

Vienna Rolls

**VIENNA ACOUSTICS
BEETHOVEN BABY GRAND (£2195)**

Austrian brand Vienna names all its hi-fi products after composers: do they live up to their reputations?

hi-finews
HIGHLY
COMMENDED



Vienna Acoustics was established in 1989 by Peter Gansterer in, believe it or not, Vienna. The city has some of the finest concert halls in the world, and may be considered as the birth-place of Classical (or Western Art) music. Peter lived in Vienna whilst studying acoustics... So no prizes for guessing how this ends up: a fine range of speakers named after classical composers, most of whom worked in Vienna. At the top of the Grand series is the Mahler, followed by the Beethoven Concert Grand, the Beethoven Baby Grand, the Mozart Grand and, finally, the Bach Grand.

Reviewed here are the Beethoven Baby Grands, which are finished in an exquisite piano black lacquer surpassing that of most grand pianos, and retailing for £2195 per pair. For the same price you can have either maple or cherry (real wood) veneers, or for £2395 you can opt for rosewood.

The Beethoven Baby Grand has two reflex-loaded 150mm woofers, a 150mm midrange and a 28mm hand-coated silk dome tweeter. The front baffle is an impressive 40mm thick Medite, which should keep everything firmly in its place. The crossover uses gentle 1st and 2nd order slopes with high tolerance components. Connection is via a single set of high quality multi-way 4mm binding posts. Sensitivity is quoted at 91dB with an impedance of 4ohm.

The Baby Grand weighs in at 30kg each and are 987 x 170 x 328mm (hwd). The profiled grille has an aluminum frame, with no nasty plastic, which is neatly contoured to minimize any diffraction effects. A diecast aluminum stand with adjustable spikes isolates the speaker and decouples it from the floor; also included are protection shims for those with wooden floors.

Aesthetically pleasing, slim and discreet, causing even my mum to say 'Oh, I like those', the Baby Grands are an object lesson in art and design.

LOVE FOR MUSIC

Vienna Acoustics' design philosophy is based as much on recreating the recording environment as it is each individual instrument. How is this achieved? Largely by designing its own drive units and crossovers and by investing significant resources, time and money, into R&D, inspired to do so by a deep affection for music.

Back to the drive units: the new 6in midrange uses a unique three polypropylenes thermoplastic material to achieve maximum internal damping, ultra low mass and control over cone density. Dubbed X3P, this new cone material allows the drive unit to provide a well behaved and controlled response. The bass units used are Vienna Acoustics' new 'Spider Cone' drivers. Here

GRAND DESIGN

The Baby Grand employs two new 6in Spider Cone bass units used as ULF (Ultra Low Frequency) drivers derived from the Beethoven Concert Grand. Ribs control the woofer cone break-up for a clean fast bass with excellent dynamics. Choice of cone material is also key – Vienna Acoustics calls on an advanced TPX and polypropylene-based polymer, resulting in maximum inner damping, matching the critical midrange unit. The Baby Grand uses two ULF drivers for increased surface cone area, whilst keeping the front profile of the cabinet to a minimum width.

AUDIO FILE

Three-way floorstanding speaker with twin 6in bass drivers, 6in midrange and 1in tweeter

Price: £2195

Supplied by:
REL Acoustics Ltd

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ABOVE: The Beethoven Baby Grand is designed for single wiring only via 4mm binding posts. Its decoupled base is spiked but comes with optional shims for wooden floors

the diaphragm is formed from TPX and strengthened with strategically positioned spider cone stiffening ribs, providing additional rigidity for bass transients.

THE BEETHOVENS' BEETHOVEN

The review pair was fully run in. Nevertheless they were given a week to settle in, all critical listening being done with grilles removed. Hooked up to an AudioNote M3 pre-/Audio Innovations Second Audio power amp combination (using Atlas Mavros interconnect), these speakers had an exceptionally well balanced sound, combined with good imaging and level of detail retrieval. Bass was sufficiently deep and free from any bloom or overhang, the mid was natural and open, whilst the top was sweet and extended. The minimum phase crossover ensured that everything arrived at

'The minimum phase crossover ensured that everything arrived at the correct time and place'

the correct time and place – unlike your luggage at Heathrow's Terminal 5.

Into the Exposure 2010 CD player went Beethoven's First Piano Concerto with Vladimir Ashkenazy [Decca 430 750-2]. It opened with a soft string section with a good sense of depth, just to the left of centre. The neutrality of the violins made this extended introduction enjoyable. Further into the track, the pianoforte too was tonally very good, with enough detail for one to appreciate Ashkenazy's playing.

There was an apparent 'quietness' about the sound; everything was in order and timing was solid; the speakers had a very clean and dampened-sounding decay. Dynamics were good, although there was a slightly 'clipped' effect apparent in the midrange – not in a harsh manner, yet just enough so that things were slowed down a bit. But this meant there was more than enough time given to appreciate the performance. ➞



ABOVE: A hand-coated silk domed 28mm tweeter sits above the 150mm mid driver, on a 40mm Medite baffle

And so it was with Mozart piano Concertos No 21, K.467 [Sony SK34 562]. This is a delightful recording in which Perahia plays superbly, the softness of his touch well contrasted with the dynamics of the strings. The Baby Grand had the rare ability to make you stop, relax and marvel at what is being played. The silk dome tweeter never drew attention to itself and carried the same characteristic of composure as the mid.

The scherzo of Schubert's *Trout* Quintet with pianist Emil Gilels [DG 413 453-2] confirmed these initial findings. There was more bite from this recording: the violins sounded more cutting and the piano playing more forceful than with my previous examples. However, the Baby Grand kept control, painting a more than satisfying picture of the acoustic environment.

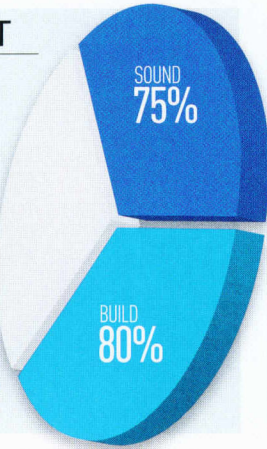
ONE FOR THE MONET

Onto a Valdi/Audio Note Arm3/IQ3 turntable setup went 'Do You Feel Like We Do' from *Frampton Comes Alive!* [AM Records AMLM 63703], a great atmospheric recording. The opening guitar had good attack and the accompanying hi-hat a pleasing sense of metallic ring. Frampton's stage position in relation to his microphone was as obvious as his characteristic energy and drive. The whistles and screams from the crowd combined with Frampton's talk-box helped transport the listener back in time to 1975 and Winterland, San Francisco.

Paul Horn's *Inside* [Epic BXN 26466] was recorded on location in the Taj Mahal. He times his playing to allow for such an extended reverberation time, harmonising flute and environment to great effect. The Baby Grands were in their element. If they were a painting, they would be Venice Twilight by Monet. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Baby Grand doesn't dish out a pyrotechnic type of performance: it is far too sophisticated for that. What you get is an object lesson in sublimity, giving you the time to fully appreciate the artists' performances. Factor in the exquisite build quality and elegance of design and you have an outstanding product that delivers a rich and rewarding musical experience.



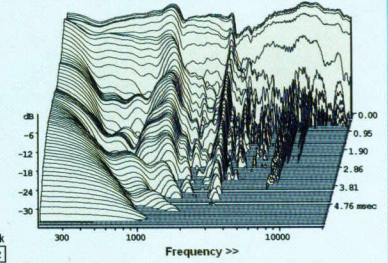
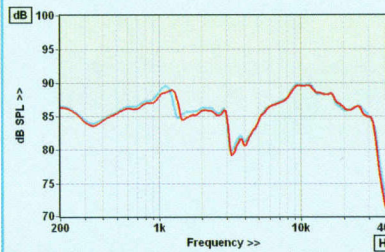
HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Vienna Acoustics' claimed sensitivity of 91dB for the Beethoven Baby Grand is optimistic according to our testing, which shows an averaged figure, 200Hz to 20kHz, of 87.5dB and a pink noise equivalent over the same bandwidth of 86.5dB. In power terms these shortfalls are equivalent to 2.2x and 2.8x respectively. Nevertheless, achieving even these figures from a compact enclosure having a bass response that is -6dB at 43Hz requires a lower than average impedance.

VA specifies a 4ohm nominal load but the minimum modulus is closer to a low 2.6ohm at 82Hz, suggesting a nominal figure of 3.3ohm. Furthermore, the minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) is a challenging 1.5ohm at 32Hz although, given typical music spectra, the 1.7ohm figure at 124Hz

is probably more relevant in practice. All told, then, the Baby Grand presents quite a challenging load to the partnering amp.

On-axis frequency response errors are on the high side at ± 5.2 and ± 5.0 dB respectively because this speaker has a switchback response between 1kHz-10kHz, with a deep notch in output between 3kHz and 5kHz. Vienna Acoustics makes a lot of the proprietary X3P cone material it uses for the Baby Grand's midrange driver but, as the cumulative spectral decay waterfall clearly shows, it suffers two obvious breakup resonances at 1kHz and 3kHz which are responsible for much of this uneven response. Our initial samples of the Baby Grand showed pair matching errors of ± 1.9 dB, which is also on the high side, the principal disparities occurring in the passband of the midrange driver. KH



ABOVE LEFT: A 'switchback' frequency response with a significant notch in output between 3-5kHz; ABOVE RIGHT: Resonances at 1kHz and 3kHz are probably associated with breakup modes in the midrange driver

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL at 1m for 2.83Vrms input)	87.5dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	2.6ohm @ 82Hz / 19.9ohm @ 3.0kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	-35° @ 4.7kHz / 46° @ 2.0kHz
Pair matching (200Hz-20kHz)	± 1.9 dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	31.9kHz / 32.0kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.7% / 0.6% / 0.1%