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EgglestonWorks Dianne Loudspeakers

The 2009 Consumer Electronics Show seemed to me a study in contrasts: the wave of computer-based audio components vs. the increasingly irrelevant CD transport; the rise of several new high-end-audio companies as other, historically prominent companies struggle to survive; some newish manufacturers of brutally expensive gear practically begging folks to visit their rooms, while lower-priced, higher-value products drew more attention than their makers imagined it would. That last contrast applied somewhat to the EgglestonWorks Dianne loudspeaker (\$2500 USD per pair), which [I wrote about](#) in detail in SoundStage! Network's coverage of CES.

Memphis-based speaker maker EgglestonWorks has been around for over ten years now. Their first model, the Andra, was hugely popular in the late 1990s. (The company introduced its third iteration, the Andra III, at CES 2009.) But the new Dianne appears to be the highest-value product EgglestonWorks has ever produced -- a substantial floorstander expertly constructed and reasonably priced. I was so taken with its appearance and sound at CES that I requested that the demo pair be shipped directly to me. Owner and chief designer Jim Thompson enthusiastically agreed.

Getting to know Dianne

The Dianne is a medium-sized (41"H x 8.5"W x 12"D, 55 pounds), two-way, floorstanding design with a 1" cloth-dome tweeter mated to a 6" double-magnet woofer, both made by Israeli driver manufacturer Morel. Its low-frequency extension is rated at 51Hz (-3dB), with its top end reaching 24kHz. The impedance is specified at 8 ohms nominal, 6 ohms minimum, and the sensitivity pegged at 88dB.

The Dianne's cabinet is slightly raked back and faceted on top, to create a sleek, jewel-like shape sure to appeal to the dñcor-conscious. The finish is an automotive-grade job that comes standard in charcoal-gray metallic, with gloss black available on request; other colors are available at higher prices (check with the factory). A single set of gold-plated, five-way binding posts is inset in the lower rear panel. Aluminum feet are attached to the bottom of the cabinet, into which spikes (supplied) can be screwed. The Dianne I received were the first pair manufactured, and no grilles were supplied with them. Jim Thompson assured me that when they start to ship Dianne's (by the time you read this), they'll include grillecloths as standard equipment. And the Dianne's impressive six-year warranty against defects somewhat exceeds the industry average of three to five years.

I just love the look of the Dianne -- this is one speaker that will actually *improve* the appearance of many people's living spaces. In fact, after thoroughly auditioning them in my Music Vault listening room, I moved



the Diannes into my downstairs living room for the rest of their stay -- they looked great to either side of my Sharp LCD, and sounded terrific in this large, reverberant room.

Her sound

All in all, I had very favorable first impressions of the Diannes' build quality and sound right out of their boxes, and those impressions carried through the first week of listening. I realized early on that the Dianne would, for me, be aural comfort food. What I'd heard at CES was no fluke -- the Dianne hit all the right buttons. In fact, I can't remember a review product at or near its price that instantly made more sonic sense to me.

One of the first tracks I like to play when auditioning speakers is "Tall Trees in Georgia," from Eva Cassidy's *Live at Blues Alley* (CD, Blix Street 10046). Her spoken introduction is just right for assessing a speaker's ability to re-create a realistic sense of soundstage depth -- this recording has enough natural ambience that, with the right system in a good room, a close approximation of the acoustic signature of the jazz club in which it was recorded comes through with spooky realism. Cassidy also produced a wonderful track that will let you know exactly how a speaker reproduces the fine gradations and inflections in a female vocal performance. The Diannes sailed through this track with flying colors: the physical depth of Blues Alley was palpable in my listening room, very deep and full of activity. I could hear the tinkling glasses held by members of the audience, and could sense their presence, laid out in front of the stage. Cassidy's voice was finely detailed, yet with no added emphasis in the upper registers, and there was no harshness or grain to dissuade me from putting in a long listening session.

The Diannes reproduced the central image of Cassidy with stable solidity, which tells me that the pair-matching of EgglestonWorks' quality-control department is nigh on perfect. If you've heard speakers whose imaging was skewed to one side because they weren't *quite* perfectly matched, you'll know how important this is, and it seems that EgglestonWorks, too, cares deeply about this aspect of the listening experience. I can't guarantee that every pair of Diannes that leaves Memphis will sound exactly like my review pair, but hopefully, they will. Off-center imaging can drive you crazy.

The voices of male singers were reproduced with admirable realism, though this area of the Dianne's sound will more appeal to someone looking for a warmish midrange balance. The Dianne wasn't the most neutral speaker I've ever heard -- it seemed "voiced" to remain listenable with recordings both good and bad. Its top end softened bright recordings ever so slightly while warming up the lower midrange, to make voices sound full and dense. I didn't find this aspect of their sound objectionable -- in fact, those characteristics are something that gives me a little extra comfort level in recommending this speaker to my friends. For instance, on my computer are a few Coldplay tracks I downloaded from iTunes in MP3 format at 256kbps. They sound decent through much more expensive, more neutral speakers than the Diannes, but they're nothing I'd listen to for long periods of time in a ruthlessly revealing reference system. Through the Diannes, however, they were just a touch more listenable -- something I could really enjoy.

I don't want to give the impression that the Diannes weren't capable of revealing the nuances and details in really good recordings. When I listened to "Everest," my favorite track from Ani DiFranco's *Up Up Up Up Up Up* (CD, Righteous Babe 13), the Egglestons reproduced DiFranco's plucky guitar and vocal grit with excellent fidelity. When she explores her vocal range toward the end of the song, the Diannes scaled perfectly with the music. The bottom line for me was that the experience was enjoyable, and encouraged me to keep listening -- to good and more average recordings alike.

The bass was full and weighty down to about 45Hz in the Music Vault. Although the Diannes couldn't fully energize the room with pipe-organ recordings or deliver the full chest impact of a massively engineered Metallica kick drum, they could closely approximate a bass guitar with admirable fidelity. With a little front-wall boundary reinforcement in my downstairs living room, they came alive in the lower registers without bloat or boom. All in all, the Dianne provided that critical bit more energy in the bass region than what I hear from most reasonably sized bookshelf speakers, some of which cost more than the Dianne, and some of which have a larger footprint (when stands are taken into account). This, in fact, was one of the Diannes' trump cards: they could sound like a minimonitor in terms of imaging and soundstaging, but could reproduce real scale and good bass depth -- characteristics that enabled them to handily eclipse most smaller speakers, minimonitor and otherwise.

Last, the Diannes' imaging prowess in either of my rooms was ridiculously good -- not good for the price, or good for the size of the speaker, but just plain *really good*. Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," sung by the late Jeff Buckley on his album *Grace* (CD, Columbia 57578), filled my room from wall to wall with mood and texture, and the Dianne's midrange emphasized the haunting vocal that Buckley floated on this track. I was listening to this song as I was finishing writing this review, and something interesting happened: It was so enjoyable that I had to listen to it three times running. The EgglestonWorks Dianne made me want to listen to music more than any \$2500/pair speaker that I can remember.

Conclusion

I hesitate to describe the EgglestonWorks Dianne with the cliché "a speaker for a music lover." After all, that would imply that a speaker balanced just a little differently is *not* meant for music lovers, but for some other sort of listener, and I don't believe that for a minute. A more accurate description of the Dianne's target audience requires a bit more explanation.

The Dianne is not tilted toward ultra-resolution or sonic fireworks. Instead, it impressed me with a more graceful ability to present the fine details in my recordings. It laid out an inviting sonic landscape that lent itself to most of the music I listened to during the audition period. It could sound bigger than most of the two-way speakers I've heard, and, when positioned correctly, served up generous helpings of midbass and even a touch of low bass. The pair of them soundstaged like champs, with highs that delighted rather than pierced my eardrums.

If you're tired of the razor-like highs prominent in many of the home-theater-slotted speakers that cost between \$2000 and 3000/pair, or you're weary of speakers that seem designed more for extreme sound-pressure levels than for reproducing a recording's finer details, or you don't want a thin-sounding bookshelf model that's unlistenable without a subwoofer, then the Dianne might be *the* speaker for you. Its well-thought-out combination of strengths places it smack dab in the sweet spot of many audiophiles.

Still, the Dianne is no substitute for a large three- or four-way design -- it won't do large-scale dynamics in a cavernous room, and it won't play subterranean bass. But it does plenty right. If I didn't need a "reviewer's tool" -- a reference loudspeaker -- but instead was someone who just wanted to enjoy his music through a finely crafted, living-room-friendly pair of speakers, and had \$2500 to spend, the EgglestonWorks Dianne is the speaker I'd buy. It's a tremendous value. Get to know Dianne yourself and see if you don't agree.

. . . Jeff Fritz