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Remove the grills to get a look at Vienna Acoustics' glorious high-quality drivers

Shining future for Viennese wonders

Never one to shirk the limelight, **Adam Rayner** waltzes his butt off to some designer speakers with audio gravitas...



Vienna Acoustics have been making loudspeakers since 1989, and have produced a variety of often striking designs. None, though, have been as aesthetically jaw-dropping as the Schönberg range.

Created as a serious attempt to produce a 'designer' set of speakers with audiophile status, these dramatic models, made of aluminium and MDF, seem to be the perfect partner for a home theatre built around a high-end flatscreen. I suspect this speaker package, which utilises Schönbergs for left/right duties, and the tonally-matched Webers for centre and rear duties, is aimed squarely at the discerning buyer who has issues with traditional dog-coffins and wants 'pretty.' Said buyer is also likely to want a nil-footprint solution in their room. A tall order, perhaps, and one that has been tried and failed in the past by manufacturers more keen on the pretty than the performance.

Of course, some designer speakers do manage to work quite well and still look gorgeous (most recently the Audica CX System 3 I reviewed in *HCC* #155) yet nothing I have come across to date has succeeded like these.

The Schönberg enclosures, available in either silver or piano-black lacquer, are extraordinary. Despite being really quite compressed front to back, they are

wide, and, being oblate, do manage to contain a reasonable amount of air; enough to port the enclosure for better bass. The Schönberg towers are weighty to the point that you will need help to unpack and definitely help to attach them to any wall brackets you might use.

They loudspeakers look smart and sexy, especially with the tweeters mounted seemingly in mid-air to the side of the speakers. Their cones are see-through, and look fabulous. The Schönbergs come with upright feet frames (they can be wall-mounted) while the three smaller Webers are available with either a foot-stand or centre horizontal stand.

Putting it together

The towers include spiked foot-stands but those for the smaller Webers are sold separately. Assembling and fitting them feels a little like that bit in *The Day Of The Jackal* when Edward Fox makes his gun. Snick, click. Magnetic clasps, Allen-headed bolts and neat-but-weighty parts. In fact, the whole system speaks of quality. These are no me-too items. One heft of the things and the Donald Gennaro rating – he's *Jurassic Park*'s accountant who measures everything by mass – leaps out at you.

I found out that the speakers have not just been designed to try and work with their own drivers, but that

AV/CV

Product: High-quality packaging together of audiophile sub-bass system and esoteric plasma-friendly designer speakers

Position: Vienna Acoustics entry-level speakers

Peers: Waterfall Audio's Victoria Evo Audio Pro's Cinema Precision Silver Pioneer's S-LX70

the midbass driver and crossover have been developed together. You need some real muscle to make bass in less space and it can affect the curve of a drivers' response.

A well-designed crossover can take the peak off and make it create better low-end, even in the stressful acoustic environment of not much air to bump against. (Tech moment: one of the parameters of the speaker driver itself is called its compliance – or 'wobbliness' – and is measured by comparing the squeezability of its soft suspension parts and cone to a volume of air – like in a ball. This 'VAS' is measured in litres. The more, the squeezier.)

The Schönbergs are distributed in the UK by the revered subwoofer brand REL. This goes quite a long way to explaining why REL subwoofers are being bundled with Vienna Acoustics' speaker packages; in this case a REL T1, which sells individually for around £600.

Proof, pudding, etc

As a multichannel speaker system, the Viennas shine. I spun a selection of 5.1-channel music discs and found myself immediately engaged.

The deep throbs at the beginning of Sting's *Brand New Day* album are delivered tight and rich with a plunging bass. Treble definition, as the percussion and drums hit, is delightfully crisp and fast.

I must confess I was a bit



Glossip:
Expect this Euro brand to create a buzz for itself on the cinephile circuit

disappointed with the level available at first, but quickly concluded that efficiency *per se* was a slight sacrifice of the Vienna's exquisite design.

Anyway, my reference Acurus amplification had plenty of muscle left in reserve, and so I simply cranked them up and my concerns went away. Actually, it seemed they wanted to be run good and vigorously, in order to show what they could really do. I imagine that when these Viennas are demonstrated at hi-fi shows, they are played at full, orchestral *Gottterdammerung* volume levels.

To test the systems movie chops I once again went to my current favourite DVD set – the *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* box. The latest iteration of Ridley Scott's sci-fi has a dramatically improved soundmix to the previous releases – even if it does come *sans* Harrison Ford's much-maligned voiceover – and is a real system tester.

The sequence where Deckard kills the replicant stripper, sending her crashing through window after window, is a peach. It has street chaos, followed by world-splitting

gunshots, then glass, then a throbbing heartbeat that rises to be everything, then ceases. In an ideal world the heartbeat should make your room throb before you jump out of your seat when the gun fires; the good news is that this system achieves just that. It grabs you and takes you on a proper emotional journey.

If you're left unmoved at the end of it there is either no poetry in your soul, or you're listening on the wrong equipment.

Conclusion

The name may not be that well known, but this spectacular set from Vienna Acoustics makes a gigantic splash. Sure, you need to run your amplifier hard (or have one with big hairies) to enjoy these beauties at their best, but, like the legendary Lambo, why let poor drag figures spoil your fun? In many ways, I see this array being the perfect solution (at a cost) for the high-end purchaser with a hard-to-please partner. They look great, offer genuine audiophile output and are muscular, too ●

→ Specifications

Vienna Acoustics Schönberg

Drive Units: Two 6in proprietary transparent XPP cones, plus hand-coated 1in silk-dome tweeter with triple-vented Neodymium magnet

Enclosure type: Two-and-a-half way dual-ported with asymmetrical internal ports

Frequency Response: 40Hz-25kHz

Sensitivity: 91dB

Power Handling: 30 to 200W

Dimensions: 268(w) x 1050(h) x 90(d)mm

Weight: 13.5Kg

Vienna Acoustics Webern

Drive Units: Two 6in proprietary transparent XPP cones, plus hand-coated 1in silk-dome tweeter with triple-vented Neodymium magnet

Enclosure type: Two-way sealed

Frequency Response: 60Hz-25kHz

Sensitivity: 91dB

Power Handling: 30 to 200W

Dimensions: 268(w) x 500(h) x 90(d)mm

Weight: 7.5Kg



HCC VERDICT

Acoustic Vienna system
£4,000 Approx

Highs: Gorgeous appearance; expansive dynamic sound; perfect for 'designer' audiophiles

Lows: You pay extra for stands and brackets; need real power to drive

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5