

THE THEATRE ORGAN IN STEREO

PART I: THE LOUDSPEAKER

by Ron Musselman

Although the theatre organ enthusiast prefers to hear his favorite instrument live and speaking into a vast auditorium, he can't always get what we want firsthand. So, many of us have collected numerous recordings to enjoy at home. Many have stereo systems that aren't quite capable of "bringing it all home," and others are considering buying their first stereo system. Since the stereo game is a jungle with many traps for the uninitiated (translated: potentially expensive mistakes), this series of articles will aid in the selection of equipment that won't cause future regret.

First, two important points:

- 1) Assuming the amplifier produces ample, clean power and a decent turntable/cartridge combo is used, the biggest variable in the system is the loudspeaker.
- 2) The most expensive characteristic to build into a loudspeaker is generally, extended, clean bass response.

Since the pipe organ is the King Kong of bass makers, point #2 (above) is of prime importance when considering getting a reasonable aural facsimile in your living room. Quality commercially-manufactured speaker systems range in price from about \$50 to over \$5,000 each, with wide variations of sonic accuracy in every bracket. Many systems costing \$500-\$800 each are less accurate than some competently-designed units selling for under \$300. We'll bypass the "special effects generators" and instead, concentrate mostly on some of the better moderately-priced units available, some of which have gone a long way in lessening the impact of point #2. Keep in mind that low C, as produced by a 16'

Tibia, represents 32 Hz (or cycles per second), while a 32' Diaphone one octave lower rumbles at 16 cps.

In terms of overall realism and bass response, the all-time bargain is the original Advent. The "updated" version has the same excellent low end, but a somewhat "brighter" treble response. If the listener finds the highs too prominent, a switch in the back can reduce tweeter output to sound more like the original. However, if your listening room is heavily carpeted and draped, it should sound balanced with the switch at "normal." The 10" woofer of this large bookshelf unit will generate a room-shaking 32 cps fundamental (that is, if it's present on the recording!), and even at 20-25 cps (well into the 32' octave), the output is reduced, but still significant. The non-commercial *Stereophile* magazine referred to them as the least-colored loudspeakers they'd ever heard. They still cost less than \$200 each, and their naturalness on any type of music embarrasses many costlier systems. The phenomenal clarity they exhibit in the bass range is very unusual in this price range. An excellent choice for a speakers/phono/amplifier system under \$800.

Another prime contender of modest cost is the ADS L-620, which has the same general acoustic properties of the Advent, although the Advent seemed to reproduce the lowest bass with a little more authority. The L-620 costs \$200. A very accurate loudspeaker with no weak points.

The Cizek One is another 10" woofer bookshelf unit, very similar to the Advent in sound, although there are slight differences in the midrange and high end. Also ca-

pable of strong, undistorted output around 30 cps, they sell for \$240 each.

At the other end of the price spectrum is the AR-9 by Acoustic Research, a superb speaker in all areas. In *Stereo Review*, this tower-type system proved to have the cleanest, deepest bass response of any system they'd ever tested. Its twin 12" woofers will pump out strong, tight bass below 25 cps, and their usable response extends clear down to 16 cps. Pure test tones between 16 and 35 cps fed to the AR-9's can be felt as well as heard, and in that region, they'll rattle windows, doors and objects in the room. Like the Advents and ADS L-620's, the 9's are most accurate at all frequencies, although they extend even deeper into the bottom octave, and with a little more detail in the high end (and the highs are more evenly-dispersed throughout the room). In one listening test, this complex 5-speaker unit (topped by a tiny 3/4" dome tweeter) literally shook the foundation while reproducing the big Diaphones in George Wright's *Chicago, Vol. II* album. Yet, when the voice of an FM announcer played through them, his voice wasn't at all "bass heavy" and he seemed to be standing in the room, between the two speakers. If you can budget \$750 apiece for loudspeakers, these are worth every penny. A similar model, the AR-90, is essentially the same loudspeaker, except for its 10" woofers and smaller size. At \$550 each, it has less "bottom" than the AR-9, but more than the Advent.

In the medium-price category is the Allison: 3, a triangular tower designed for corner placement. Its 10" woofer provides a clean extended

bass curve almost identical to that of the Advent. The Allison presents a wide, natural stereo stage when placed in the corner. The sound they produce is very balanced, and instruments often appear to be emanating from outside the units themselves. About \$300 each.

Epicure Products makes several loudspeakers with extended bass response, but their best moderately-priced model is the M-200C. A large bookshelf/floor system, it utilizes an 8" woofer augmented by a 12" "pas-

sive radiator." In terms of bass extension and overall sonic character, it's in the same league with the best speakers in its price range. A "plus" feature of the M-200C is higher-than-average efficiency, which allows for a little more unstrained volume with any given amplifier. At \$275, this one should be listened to before making a decision.

While the group of speakers covered in this article is by no means a complete list of high-quality reproducers, the writer has listened ex-

tensively to them, and they all represent good-to-excellent values in their price ranges.

Later on, we'll briefly cover the subject of evaluating speakers in the showroom, for those wanting to audition other brands or models. For the ones covered in this article, recommended minimum continuous power is 100 watts per channel for the AR-9 and AR-90; all others, 40 to 50 watts for a typical living room.

NEXT: Amplifiers

NOTE: Products mentioned or recommended are views of the author and do not constitute ATOS endorsement.

All prices, descriptions and model numbers are the latest available. □

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