8 kHz, and first-order filtering on both woofer and tweeter. Dynaudio says that the speakers can handle up to 150 watts maximum. They are a ported system, and are supplied with foam plugs for use when the speaker must be used close to the back wall. Literature mailed to me from Dynaudio gives details about several features of both drivers, such as the large 75-mm voice coil on the woofer, said to increase cooling, as well as the long 3.2-mm voice coil on the tweeter, intended to allow a lower crossover frequency, minimize distortion, increase power handling, decrease power compression, and also allow use of the low-order crossover. The system also uses vented magnets for high power handling, low Q, and low resonance frequency, among other claimed advantages. The voice coil of the woofer is wound around the magnet instead of being inside it, and the use of two magnet rings allow for less time distortion, it is claimed. Not being schooled in the intricacies of speaker design, I am in no position to dispute any of these claims, and my listening sessions indicated, at least to me, that whatever Dynaudio is doing, they are doing it right.

It always seemed logical to me that any company manufacturing their own drivers, provided they are sufficiently good at it, should be able to wring the most out of those drivers in a finished speaker system. Dynaudio, of course, has a long and well-earned reputation for building some of the finest drivers, ones used by speaker manufacturers

worldwide. The performance of the Audience 42 certainly supports my theory. They are great loudspeakers to build a starter system around or for high-end audiophiles to use in a second system. They also make a great recommendation when friends and acquaintances ask for advice on what to buy at a reasonable price. At \$699.00 a pair in rosewood, cherry, or black ash wood grain vinyl, or \$769 in white, these speakers are an absolute steal, and are worthy of consideration even if your budget can accommodate something more expensive. I highly recommended them.

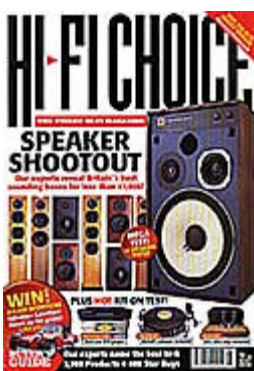
Audience 40 Reviews (previous model)



1999/2000 European Loudspeaker of the Year

European Imaging and Sound Association

20 Hi-Fi Magazines of 19 European countries
voted for the Audience 40.



Mega Test

Speakers Below £500

Review reprinted with permission from **May 1999, Hi-Fi Choice**

Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy

A long-established Danish company, Dynaudio has been better known for unusual main drivers than compete speaker systems, but this is beginning to change. The 577 Audience 50 scored a "Best Buy" rating in HFC 174 and, while the £400 Audience 5 was rather less successful (HFC 177), the company has now come up with its Audience 40 replacement.

However, £400 is still a lot of cash to pay for a 7-litre miniature two-way, especially as the box finish is vinyl where most of the price competition offer a tasty choice of real wood veneers. But Dynaudio has built its reputation on serious engineering, applying its proprietary driver technology across the whole range, budget to high end. It also uses some pretty solid cabinet work, even in the vinyl-finished enclosures, simply because this is very effective engineering to maximize all-round performance - the front panel is 19mm MDF. Besides, the vinyl looks neat enough, even close up, only really betraying its humble origins to the touch.

On the surface this is a simple, demure and understated two-way in a classic "miniature" enclosure for stand-mounting. The piece de resistance, however, is the unique main driver with its combination cone/dome 100mm plastic diaphragm driven from an oversize (75mm) voice coil and cast chassis. The tweeter is also Dynaudio's own design, using a 28mm fabric dome with ferrofluid cooling/damping. Both drivers use aluminum voice coil wire.

The rear carries a port (with optional foam bungs) and just a single terminal pair (Dynaudio doesn't believe in bi-wiring), while the crossover use very gentle 6db/octave roll-off rates. Although the far-field in-room measurements confirm the expected lack of deep bass, the Audience 40 still has sufficient midbass output to avoid the need for wall assistance - use the bungs if you want to place them close to a wall. The trace, as a whole, is exceptionally well balanced right across the band, with just a faint dip around the crossover point and a slightly brighter-than-average treble.

Sound Quality

The Audience 40 delivered a stonking performance in the listening tests - two listeners rated this humble Group A miniature their joint "best of the day". It might not quite have the artillery to compete head on with some of the larger models in the more upmarket groups, but it proved quite able to see off its immediate competition and several Group B and C models too. It was also widely praised for its fine musical communication.

The bottom line is that it does nearly everything well and can compete with floorstanders in everything bar dynamics and bass grunt: "Treble sings sweetly and midrange is coherent. Not a sound to thrill the senses but generally foible-free and easy to live with. Very pleasant indeed."

The sound as a whole is clean, clear and beautifully balanced, with just the minor caveat that it might be a shade on the bright and shiny side for some partnering electronics.

Conclusion

A big improvement over the now discontinued Audience 5, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the Audience 40 is even better value than the 40 percent larger (and 44 percent more expensive) Audience 50, especially since its bass tuning gave a rather better match with our listening room. Since the Audience 50 rated a "Best Buy", the same accolade is mandatory for this excellent newcomer. Few, if any, of a similar price and size can offer the same winning combination of neutrality, dynamic range and sheer musical involvement.

Verdict

Sound: 5 stars
Build: 5 Stars
Value: 5 Stars
Price: £400



Dynaudio Audience 40, £400
Extract reprinted with permission from:
WHAT HI FI? Ultimate Guide to Audio 1999

Rating: 5 Stars
For: Excellent midband; impressive weight; absorbing presence.
Against: A touch hard sounding at times.

The Audience 40s are based on the Danish company's Audience 50s, but are more compact at 28.2x17x24.6cm and shave £144 off the price. They're not the prettiest, but their vinyl-wrapped cabinets are solid and come in three decent finishes. But who cares about niceties with such high quality drive units in £400 speakers?

Bass has authority and punch, and midrange is clean and detailed with very impressive coherence. The treble is crisp and assured, putting most of the competition to shame in terms of definition. Their sound can be a touch on the hard side, but unless you like your music especially smooth and warm, their clarity and involvement will banish any doubts.

The net result of all this is a pair of standmounters that sound much bigger than they look. They can't quite match the all-absorbing scale of the Audience 50s, but in smaller rooms they may offer a better balance.



Top-value
£400 Danes
Review reprinted with permission from **December 1998 - WHAT HI FI?**

This issue of WHAT HI FI? is crammed with great speakers, and Danish maker Dynaudio is taking a starring role. Those of you with over a grand to spend should undoubtedly check out the company's Contour 1.3 MkIIs (see p51) but if your budget is less than half that you've got to hear these Audience 40s. For musical entertainment and high resolution detail there's little to beat them at the price.

They're based on the company's Audience 50s, but they're more compact at 28.2x17x24.6cm (h x w x d) and they shave a full £177 off the price. They're not the prettiest little standmounters in the world, but their vinyl-wrapped cabinets are solid and come in three decent finishes. But who cares about such niceties when Dynaudio is able to squeeze such high quality drive units into £400 speakers (see Coils 'n' Cones panel below).

Their performance has much in common with the Audience 50s, and the 'Dynaudio sound' in general. Bass has authority and punch, and midrange is clean and detailed with very impressive coherence. Then there's the treble - crisp and assured, it puts most of the price competition to shame in terms of definition. True, their sound can be a touch on the hard side, particularly if you partner them with an aggressive amp or play a bright recording. But unless you like your music especially smooth and warm, the clarity and involvement they provide will banish any doubts.

The net result of this is a pair of standmounters that sound much bigger than they look. They can't quite match the all-absorbing scale of the Audience 50s, but in smaller rooms they may offer a better balance. Their big brothers have a tendency to boom if they're not given enough room, but these are happier in more confined areas, and if you use the supplied bungs in their rear-firing ports there should be no problem putting them up against a wall.

All kinds of music are catered for, from classical symphonies through to speed garage. Play the Fun Lovin' Criminal's Up on the Hill and they show superb rhythm and presence, letting sax flow freely through the mix and giving Huey's vocal real weight. Switching to Sara K's Play on Words; shows their lighter side, supplying female voice and acoustic instrumentation with vivid poise. And as for dance music, a DJ who visited us during testing was simply blown away by their clarity and energy, though there are limits in terms of bass and volume.

The Audience 40s aren't great respecters of harsh or dull recordings, but on most counts these rank among the very best speakers you can buy for under £500. If that's your budget and you're after small speakers, then put them on your shortlist alongside Dali's £400 Royal Menuet II's and AVI's £500 NuNeutrons.

Coil's 'N' Cones:

Dynaudio makes its own drive units, which are highly respected in both domestic and professional sectors worldwide.

With the Audience 40s, that experience is reflected in a quality of engineering and components rare in £400 speakers, not least where the mid/bass driver units is concerned. The 15cm cones are made of polypropylene impregnated with minerals to control resonance, and features the company's distinctive cone/dome design with a large, stiff dust cap moulded as one piece. The unit's voice coil is a 75mm pure aluminium device, which is relatively large to help increase power handling (150W continuous) and maintain the diaphragm's linear action. The 28mm silk dome tweeter is a version of Dynaudio's D260 Esotec unit, as used professionally by the BBC.

Dynaudio Audience 40 Loudspeakers. £400 For: Excellent midband; Impressive weight; absorbing presence Against: Can be a touch hard sounding at times Verdict: Open, weighty and wide-ranging standmounters that sound much bigger than they look. Top value and no mistake.