



Audio Physic Classic 30 Loudspeaker

A Class Act

Neil Gader

Audio Physic's long-standing company motto, "no loss of fine detail," has always represented more than mere sloganeering. As anyone who has ever experienced these fine German loudspeakers can attest, fine detail is a signature characteristic of the brand—a taste baked into the cake of every AP speaker. Thinking back on my experiences with Audio Physic transducers—the Yara (Issue 142) and more recently the Step 25 compact (Issue 224)—conjured up memories of narrow-baffle, clean, columnar transducers of superior resolution, swift transient behavior, and exact focus. They possessed an ability to resolve detail deep within a soundstage, precisely mapping the makeup and environment of a symphony orchestra in much the same way as the keen eyes of a surveyor analyze a landscape. But for this listener these models also had a slightly lighter overall spectral balance, resulting in speakers with the kind of detail and finesse that are tailor-made for the world of light classical, jazz, and chamber music, but somewhat lacking in the full, visceral measure of bass-range weight, foundation, and dynamism that large-scale, beat-driven pop music demands.

Enter the Classic 30 the largest and most sophisticated of Audio Physic's new and affordable Classic line—models that also includes the floorstanding Classic 10 and 20, a compact monitor, and a center channel. In a nutshell, the Classic 30 has the sheer sonic enthusiasm of an extrovert. Versatile in the extreme it can don a tux and head uptown to take in an opera, or just as effortlessly shred its way through a *Best of Twisted Sister* compilation or kick back for a mellow night of Barry Manilow remixes. (Not that I consider these recommendations.)

Before I run away with myself however, a description is in order. The Classic 30 is a five-driver system that features a 1.2" (30mm) coated-textile dome tweeter that is surrounded by a star-shaped acoustic panel that promotes even dispersion. This assembly is positioned between the coated-paper cones of the 5.9" midrange and 5.9" mid/bass. It's this latter transducer that produces the ".5" of this 3.5-way design, in that it augments the midbass region on up into the heart of the midrange where it begins a slow acoustic roll-off above 500Hz. Both of these drivers are low-passed at 120Hz. Unique to the midrange is the phase plug that's fixed to the magnet system, which helps to minimize compression effects and improve the dissipation of heat from the moving system, thus reducing distortions at high volumes.

The real stars of the Classic 30, however, are completely hidden in the base of the cabinet. There reside a pair of offset and

opposing aluminum 7" woofers that have been mounted vertically within their own chamber in a push-push configuration—a bass-reflex design that fires downward between the enclosure's base and supporting plinth. More commonly mounted on the exterior sidewalls this configuration has the advantage of further reducing cabinet vibrations and hence potential colorations. The woofers cross over at 120Hz. Audio Physic normally employs this more costly solution on its pricier models, like the Avantero reviewed by JV in Issue 220. The Classic 30 is the first AP speaker in this price range to use this push-push woofer-assembly.

The look of the Classic 30 is contemporary and clean. Viewed head-on, the narrow baffle of the Classic 30 makes it appear for all intents and purposes like a lightweight tower speaker of yore—until, that is, you take a gander at the sixteen-inch depth of its slab-like side panels. Then you're reminded that those twin seven-inch woofers have to be lurking somewhere inside.

For all the apparent outward simplicity of its chassis, the truth is much more complex. Each Classic-line speaker features a dual-layer enclosure with an inner shell made from MDF. But there is also an outer layer of either glass plates for the high-gloss versions or veneered MDF boards for the natural-wood-finished version. Additionally an air gap separates these layers, which cuts the transmission of mechanical energy from the inside of the enclosure to the outside (listening room) to diminish all possible cabinet-induced sonic colorations. Though unscientific, a quick rap of the knuckles suggests AP has achieved a very stiff, non-vibrational ideal in its Classic line chassis.

While I nursed my now-sore digits, I cued up my old bass and tympani drum stalwart, Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and clamped my hands to the enclosure's side panels to get a sense of the cabinet's action. Even at output levels that prompted me to stand behind the speaker, vibrations were remarkably subdued.

Shrewdly the Classic 30 gives users the option of displaying the drivers with an open, solid front panel or replacing this panel with one sporting a fabric covering. Both versions are supplied with the Classic 30. (I told you this was a class act.) Finishes include veneers, high-gloss white and black glass, plus a handful of special-order glass coatings. Top-quality Nextgen connectors from WBT are standard—a design developed to isolate conductors from micro-vibrations.

As alluded to earlier, the sonics of the Classic 30 present a highly persuasive and immensely authoritative sonic picture. Two-way compact aficionados and Audio Physic followers will

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immediately cock their heads in appreciation of the cleanly wrought images and the speed and formidable dynamics that are brought to bear in the all important midrange—a region where intelligently engineered three-way designs truly thrive.

The Classic 30 is a speaker that doesn't need to be babied. It produces clean dynamic contrasts and astonishingly high-output levels without upending its carefully sculpted voicing. It descends convincingly, at times *thrillingly*, into the low thirty cycle range, as advertised. It's impressive both in definition and pitch expression, but also in all-out extension—an attribute that further adds credibility and foundation and proportion to a very realistic soundstage. And it's not mere trifling low bass, either; the Classic 30's low-end response is vigorous, with the kind of impact that not only brings an orchestra to life but also supports the manic 16th-note triplets of Lars Ulrich's explosive drumming from Metallica's eponymous "Black Album." Its bass response has personality—the dark saturnine weight during the "Landscape lento" movement of Vaughan Williams' *Antartica* [Naxos] or the firm, upbeat rhythmic bounce of Holly Cole's "I Can See Clearly" from *Temptation* [Alert].

Timbre is colorfully rendered, from the oboe that introduces Judy Collins' cover of "Send In The Clowns" to Jennifer Warnes' backing vocals during "Lights of Louisiana." And low-level resolution? The Classic 30 clings to vocal harmonies like flypaper. Its transient response was exemplary during Elton John's "Madman Across the Water"—a virtual clinic on how to reproduce the percussive rattle and resonances of heavy flat-pick slashing across the strings of an acoustic guitar. Additionally the Classic 30 reproduces scale quite truthfully, neither overly miniaturizing an orchestra nor shrinking a closely miked vocal.

Imaging, a traditional Audio Physic strength, is a precisely targeted affair. And inter-driver coherence is very good, although at times I felt that the Classic 30 framed midrange images with a precision that was almost too exact. One of the reference torture tracks that I've listened to for years is the cut "1B" from *Appalachian Journey* with cellist Yo Yo Ma, bassist Edgar Meyer, and fiddle player Mark O'Connor. The fiery interplay of these gifted musicians makes for something akin to bluegrass/chamber music to my ears. Three soaring and diving melodic lines seem to tear off in different directions, dovetail, and then spin away again. In some situations these images can smear easily, obscuring bass extension and pitch control. However, if you can get a lot of loudspeaker beneath this track—and the Classic 30 certainly qualifies—some surprising things begin to happen. Foremost is the retrieval of bass foundation as laid down by Meyer's aggressive bowing—deep shudders of bass resonances that fill the soundstage and are certain to deliver a satisfying seat massage. No less important are the midrange dynamics and speed issuing from these bowed strings instruments. Any sense of compression instantly robs this incendiary track of image localization, and its momentum and intensity.

Solo piano, my touchstone instrument, is reproduced in its entirety. That is, not as a spinet or an upright or a console or even a baby grand, but as a true concert grand—nine glossy black feet of steel, wood, and literally tons of string tension. The final section of *The Lark* is replete with Evgeny Kissin's vertiginous swirling arpeggio flourishes that arrive in dynamic, immersive waves. The Classic 30's new tweeter with its quick, open personality

really shone in this atmosphere. It's a truly excellent driver that remained smooth and composed in the company of such high-intensity material, but was equally sensitive to the soft touch of the pianist during gentle pianissimos. On the concluding movement of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the Classic 30 permits "The Great Gate of Kiev" to swing wide open. The bottom octave weight of the concert grand piano is explosive and awe-inspiring in its impact. If the Classic 30's bottom octave begins to sound a bit woolen and port-"lively" beneath this onslaught, it's plainly forgivable given the many other ways it's capturing this massive performance. A last word about the Classic 30's impressive bass performance—as I listened the Taiko drums and soothing Tibetan bowls during "Silence" from the Hans Zimmer score to *The Thin Red Line*, I felt the Classic 30 struck a fair balance between the immersiveness and bloom of the ported system and the textural detail and control of sealed enclosures. I tend to find myself more often in the sealed camp but the Classic 30 was persuasive in its handling of deep-bass excursions.

Vocals, a strong suit of every Audio Physic design I've encountered were reproduced with the immediacy and focus I've come to expect.

While the Classic 30's general tonal balance is neutral, there's also a sonic mix of light and dark. On top, there is a cooler lift in the treble and a fractional dip in the presence range that enhances the air and articulation in a vocalist's delivery. "A little more head tone" were among the notes I made as I listened to Mary Stallings' vocal during "Sunday Kind of Love." In that same vein there was just a bit more articulation in the upper octaves than what I'd consider natural in the recorded-live performance of cellist Martin Zeller's Bach Cello Suite [MA Recordings].

The Classic 30 eloquently speaks to me on many levels, as a product capable of the intimacy, transparency, and coherence of a fine two-way compact, and as a multiway with an uncommon exuberance and range that doesn't slight the wide dynamics and deep bass challenges of big music, from metal to Mahler. I probably don't need to add that these attributes are often mutually exclusive in most loudspeakers. Not in the Classic 30, however. In fact, and though it's too early to tell, Audio Physic may well have a genuine *classic* on its hands. **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Three-way, bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker

Price: \$6750

Drivers: One 1.2" dome tweeter, two 6" midranges, two 7" woofers

GOERNER COMMUNICATIONS (U.S. Distributor)

Frequency response: 31Hz-30kHz

91, 18th Avenue
Deux-Montagnes,
Quebec, J7R 4A6

Sensitivity: 89dB

(514) 833-1977

Impedance: 4 ohms

Dimensions: 41.5" x 6.7" x 16.2"

info@goernercommunication.com

Weight: 59 lbs.

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