

# Vienna Acoustics Mozart Speaker System

*Sprechen sie Musik?*

by Darryl Wilkinson

**A. The Maestro center channel uses the same drivers as the Mozart, but it's configured for horizontal placement.**  
**B. The Mozart is just about the perfect height, width, and depth for a floor-standing speaker.**

Think high-end means rule Britannia? *Nein, Wien uber alle!* Naming loudspeakers after illustrious composers seems mighty presumptuous—like an egotistical screenwriter using Shakespeare Jr. as his pseudonym or an aspiring painter signing his work Picasso II. Vienna Acoustics, however, hails from a city steeped in musical tradition, so I suppose it's natural for them to make such daring allusions. Over half of the speakers in the Vienna Acoustics line are named after famous Austrian

and German composers: Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Bach, and Mahler. This is certainly one area where cultural history gives European speaker companies a distinct advantage over American ones. I certainly wouldn't take speakers named Elvis, Cher, and Liberace quite as seriously.

So these speakers have a pedigree. So what? Name-dropping might open doors

in Europe; however, once you cross the Atlantic to these shores, bud, you'd better put up or shut up. John Hunter, president of Sumiko (the North American importer for Vienna Acoustics), chose to put up by sending us a system that supports his extremely confident claims of sonic superiority: two Mozarts (\$2,500 per pair) for the front, a Maestro (\$995) for the center, and two Haydns (\$995 per pair) for the rear. To flesh out the low end, a modest REL Q201E subwoofer (\$1,595) accompanied the package. Just for grins, Sumiko also threw in a Thule pre/pro-and-amp combo with 150 watts by two and 100 watts by three.

Physically, the Mozarts are about as close as you can get to a golden mean for floorstanding speakers. They're the right height (37 inches) to bring the tweeter to seated ear level without dominating the room. The substantial but not overwhelming depth (11.6 inches) gives them an air of seriousness. The fairly narrow width (6.7 inches) and gently rounded corners create a lean, slender look. The narrow black grille (about 29.25 inches long and 5.75 inches wide) further contributes to the Mozart's trim appearance, while the half-inch of wood visible on either side nicely frames the finely woven black cloth. The electric design is two-way, with a 1-inch silk-dome tweeter and two 5.5-inch XPP (a special clear polypropylene material that's stiff on the outside but semisoft on the inside) midbass drivers. Acoustically, the two midbass drivers differ in that they're loaded in separately

tuned, asymmetrical chambers inside the cabinet. The upper midbass driver outputs the entire range of bass and midrange, while the lower driver rolls off naturally as the frequencies begin to rise out of the low-bass region. Each chamber has its own port on the back of the cabinet.

The bottom third of the Mozart cabinet serves mainly as a beautifully integrated speaker stand. Sumiko highly recommends filling the empty bottom cavity with about 20 pounds of dry play sand (easily acquired at that bastion of high-end audio, Toys "R" Us). It's imperative to use dry sand; otherwise, moisture from the sand will leach into the cabinet with ruinous results. John Hunter claims that this under-\$10 modification, easily accomplished using a funnel and a helper, saves over \$1,000 in added costs if the speakers were designed and shipped with the sand already in place. I think I'll buy my own sand, *danke!*

The Maestro center channel is essentially a short Mozart that uses the same drivers but is configured to lie on its side. It's not very tall (6.7 inches), but it is deep (11 inches) and fairly wide (23.1 inches) for a center channel. Both of the Maestro's ports are on the front baffle, allowing you to mount the speaker directly on the wall above or below a front-projection screen.

The Haydn is a two-way monitor speaker that I conscripted into use as a rear channel in this system. It's designed to be a physical and sonic mini-version of the Mozart,



## Vienna Acoustics Mozart Speaker System

with a less-sophisticated 1-inch silk-dome tweeter and only one 5.5-inch XPP cone midbass driver in a compact cabinet that's 6.7 inches wide, 13.6 inches tall, and 10.2 inches deep. A single port hides on the back of the speaker.

It's impossible not to notice the extreme attention to detail that went into the construction of each of the speakers. (Freud, who spent his formative years in Vienna, would have had a field day analyzing this anal-retentive focus.) The grille cloth, for example, is tightly wrapped, glued, and carefully pressed into place on the back of the grille (and this is the side you don't normally see). It's so well done that you can barely tell where the cloth overlaps at the corners. The cabinet itself shows similar signs of precision. Sumiko stresses that these are furniture-grade cabinets, but I'm unable to judge that statement—no furniture I've ever owned has had a finish this nice. The cabinets' front and rear baffles are veneered using a special membrane press that both enhances the beauty of the speaker and makes the baffles more rigid.

The anal-retentive approach followed the speakers to my house when Dave Ellington from Sumiko dropped by to set up the system.

Dave and I have a lot in common (industry acquaintances and retail-floor war stories); however, when he first set up the speakers almost all the way into the front corners of the room, I began to wonder about him. He spent the next couple of hours moving each speaker a half-inch at a time until the right

speaker was less than a foot from its corner and the left speaker was about 18 inches out. In this configuration, the speakers were wider apart and much farther back than I would normally have set them up. Since I don't like to critically listen to gear with a manufacturer's representative within at least 30 miles, I made a mental note to move the speakers back to the position I thought they should be in and sent Dave packing.

Of course, I soon found out that I didn't need to move the speakers. It's a little hard to believe that the Mozarts can generate such strong, clean bass with just two 5.5-inch midbass drivers, but there it was: a slight bump around 50 to 60 hertz, with significant output down to the low 30s. Unless you're a bass fanatic, the Mozarts can give you almost all the bass you'd ever want for most two-channel music. On Jennifer Warnes' "Way Down Deep" and "Bird on a Wire," the bass was very tight and emphatic. (Firing up the REL subwoofer gave it that last little kick over the line from excellent to exceptional.)

More impressive, however, was the extremely wide soundstage. I felt certain that positioning the speakers so far into the corners of the room would put a hole in the middle of the sound. Not so. As I listened to the two-channel mix of Steve Stevens' *Flamenco.A.Go.Go* DVD-Audio disc, the soundstage was surprisingly wide with a definite center image, especially with the multiple guitars on "Hanina."

Those silk soft-dome tweeters are unforgivingly precise. You'll hear every lip, tooth, and tongue movement in Kelly Flint's mouth

on "Walk on the Wild Side" by Dave's True Story. Yet it's not annoying or grating—just very natural-sounding. Some speakers are polite and reserved, masking many of these problems. Others are aggressive, mounting a frontal assault on the eardrums. The Mozarts are neither, with a

sound I'd describe as supremely confident: just laying it out as it comes, take it or leave it. These speakers also have a quiet aspect—an ability to get out of

the quickness of the drivers and the rigidity of the baffles. It's very reminiscent of an electrostatic speaker. Music that changes quickly and dynamically, like Dave Matthews Band's "Ants Marching," sounds amazingly natural. The Mozarts get loud, then soft, high, then low—and back instantly. Symphonic music especially benefits from the quick attacks, wide soundstage, and tight resolution. The opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which I've heard innumerable times, became emotionally engaging—like I was hearing it for the first time.

Of course, when you listen to multichannel music, you need that capability times five (six with a sub). It's no shock that the Maestro matches the Mozarts up front, but it's somewhat surprising that the Haydns are such a spitting sonic image of them (sans the bass response). In fact, this is one of the few multichannel systems I've heard that uses different speakers but still sounds virtually identical from front to back. The guitars playing all around me on

**C. Exceptional attention to detail went into the making of the Mozart speaker, so (of course) it comes with high-quality gold-plated binding posts.**



### HIGHLIGHTS

- Surprising amount of tight, accurate bass
- Silken, sweet high frequency
- Wide, wide, wide soundstage

the Steve Stevens "Hanina" cut in DTS was simply stunning.

Movie-soundtrack playback was just another day in the park for this system. I will say that I've heard systems that, at times, got me more excited when watching a movie, either because of gut-busting bass or scintillating high-frequency effects. Still, the Viennas will cause you to rethink what's ideal for movies. This system certainly doesn't lack excitement, but it might be almost too revealing. Poorly done Foley sound will come across as just that. In a romance or comedy, that level of sonic intimacy is perfect. With an action movie, though, the amazingly quick range from a pin dropping to a nuclear detonation takes some getting used to. The wide soundstage is natural and works exceptionally well with large screens. Since the fronts and rears match so seamlessly, back-to-front (and vice versa) pans are very smooth and

hence Sumiko's inclusion of the REL Q201E. This subwoofer is designed along the lines of the small-box, big-bang concept that's very popular now, yet it's not just a casual knock-off of the concept. Packing quite a powerful punch, it's no dumb brute. In addition to separate level adjustments for the high- and low-level inputs and a mode switch to change the phase, this little dynamo accepts and integrates both high- and low-level signals simultaneously. So, whether there's a signal in the 0.1 channel or not, you're still going to get great bass, making the Q201E one of the only subwoofers I know of that has instant (albeit limited) DVD-Audio bass management built right in. It won't take the load off of small main speakers, but it will keep your subwoofer involved in the music no matter how the DVD-Audio disc is encoded.

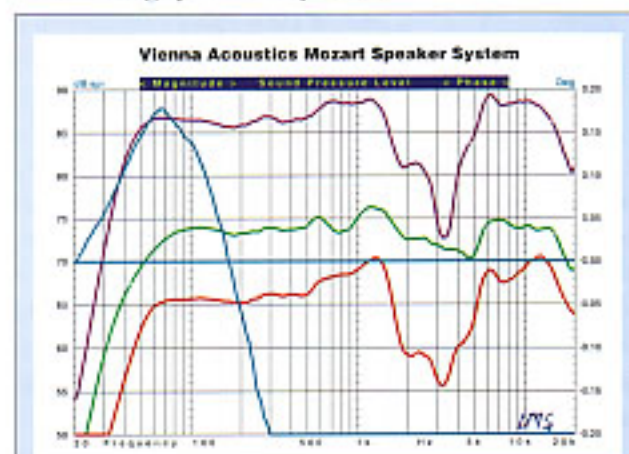
Value and budget are two considerations that always come into play when making a purchase. The price of an item might be quite a good value but still be beyond your budget. Likewise, a product falling within your budget may not be worth half the pittance it costs. At \$4,490 (\$6,085 with the REL), I can't tell you that the Vienna Acoustics ensemble will fit into everyone's budget. It won't. However, it is, without a doubt, an outstanding value in terms of performance (both sonic and physical). Scrimp, save, recycle aluminum cans, eat boxed macaroni and cheese for a year—do

whatever you have to do to fit these speakers into your budget. This system is a luxury that will soon become a necessity in your life as it brings you one step closer

<b>Mozart Main Speaker</b>	<b>\$2,500/pair</b>
<b>Maestro Center-Channel Speaker</b>	<b>\$995</b>
<b>Haydn Bookshelf Speaker</b>	<b>\$995/pair</b>
<b>REL Q201E Subwoofer</b>	<b>\$1,595</b>
Vienna Acoustics / Sumiko (510) 843-4500 www.sumikoaudio.com Dealer Locator Code SUM	

believable. Interestingly, even though the Haydns are not the usual dipole or bipole rear channels, the only time I noticed a lack was when the crowd clapped on live music DVDs. While the Haydns resolved individual hand claps, I did miss the sense of envelopment that a good set of dipoles in the rear will provide.

The Mozarts' musically excellent bass response won't be quite enough for the action-movie lover,



**HT Labs Measures: Vienna Acoustics Mozart Speaker System**

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Mozart L/R (purple trace), REL Q201E subwoofer (blue trace), Maestro center channel (green trace), and Haydn surround (red trace). All passive loudspeakers were measured at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

On-axis response of the Mozart measures +2.81/-13.65 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 43 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 38 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.41 ohms at 205 Hz and a phase angle of +40.59 degrees at 1.05 kHz. Sensitivity averages 87 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

On-axis response of the Maestro measures +2.35/-3.66 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and (+/-15 degree) horizontal responses measures +1.26/-6.49 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 58 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 45 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.62 ohms at 200 Hz and a phase angle of +45.21 degrees at 1.08 kHz. Sensitivity averages 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

On-axis response of the Haydn measures +4.14/-10.60 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 53 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 46 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.07 ohms at 200 Hz and a phase angle of -47.03 degrees at 96 Hz. Sensitivity averages 84 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

Close-miked response of the REL Q201E subwoofer, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 51 Hz and the -6dB point is at 38 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 90 Hz.

These measurements follow the standardized methodology that we employ for all speakers we test. However, with this system, frequency response does improve quite a bit when we measure the speakers 20 to 30 degrees down from the tweeter axis. —AJ

than most people have ever been to that magical zone where recorded music becomes full and alive. The Vienna Acoustics system may make your bank account dirt poor, but it'll make your soul wildly rich.  $\bar{\pi}$

