

Oh, Vienna



Adam Smith finds out if Vienna Acoustics' new loudspeakers have a Bach worse than their bite...

Continuing our whistle-stop tour of European loudspeaker manufacturers by moving north from Italy, we stop off in Austria courtesy of Vienna Acoustics. Fortunately there is plenty of time to enjoy the aural experience offered by the new Bach Grands.

Vienna Acoustics like to name their loudspeakers after composers, and the Bach Grands are the baby floorstanders of the range, despite the image of a huge behemoth that their name conjures up! Standing 88cm (34.6 in) high, they're a compact two way design that incorporate a seven inch (175mm) bass driver with an eye-catching transparent cone, and a one inch (25mm) soft dome tweeter. Bass loading is rather unusual as the Bach Grands are ported at both the front and rear, utilising a system that Vienna Acoustics refer to as Twin Balanced Reflex (TBR).

The rear port is quite conventional but the front item fires around the sides of the tweeter. Vienna Acoustics have engineered this item very well and made use of a carefully designed central 'wedge' behind the tweeter that divides the airflow from the port into two. Any inaccuracies in the design or assembly of this item will result in turbulence within the port opening and associated port noise, but the Bach Grands do not exhibit this at all. Measurement also shows that the front and rear port outputs measure identically, again proving that it has been well implemented. Vienna Acoustics claim that this design imparts symmetrical loading on the bass driver at the frequency

where the driver and port interact. As a result, bass performance should be good.

Connection to the Bach Grands is via a single pair of binding posts which are solid, large and spaced sufficiently apart from each other to allow bare wire connections to be well tightened without breaking a nail.

The Bach Grands come in a choice of four finishes, namely Black, Maple Cherry and Rosewood. Our review samples were in Cherry and were impeccably finished and screwed together. It certainly appears that your £1,250 buys you a very well designed and built product, but most importantly, how do they sound?

SOUND QUALITY

Connected up to the Vincent SA-TI/SP-TI00 amplifier combo also reviewed in this issue, the Bach Grands gave an excellent account of themselves. That unusual balanced port system proved its worth as bass was well extended and agile but with excellent detail. Bass lines had a pleasing solidity to them and the Viennas have a more than capable rhythmic ability. Even moving to an amplifier that is less of a bass powerhouse than the Vincents, the Bach Grands remained punchy and tight.

Diana Krall makes extensive use of the double bass in her music as more than just a backing instrument and the Viennas really made the most of this by reproducing it very well. Fingers could be heard sliding up and down the fretboard and the leading edge of the strings came across very well as they were plucked. Shifting up to faster paced music, the Bach grands were more than happy to boogie and still remained fast and clean, although I did detect a slight hint of 'thump' at the very lowest frequencies with some dance music. If raving is not your thing however, you are unlikely to ever experience this!

Female vocalists like the aforementioned Diana Krall, gave performances full of emotion and yet the rather huskier tones of Jeff Buckley on his track 'So Real' were equally well presented. Midrange from the transparent plastic-coned bass/mid driver was very clean and detailed. There was an excellent amount of detail retrieval but there was something of a sense of distance about the Bach Grand's performance in this area.

As can be seen from the frequency response graph [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE] there is an overall slight fall in output level as frequency increases, before

a peak appears in the treble, and this appears to be pushing some aspects of the midrange into the background a little. The Viennas have a very stable and deep soundstage and there was never any sense of the midrange being overcome, but the Bach Grands do not sound especially large and they can be a little 'shy' in some ways, as if they were afraid to really let rip with vocals - just occasionally I wished they would let their hair down and shout a bit! The upside of this is, of course that they remain composed and pleasant to listen to, no matter how tonsorially-challenged the singer is.

Treble was another area in which the Bach Grands were extremely accomplished. Output from the soft dome tweeter was smooth and meticulous, with every little detail being well captured. This added a lovely sense of space and atmosphere to recordings and added to the overall sweet nature of the 'speaker. Never veering into harshness, the Viennas again remained composed no matter what material they were receiving, without masking any poor recording or mastering.

CONCLUSION

The Vienna Acoustics Bach Grands are a well designed and thoroughly enjoyable loudspeaker. Whilst not pulling off the trick that some loudspeakers manage, of sounding much larger than they look, they have a deep and detailed soundstage and their overall balance is sweet, clean and accurate.

I found them to be quite happy with a wide variety of music material, from classical to dance and their overall character is essentially sweet and neutral. Attempts to maximise bass output from an average-sized enclosure can often end in tears, but the Twin Balanced Reflex system utilised on the Bach Grands works very nicely, and augments their low frequency performance very well. I enjoyed my time auditioning the Viennas and when one takes into consideration their sound, build quality and finish, they definitely make an excellent case for themselves at the price.



VERDICT

Sweet, detailed sound plus superb build make these excellent value loudspeakers.

VIENNA ACOUSTICS BACH

GRAND £1,250

Distributed by REL Acoustics

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FOR

- sweet, neutral character
- good bass weight and detail
- superb fit and finish

AGAINST

- restrained midrange

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

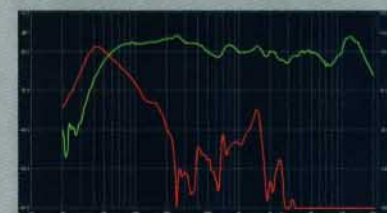
The frequency response of the Bach Grands has a general downward trend with increasing frequency, which should give their overall sound quite a weighty character. The treble peak at 13kHz combined with the steady rolloff afterwards will add high frequency detail but ensure minimal harshness.

At the low end, the bass output rolls off at around 60Hz and is reinforced by the dual ports which operate at 45Hz. One port is at the front of the loudspeaker, located behind and firing around the tweeter, and the other is at the rear, which allows for fine bass tuning through judicious positioning.

Sensitivity is high at a measured 88dB and minimum impedance is 3.8 Ohms so partnering amplifiers do not need to be overly powerful but need to be able to drive a genuine 4 Ohm load. Average measured impedance was higher at 6.3 Ohms thanks to the large reactive peak in impedance response at 2kHz. This may not get the best

out of some amplifiers, and so careful auditioning will be wise. AS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

