

RECOMMENDED COMPONENTS

fit in the palm of one hand. It uses a 20mm silk-dome tweeter and a 2.75" Kevlar-cone woofer in a black or white gloss cabinet measuring just 6" H by 4" W by 5.25" D. Its small size made it extremely versatile, portable, and fun. At reasonable volume levels, both indoors and out, the Audioengines provided a wide, deep soundstage with impressive image specificity and drama. BJR raved: "The level of sound quality produced by this uncolored, detailed, articulate, and dynamic speaker, in all situations, was beyond reproach." Though JA noted some distortion on high-level tones at low frequencies, due to the built-in equalization causing the woofer to work hard, he was impressed by the Audioengine's level of engineering and the quality of its fit'n'finish. (Vol.30 No.12 WWW)

Mordaunt-Short Carnival 2: \$300/pair (stands necessary)

The small, double-ported Carnival 2 is available in black or calvados cabinets, and has a 5.5" woven composite woofer and a 1" soft fabric dome tweeter. Rated sensitivity is 90dB. Though it lacked deep bass and had "a certain roughness in the upper midrange," the Carnival had a "surprisingly sweet" treble and "imaged like crazy," said ST. "Buy a pair just for fun," he recommended, adding that he "Love that soft-dome tweeter!" (Vol.32 No.8)

Paradigm Atom v.5: \$318/pair \$\$\$ (stands necessary)

The Atom v.5 is the latest version of Paradigm's bargain-basement, two-way, bass-reflex bookshelf design. It uses a 1" high-purity titanium-dome tweeter and a 5.5" copolymer-cone bass/midrange driver with a diecast chassis. WP was most impressed by the Atom's "glorious midrange" and ability to sort out instrumental dynamics and acoustic interactions. The speaker's full-bodied overall balance compensated for its lack of bass slam, Wes felt. According to JA's measurements, however, the Atom will require care in system matching to offset its slightly excessive treble and slightly loose upper bass. The v.5 outclassed the v.3 in every sonic parameter, promoting the Atom into competition with designs in the \$300-\$500/pair range, said BJR. (Vol.30 No.9, Vol.31 No.2 WWW)

Polk RTiA1: \$350/pair \$\$\$ (stands necessary)

The two-way, front-ported RTiA1 is biwireable and magnetically shielded. Its 1" silk/polymer-composite dome tweeter and 5.25" polymer/mineral-composite woofer were both designed using Polk's proprietary Dynamic Balance technology. The elegant cabinet comes in Natural Cherry or Black Oak real-wood veneers and is curved and tapered to minimize panel resonances. With a subtle highlighting of the high frequencies and a slight bump in the mid- to upper bass, the RTiA1 exhibited an "extraordinary sense of balance," marveled BJR. While not as detailed as the Epos EL3, the Polk offered greater high-level slam. JA didn't like its very lively cabinet, but concluded, "The Polk RTiA1 offers a lot of speaker engineering at a very affordable price." (Vol.31 No.9 WWW)

PSB Alpha B1: \$279/pair \$\$\$ (stands necessary)

The unassuming B1, the latest version of PSB's best-selling Alpha speaker, has molded plastic front and rear baffles connected by an MDF sleeve, and combines a 5/4", injection-molded, polypropylene-cone woofer with a 3/4" ferrofluid-cooled, aluminum-dome tweeter, both sourced from India. Low-bass extension was limited, and the speaker's otherwise clean, clear bass tone became muddied at very high volumes. Though high frequencies were slightly veiled, the B1's midrange was superb. JA was most impressed by the Alpha's talent for orchestral music: "If you are a classical-music lover with a small room and an equally small budget, a pair of PSB's Alpha B1s is just what you need . . . Extraordinary value." Though the B1s lent more drama to bass and drums, they couldn't quite match the Paradigm Atom v.5's treble performance, felt WP. JA's feels the PSB's treble to be more naturally balanced, however. (Vol.30 Nos.5 & 9 WWW)

K Meridian DSP7200, Focal Chorus 826W 30th Lim-

ited Edition, Vivid Giya G1, Klipsch P17b, Focal Maestro Utopia.

Deletions

B&W 802D, Canton Vento Reference 1 DC, Focal Electra 1037 Be, Monitor Audio Silver RS6, all replaced by new models; Sequerra Metronome 77 Mk.6 and Sonics By Joachim Gerhard Allegra significantly revised, mandating re-auditioning; BG Radia Corp. Z-1, JBL Studio L880, Klipsch Heritage La Scala II, NHT Classic Three, Opera Quinta, Quad ESL-2805, Teresonic Integrum, Triangle Antal Ex, Usher Audio Technology S-520, all not auditioned in too long a time to be sure of rating; Wilson Benesch Arc, because of doubts about availability in the US.

SUBWOOFERS

A JL Audio Fathom f113: \$6000

(See LG's review in this issue.)

JL Audio Fathom f113: \$3600 \$\$\$ ☆

The f113 is a small, sealed cube featuring a 13" drive-unit with a prominent OverRoll surround that permits huge cone excursions. All controls and connections for JL Audio's Automatic Room Optimization are conveniently located across the front of the sub, beneath the removable grille. Setup was simple and sophisticated. "Small as it is," said KR, "the f113 makes a powerful and musical contribution to the bottom end, even in the context of an already full-range system." "Remarkably powerful and clean by any standards, it is all the more so considering its compact dimensions," he sums up. When passing his system's low-end signal to the f113 below 80Hz, KR also noted "a dramatic expansion of the entire soundstage." "Though installing two f113s in his system required more care and time than LG had anticipated, the improvements in soundstaging and deep-bass reproduction were worth the effort. "My entire system achieved its best performance to date," he said, also noting that the JL Audio's Automatic Room Optimization circuit enabled him to tune out an annoying 50Hz mode in his room acoustics. Price is for Gloss Black finish. Black Satin costs \$3200. (Vol.29 No.11, Vol.30 Nos.5 & 9 WWW)

Paradigm Reference SUB 15: \$2799

The SUB 15 has a 15" drive-unit with a 76mm-diameter voice-coil, and is rated for bass extension down to 12Hz. Considerably more attractive than the austere Paradigm Reference Servo-15, the SUB 15 has outrigger feet, gracefully tapered side panels, and weighs 114 lbs. It accepts balanced and unbalanced RCA input signals, and offers a trigger input, adjustable low-pass filter, phase adjustment, and a USB port for control of its equalizer. Compared to the Servo-15, the SUB 15 produced a flatter, more extended bass response with a smoother upper end, allowing it to more readily "disappear" as a discrete sound source. "The SUB 15 offers all the powerful bass and extension needed for any music and, indeed, for home theater, unless you're a bass maniac," said Kal. (Vol.33 No.1 WWW)

Velodyne Digital Drive DD-18: \$4999 ☆

The servo-driven DD-18 has a built-in spectrum analyzer and eight-band digital equalizer, which allow the sub's performance to be optimized for its owner's listening room, and is one of the most expensive subwoofers on the market. LG's system gained tight, solid, bass reinforcement with "jaw-dropping increases in definition in the deepest notes." The soundstage also gained width and depth, while spatial perspective was enhanced. LG: "The combination of its computer installation program and its first-rate servo-controlled drive-unit make it a true breakthrough for aftermarket subwoofers." (Vol.27 No.6 WWW)

B Bryston 10B-SUB crossover: \$3050 ☆

The 10B features three balanced configurations—stereo two-way, monophonic two-way, and monophonic three-way—and proved extraordinarily versatile in managing

crossover slopes and frequencies. LG heard no electronic edginess and noted only the slightest loss in soundstage depth. "I found the 10B-SUB's sound clear, transparent, and neutral—as good as I've ever heard from an outboard crossover." (Vol.18 No.5, Vol.28 No.11 WWW)

SV Sound PB13-Ultra: \$1599

The 155-lb PB13-Ultra is a front-firing, vented, powered subwoofer with selectable port configurations. Its 13.5" drive-unit has a 3" voice-coil and 2" peak-peak excursion, and the sub's Bridged Amplifier Switch Hybrid design combines a fast-responding power converter with a low-distortion, class-AB amplifier claimed to be as efficient as a class-D amp. Though the PB13-Ultra couldn't match the musicality or deep-bass output of more expensive subs, it generated great bass extension and provided "the tight, anxious mood necessary to build suspense," said LG. "I heartily recommend it for its relatively low price, rugged construction, versatile controls, and sturdy drive-unit." Price is for oak, rosenut, and textured black finishes; piano gloss black adds \$100. (Vol.31 No.8 WWW)

Editor's Note: There are no Class C or D subwoofers listed.

HEADPHONES & HEADPHONE ACCESSORIES

A AKG K 701: \$499 ☆

The K 701 is a large, open-back, circumaural, dynamic design with a neodymium magnet system. It features wire frames, a leather headband, white porcelain-like rims and motor housing, and extremely comfortable, velvety ear pads that make "a dashing retro-futuristic fashion statement." While the K 701s were not exceedingly difficult to drive, a headphone amp is recommended. The K 701s coupled an unmatched sparkle and life in the high frequencies with a full bottom end for a truthful, involving sound that defied simple background listening. WP: "The AKG 701s have raised the bar for natural-sounding headphones." Sam's reference phones: "Why mess around with speakers costing tens of thousands of dollars when you can have this?" he asks, summing up "Beautiful to look at, comfortable to wear. Worth every Pfennig!" JM agreed: "The 701s exhibited clarity and detail in abundance, as well as bass that was powerful and well defined." "A bit forward-sounding," warns MF, however. While the AKG matched the Sennheiser HD800 in terms of rhythm and pace, it could not re-create the Sennheiser's spatial soundstaging or nuanced dynamics. ST loves them however. The K 701s require several hundred hours of break-in time before sounding their best, cautioned ST. Driven by the Musical Fidelity X-CAN[®], the AKGs exhibited extraordinary resolution, exquisite high frequencies, and authoritative bass, he concluded. *Stereophile's* 2006 "Joint Accessory." (Vol.29 No.8, Vol.30 No.12, Vol.31 Nos.6 & 9, Vol.32 No.7 WWW)

Audio-Technica ATH-AD700: \$249.99

The ATH-AD700s have a honeycomb aluminum casing, a magnesium frame, and 53mm neodymium drivers. Two wing-flaps self-adjust to the listener's head to sit there "firmly, but ever so lightly," making them "among the most comfortable headphones" in ST's experience. While they couldn't match the bass authority or detail retrieval of the more expensive AKG K 701s, the Audio-Technicas had impressive openness, air, and ambience, and a "silky smooth" midrange. "Simply amazing headphones," concluded Sam. The ATH-AD700s were too large for travel, and could benefit from a dedicated headphone amp, he felt. (Vol.31 No.6)

Benchmark Media Systems DAC1: \$995 \$\$\$

DAC1 USB: \$1295

DAC1 Pre: \$1595

Two headphone jacks but only digital inputs rather than analog. See "Digital Processors." (Vol.26 No.7, Vol.27 No.5, Vol.31 Nos.1, 7 & 10, Vol.32 No.3 WWW)