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ROBERT SCHRYER

Pearl Acoustics Model One

LOUDSPEAKER

The quest to review the Pearl Acoustics Model One began at the 2025 Montreal Audiofest, which I was covering for *Stereophile*. It was there I crossed paths in a hallway with Galion Audio's Thomas Tan, who also hosts the YouTube channel *Thomas & Stereo*.

"Rob! Rob!" he called out through a stream of visitors between us. "You have to hear my TS A20 power amp driving Pearl Acoustics speakers!"

"You mean the speaker from Joseph Audio?" I asked over bobbing heads.

"No! The company is Pearl Acoustics. The speaker is the Sibelius."

I'd never heard of the speaker or the brand, but I promised Thomas I'd check it out.

When I finally visited the room, I was perplexed by the excitement Thomas had shown in the hallway, which he carried into the exhibit room. I expected something more imposing: big woofers, perhaps, or a gaping horn mouth. Instead, the Sibelius was elegantly slim and not particularly tall. It was attractive in an understated, clean-lined way—but where were the drivers?

"That's it," said Thomas, pointing to a single 4" driver positioned at the top of the baffle.

"So the woofer is underneath the cabinet?" I wondered aloud, then quickly noticed the horizontal vent at the base of the speaker: There was no place for a down-firing woofer to go.

"No!" he replied with a toothy grin. "That driver is it!"

I felt my heart sink, not because I have anything against full-range drivers—but 4"? Sure, this was a quintessential point-source design, but still: I couldn't help thinking about all that music in a recording—not just the frequency range but the compounded musical energy, the physicality of the lowest bass notes, the abundance of information trying to get out into the room. With the Sibelius, it would all have to squeeze through that tiny cone, and that rectangular vent at the bottom.

Not expecting much—at least nothing out of the ordinary—I sat in the front row. Visitors were flowing in, smiling, and chattering as if they were in on a secret. When the last available seat was taken, people piled against the back wall and spilled to the sides, standing shoulder-to-shoulder.



SPECIFICATIONS

Description One-way, no crossover floorstanding speaker based on the Voigt pipe design. Drive unit: One 4" custom-made single full-range Markaudio Alpair 10, designed by British audio engineer Mark Fenlon. Frequency response: 38Hz–20kHz, ±6dB.

Nominal impedance: 7.2 ohms. Sensitivity: 87dB/W/m. Power handling: 35W RMS–70W. Maximum output: 105dB/1m. **Dimensions** (without stand): 3'6" (1010mm) H × 9" (225mm) W × 11.6" (300mm) D. Net weight: 55lb (25kg). **Finishes** Enclosure either solid

natural European oak or lacquer on Baltic Birch Plywood. Cone: Copper Gold, Silver Grey. **Serial numbers of units reviewed** S001050-R, S001050-L. Made in Belgium. **Price** \$12,000/pair. Number of US dealers: Sales are direct and shipped to US customers from

a warehouse in Milwaukee. **Warranty:** 10 years, labor and parts, except on the driver's diaphragm. **Manufacturer** Pearl Acoustics Ltd., 1–3, Manor Rd., Chatham, England, ME4 6AE. Email: enquiries@pearlacoustics.com. Web: pearlacoustics.com.

Thomas then introduced the speaker's designer, Harley Lovegrove, a Brit based in Belgium, where the speaker is manufactured. Harley explained the design philosophy and suggested that the best way to understand the Model One's 4" driver was to think of it as a microphone in reverse.

"A microphone's diaphragm is very small, often less than an inch in diameter, yet it captures the entire range of frequencies," he said. "We don't need or use separate bass, midrange, and treble microphones."

Once he finished speaking, I settled into my seat, expecting an enjoyable but standard show demo. Then the drum solo kicked in, and it was as if I'd been dropped into a USS *Enterprise* Holodeck program. *Whoosh!* The air felt denser and I felt more closed in. I was in a virtual recording space, with one of the most palpably recreated drum kits I'd ever heard spread out in front of me, down to the height of the drums on their stands. People next to me gasped audibly. I suddenly felt self-conscious: What was I witnessing here?

The easy answer was: drum hits so lifelike they seemed 3D print-

ed; microscopic resolution, in the rapids-like churning of the air between the strikes and off the nearby walls; elaborate tonal gradations; intricate vibrational patterns set off by strikes on drum skins; the slam of the bass drum. The transparency and degree of verisimilitude to a real drum set took my breath away. It was hard to reconcile the presence and impact I was hearing with the single tiny speaker cone I was seeing. It defied common sense.

"Bass walloped," I wrote in my show report,¹ along with describing tone as "textural," detail as "granular," and the soundstage as "walk-through enveloping."

It was quite the demo, but had it ended there, I might have suspected the Sibelius was a one-trick pony, able to reproduce that one drum solo really well but maybe not much else. Then songs by Paul Simon and Diana Krall poured out, sounding lavishly detailed and tonally pure, with vividly rendered vocals and soundstages like Persian rugs—richly and colorfully patterned, with not a loose

¹ See [stereophile.com/content/montreal-audiofest-2025-show-report-wrap-now-complete-page-2](https://www.stereophile.com/content/montreal-audiofest-2025-show-report-wrap-now-complete-page-2). Scroll down.

MEASUREMENTS

The Pearl Acoustics Model One was measured in a large conference room, 11'11" H × 25'3" L × 15'8" W. The first reflection was from the floor, at about 5ms, which corresponds to a lower frequency limit of about 200Hz. The loudspeaker was measured with the microphone 1m from the driver. From the center of the driver to the floor was approximately 68.5". I used a GRAS 40BD ¼"-capsule microphone and 26CB mike preamp; an SCM2 measurement ¼"-capsule microphone; a seven-mike array at 15° vertical increments; an AmpConnect 621 audio interface and amplifier; a PT&D MDT turntable; a Brüel & Kjær 4231 acoustic calibrator at 94dB, 1kHz; and a B&K Type 4534-B-001 accelerometer.

The Pearl Acoustics Model One is an unusual loudspeaker in that it has a single cus-

tom-designed 4" woofer married to a Voigt pipe enclosure, which combines transmission line, ported, and horn characteristics. Because it is a single-driver design, there is no need for a crossover, no need to time-align different drivers, and consequently no off-axis lobing due to a crossover.

I measured a minimum impedance of 9 ohms (fig.1), with a very small phase angle; this should be an easy load for an amplifier to drive. However, due to the higher impedance, the Model One requires about 50% more voltage to achieve the same output level as a typical 4 ohm loudspeaker.

With the microphone pointing at the full-range driver, the average sensitivity from 100Hz to 10kHz was 86dB/2.83V/m. The frequency response (fig.2) measured 45Hz–20kHz, ±3dB, with a few resonances above 8kHz. Even though it uses a



Measurement setup: the Pearl Acoustics Model One on the measurement turntable, with the measurement microphone 1m from the driver.

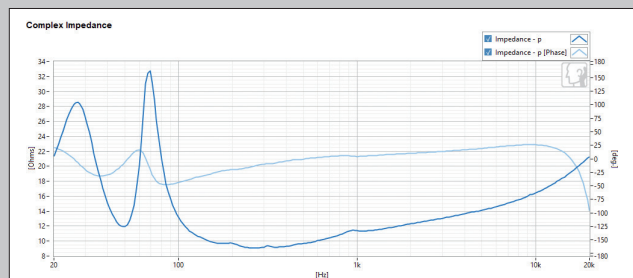


Fig.1 Pearl Acoustics Model One, electrical impedance (dark blue trace) and phase (light blue trace) (2 ohms/vertical div.).

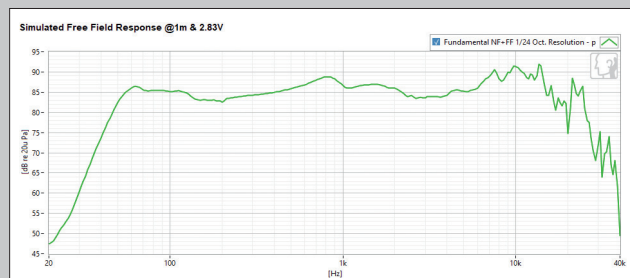


Fig.2 Pearl Acoustics Model One, 1/24-octave smoothed quasi-anechoic response on driver axis at 1m, 2.83V (nearfield and farfield responses spliced at 200Hz).

seam in sight.

Suffice to say that my predemo assumptions couldn't have been more wrong. I was blown away by the presentation, as was most of the crowd, judging by the reactions I noticed. The Sibelius seemed to beat the laws of physics. But it wasn't magic. As explained in the product literature, "The Model One isn't radically new. Instead, it represents a 'no cost spared' reintegration of proven acoustic principles."

As I left the exhibit room that day, I wondered how the Sibelius would sound in *my* room, with music and a system I knew well. Thus was planted the seed of this review—for the Sibelius.

The Model One

So, why am I talking about the Sibelius when this review should be about the Model One?

"They're exactly the same speaker," Harley told me during our interview. "As the business started expanding its product range, a name change was considered a good idea: 'one' driver, our 'first' design, and so on. There was also a perception from younger people that the Sibelius was only for classical music. Another perception was that most of our clients and prospects didn't know Sibelius."

There were no changes to the design, "and nothing planned for the next 20 years!" Harley said. "We believe we have it right, and like a violin luthier, when you believe you have it right, you'd be very unwise to change it. Of course, if something were to dramatically improve in terms of materials or laws of physics, we would need to reflect on that, but that isn't something we've witnessed.



measurements, continued

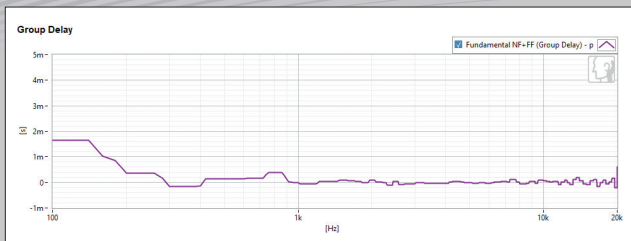


Fig.3 Pearl Acoustics Model One, group delay on driver axis at 1m.

single 4" driver, the Model One maintained meaningful output all the way down to the upper 30Hz range.

Group delay (fig.3) was very good because this is a single-driver unit without a crossover. There was, as there always is, some group delay at extreme frequencies, where a speaker starts to roll off.

The transient response (fig.4) was also very good, for the same reason, with some ringing at low frequencies due to the Voigt pipe and at high frequencies due to cone breakup. One of the advantages of crossing over from a low-frequency woofer to a high-frequency tweeter is that the tweeter has a smaller and stiffer diaphragm, which pushes resonances higher. That advantage is missing when a single driver must manage a very wide range of frequencies.

Looking at the waterfall plot (fig.5), again some ringing is noticeable at lower

and higher frequencies due to the Voigt pipe resonances and woofer cone breakup, but there is little ringing in the critical midrange, from 800Hz to 7kHz, where the human ear is most sensitive.

The horizontal directivity (fig.6) is

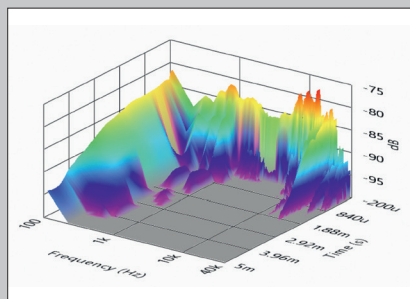


Fig.5 Pearl Acoustics Model One, cumulative spectral decay plot on driver axis at 1m.

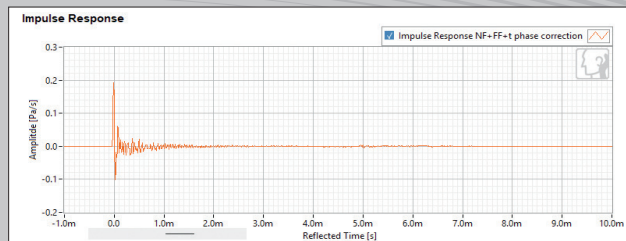


Fig.4 Pearl Acoustics Model One, impulse response on driver axis at 1m (10ms time window).

uniform over the whole frequency range, though there is some off-axis lobing above 7kHz due to cone breakup. As a result of this uniformity, placement of the loudspeaker and the seating position in the room should not be overly position depen-

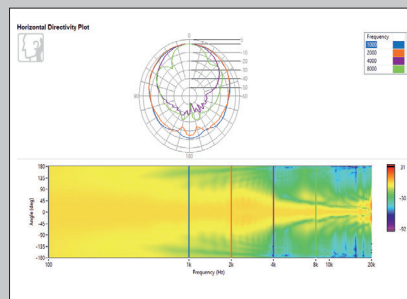


Fig.6 Pearl Acoustics Model One, horizontal directivity: polar responses at 1kHz (blue), 2kHz (orange), 4kHz (purple), and 8kHz (green) (top); contour plot of off-axis response, $\pm 180^\circ$, 100Hz–20kHz (bottom).

Pearl Acoustics is about longevity—all our products are designed to last decades without maintenance.”

On the other hand, should the Model One require maintenance, it comes with a 10-year warranty covering any manufacturing defects, except for the driver’s diaphragm; apparently that’s one trade-off for their small size. Also, the 4" cone is made from an extremely thin but rigid magnesium alloy, to keep mass very low for improved efficiency. Drive them too hard, and they can fail. As Pearl Acoustics Director Ajay Verma told me, the company sells “replacements, should the customer damage them.”

The Model One stands just over 3'6" (1010mm) high, 9" (225mm) wide, and 11.6" (300mm) deep. Significantly, the speaker’s architecture is based on Paul Voigt’s Voigt pipe principle—more on this in a moment.

I asked Harley to elaborate on his mike-in-reverse analogy.

“A microphone converts soundwaves into electrical signals, while a loudspeaker performs the opposite task, converting electrical signals back into soundwaves,” he said, adding: “Most studio microphones use extremely small diaphragms, often less than an inch in diameter. These thin metallic discs respond to sound pressure waves in two different ways.” At low frequencies, the diaphragm moves back and forth. At high frequencies, it flexes.

“When a full range of frequencies arrives simultaneously, both behaviors occur at once: the diaphragm moves back and forth while also vibrating. The Model One’s driver designer, Mark Fenlon of Markaudio, understood this behavior extremely well. His goal was to design a loudspeaker cone that mirrors the behavior



measurements, continued

dent. The 4" woofer is about level with an average listener’s ears, so a stand is not needed, and the speaker’s footprint is quite small, making it easier to put closer to a wall.

The loudspeaker’s vertical directivity (fig.7) is very smooth and uniform off-axis, as you would expect from its single-driver configuration. Normally there is bumpiness in the vertical response at frequencies near crossover regions; here that is not an issue.

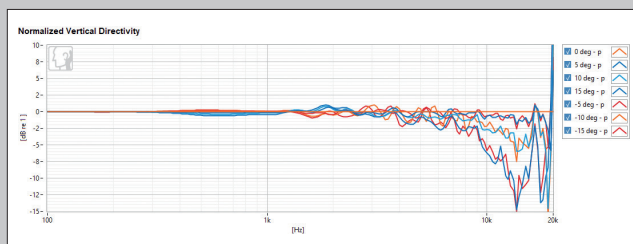


Fig.7 Pearl Acoustics Model One, vertical directivity, normalized to driver-axis response: responses from -15° to $+15^{\circ}$ in 5° increments.

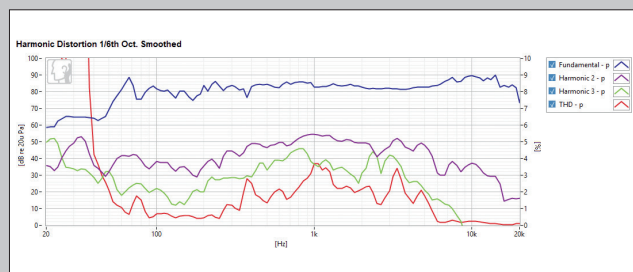


Fig.8 Pearl Acoustics Model One, harmonic distortion at 90dB SPL, 1/6-octave smoothed: fundamental (dark blue), second harmonic (purple), third harmonic (green), and THD (red). Note that THD is in %, scale at right.

One of the trade-offs of using a single driver to cover the full audio frequency range is that the driver must work harder at low frequencies. To reproduce low frequencies at high levels requires more displacement, which inevitably leads to increased distortion. Here the distortion (fig.8) exceeded 3% at 1kHz, which is on the high side, at frequencies where the ear is quite sensitive.

I used an accelerometer (fig.9) to check for resonances in the cabinet that could impact the sound. The cabinet is made from $1\frac{1}{4}$ "-thick solid wood, so it is fairly rigid. The accelerometer was placed at different positions on the panels, and the vibration measured using the same sine sweep at 2.83V. Most surfaces were relatively free of resonances; the surface with the most intense vibrational modes was the front, with modes between 850Hz and 2kHz, most likely due to the 4" woofer vibrating the surface in which it is mounted.

Although the distortion is somewhat high in the midrange, overall, this novel single-driver design delivers excellent measured performance.—Steve Temme

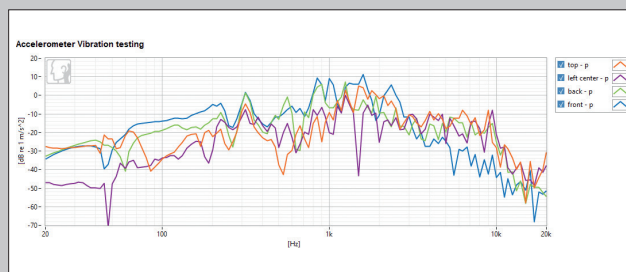


Fig.9 Pearl Acoustics Model One, cabinet vibration measured with an accelerometer at four positions: top (orange), left center (purple), back (green), and front (blue) (driving voltage, 2.83V).

"To achieve the most realistic soundstage and sense of spatiality, you need to keep everything in perfect phase."

of a microphone diaphragm, allowing a single driver to reproduce the entire audio spectrum, like a microphone in reverse."

"A single point source—one driver—has no phasing issues whatsoever," he said. "The soundwaves it produces radiate into the room completely in phase. This gives many advantages, most notably a wonderfully wide and deep soundstage, where the listener may not only hear a very lifelike image in front of them, but to the side of the listening position and even behind it.

"In general, single-driver loudspeakers can produce this effect far easier and more accurately than most multiple drive unit systems," he continued. "Why that is can be summed up by one word: coherence. Everything acts together as one. Because there is only one source, the brain can detect and process the audible data more easily than sound coming from multiple sources. A single source is also very likely to have low distortion. Imagine it this way: Throw a stone into the middle of a pond and watch the ripples form into pure circles. Now imagine what happens when you throw three different sized stones into the same pond at exactly the same time. The colliding ripples cause what we call interference, and this is exactly what happens when sound is produced from multiple drivers."

"Take, for instance, a two-way design, which typically uses deep cones for the mid/bass unit to ensure rigidity. The side effect is that the mid frequencies are projected into the room in a directional and focused way—like a megaphone—while the lower frequencies are omnidirectional. This 'megaphone' effect invariably colors the sound.

"It's why the Model One provides a level of detail that many designs can't match," he said. "And this comes down to the next challenge: using a crossover, which the Model One doesn't. There are many crossover designs, but each introduces some degree of phase shifting, where one driver is out of sync with another.

"These phasing issues can largely be overcome with additional circuitry, but at a cost," he warned. "Increasing complexity adds distortion. Each driver also has its own physical properties, introducing a certain degree of incoherence. All this can result in the loss of the minutiae of detail."

Harley cautioned that not all single-driver designs are built equally. "Some use step filters, which act very much like crossovers, holding back certain frequencies which would otherwise be too loud. In the case of the Model One, there are no step filters, or other electronics, in the signal path. The wires from the output of the amplifier are *directly coupled* to the single voice coil in the driver.

"To achieve the most realistic soundstage and sense of spatiality," he continued, "you need to keep everything in perfect phase." The cone's 4" size was also critical.

"It has extremely low mass," Harley said. "This allows the diaphragm to return to its resting position almost instantly, allowing it to capture the minutest sonic details."

There's one downside to the cone's small size—and the ultralight voice coil the driver uses: It's not very efficient. Most crossoverless, single-driver speakers have very high sensitivity, but the Model One's sensitivity is average, at a specified 87dB/W/m. This low sensitivity is offset, however, by the fact that the Model One's impedance presents an easy load to an amplifier, with a specified nominal impedance of 7.2 ohms and an impedance curve said to rarely drop below 6 ohms.

As for the bass, "While larger cones can move more air, their



greater mass also means they take longer to stop and return to rest. This can obscure detail and lose information."

"Another problem of big cones is that as the diameter of the cone increases, the center of the cone tends to move and accelerate before the outer edge. This causes the cone to deform and flex. Even the slightest deformation causes sonic degradation.

"Keeping a large cone both rigid and lightweight is extremely difficult. When flexing occurs, different parts of the cone generate slightly different sound wave patterns."

The driver is only half the equation; the Model One's cabinet, based on the Voigt pipe design, is the other half. In a conventional speaker enclosure, the rear soundwave cancels the sound produced by the front of the cone. In a Voigt pipe, the rear wave is delayed so that it exits the enclosure in phase with the front wave, which it does through the vent at the base of the baffle. "The two waves reinforce each other, increasing acoustic output," explained Harley. "Especially in the lower bass region."

Another characteristic of the Voigt pipe design is its tapered internal geometry, which works much like a horn or an acoustical instrument. Harley: "Consider the double bass. When a player plucks a string, the vibration travels down through the bridge into the front of the body of the instrument. The front panel excites a large volume of air, which escapes through the small f-holes, producing loud and powerful low frequencies.

"The Model One operates on a similar principle," he said. "The energy from the rear of the driver excites a column of air inside its enclosure. That air is then released through the front port in a controlled manner, allowing the system to produce very deep and well-defined bass from a relatively small initial movement."

Setup

The Model One doesn't have threaded holes for the usual spikes or outriggers. It comes instead with a custom steel stand with adjustable spikes and a metal backrest to prevent the speaker from tipping backward; otherwise, it relies on its 55lb weight to keep it anchored. Because the speaker and stand are separate pieces, positioning the speakers incrementally required a different approach than with a conventional floorstander.

When I solicited Harley for setup advice, his recommendation was to "move the loudspeakers around off their stands first, one at a time. Asymmetric placement can work in some rooms. When you find the right spot, you put the speakers on their stands."

This worked surprisingly well, helped in part by my adult son, who lifted and maneuvered the speaker as I positioned the stand underneath it.

Harley told me he liked to begin by "positioning my Model One



pair about 10"–12" from the back wall. I found that the difference between close to the wall or further into the room is much less critical than with most loudspeakers.

"When it comes to toe-in, in larger rooms, I like firing flat into the room," he said. "This gives a very spacious soundstage and good sound from a very wide seating position. You move around the room, and the musicians stay where they are. Toeing in in an equilateral triangle will give you wonderful depth, but I like to have the distance between the loudspeakers just a bit longer than the distance of the center line to my listening position. Ideally, you will be able to sit at least 3m (10') back from the center line, with them being about 3.5m (11.6') apart."

"Frequencies as low as 25Hz should be audible," he added, "with sounds extending at least 1m (3.3') diagonally past the left and right loudspeakers, along with a very three-dimensional soundstage."

My room isn't large enough to accommodate a speaker spread as wide as Harley suggested, but I got very good results with the speakers positioned not quite 9' apart and 8' from the listening position. I also preferred no toe-in, even though my space isn't large. This gave a layered soundstage that extended beyond the sides of the cabinets by about the 3' Harley mentioned.

Using the "Bass Decade" track on *Stereophile's* discontinued *Test CD2* (CD, STPH 004-2), I heard solid bass down to 50Hz, with a significant rolloff at 40Hz, and—just as Harley said—some slight energy at 25Hz. There was a lot of energy in the upper-bass region, around 160Hz, suggesting that I might've gotten even better-integrated bass response with a slightly wider speaker placement.

As a final positioning test, this one centered on locking in the soundstage, I used the first track, "The Ballad of Bill Hubbard," from Roger Waters's *Amused to Death* (CD, Columbia CK 47127) to tweak the setup further. I knew I'd nailed it the moment I returned to my seat and wondered if I'd ever heard a soundstage this wide, enveloping, and seamlessly layered in my listening room, with such incisive yet naturally contoured images.

When setup was complete, I leaned back on my couch's cushy headrest to take in the speakers' appearance. With their "Copper Gold" cones and cherry-stained oak cabinet, they looked chic and sturdy. Though not especially tall, they looked stately in my room, adding flair to my basement décor.

You can have the Model One *your way*—to borrow from a popular burger slogan—from a range of finishes, a choice of Baltic Birch Plywood or Natural European Oak, and a cone in either Copper Gold or Silver Grey.

Listening

As soon as the first beat dropped on Patricia Barber's "The Beat Goes On," from *Companion* (CD, Blue Note/Premonition 72435 22963 2 3), I forgot I was listening to just one little cone per speaker. It may as well have been three. From the speaker's smooth top end to the palpable midrange presence of the instruments (piano, vocals, percussion) to the burly double bass and bass drum, the Model One made a statement—and a strong second impression following the show demo.

It was immediately obvious that the Model One was not a typical single-driver-in-a-box design. It was also clear that the rectangular vent on the bottom edge was not your typical bass port. Via the Voigt

pipe, it seemed to function much like a true woofer, delivering deep bass in lockstep with the sound radiating from the cone. It felt literally like a speaker *system*, where a single cone reproduced the three tiers of the frequency range in one controlled wave pattern, unaltered by crossover parts.

How ample was the bass? There was more than enough for my room. More importantly, it sounded genuine. If I had any doubts that such a small driver and this port design could deliver real bass *definition*, they were put to rest the moment the double-bass notes on *Companion's* "Like JT" slapped inside my room, thick as limbs and bulging with texture. There was no amorphous flab around their structure, only musical information that spread all the way to the edges.

And it wasn't just about the double bass. Every instrument had substance and presence: Barber's vocals, chesty, nuanced, and glare-free; the organ, slats of dense, vibrant chords; percussion, microdetailed down to the elastic texture of the bongo skins as the hand bounced off, even on the softest taps. The music traveled viscerally.

And freely! I sensed a liberation, a collective swagger, as if everything was moving efficiently and naturally. The Model Ones avoided the sizzling hash that, on many systems, can afflict parts of Barber's voice, or the scrunched, screeching overtones that can plague the piano's hardest-played notes and chords.

We audio writers often make note of reproductions of the piano whose tone, timbre, and imaging evoke a semblance of the real thing. Usually it's with the implicit understanding that it can't *really* reproduce the piano's scale and shuddering weight, except occasionally over speakers that themselves are as big as pianos. On *Companion's* second track, "Like JT," the Model One came so eerily close to capturing those things that I kept glancing toward the piano in my room, thinking: "Would a piano actually sound like that *here*? Hmm ..."

There was more: the piano's lifelike tone, from its percussive *thunk* to its warbling, resonant bloom; the live-in-the-moment imaging of the hand coordination on the electric guitar and drum solos; and the laser focus on both crowd banter and the ceramic constitution of clinking dishes.

As I might be tempted to do at such a bar-music event, I played

The soundstage sounded nothing like a reconstruction: I didn't hear parts or detect any discontinuity.

musical chairs in my room to try to find the best seat in the house sonically, this time among the three cushions on my couch. They were all good, each preserving a strong semblance of the band performing from the same central spot. Imaging remained consistent.

The title track on Can's album *Future Days* (CD, Spoon Records 9385-2 724596938522) is known for its animated carousel of 3D sound effects. What I hadn't expected was the impact of the bass drum that begins the song in earnest. Each dropped with such an authoritative thump that I was momentarily worried it smothered detail in the process. It was the opposite: I heard more detail, and a refined caliber of it; more developed and purer in tone, within the bass region and the upper echelons.

As you might expect from its small, rigid cone and a purist design that eschews electronics in the signal path, the Model One's transient response and dynamics were immediate in a real-life way. Sounds were tactile; images, sharp—neither sounded etched. Can's singer Damo Suzuki's lyrics on "Future Days," which were meant to sound murky and enigmatic, sounded crisp-without-the-bite intelligible, down to the subtle inflections of his Japanese accent.

Such was the perceived speed and in-room extension of the sound that some sound effects appeared ventriloquist-thrown so far from the speakers that I'd cock my ear and lower the volume to see if what I'd heard was coming from another room.

It didn't—well, except for a couple of times when I began questioning *everything*, even sounds that obviously came from upstairs. Oh, right, that's the toilet flushing. Bummer.

At some point early in my listening, I wondered if, through the Pearls, I was hearing a soundstage reproduced correctly for the first time. The soundstage sounded nothing like a reconstruction: I didn't hear parts or detect any discontinuity. I heard filmlike moving pictures. Most other speakers' soundstages, in comparison, sounded somewhat misaligned.

Pivotal, that sense of seamlessness made the system subservient to the music. With mechanical distractions brought to imperceptible levels, the music had no problem drawing me into a dream state.

And it hit me, as the bongos and cymbals in *Future Days*'s second track, "Spray," came at me furiously yet never before this well-sorted, that the soundstage counts for practically everything; get that seamlessly right, iron out all the crinkles in the musical fabric, and the rest of sound reproduction falls into place: the detail, the imaging, the tonal density, the linearity of wave patterns, the corporeality of objects, the textural complexity of notes. I couldn't remember hearing this percussive track sound more dynamically impactful, instrumentally focused, and uniformly linear.

I heard much of the same on the Qobuz-sourced *Dragon—Concerto for Pipa and Orchestra* (24/96 FLAC, GFN Classics/Qobuz), where the Model One laid out the music like a food spread at a fancy hotel. A pipa is an ancient Chinese stringed instrument, and through the Model One it didn't matter how soft a note was played on it, or whether it was strummed or picked—it popped out tangibly so you could feel its pressure puncture the air. Massed strings sounded both massed and collectively porous. Wind instruments sounded both wind-based and rich with the tone of real wood rather than some synthetic composite. Bass tones filled the floor, lifting the orchestra so it almost seemed to float.

The Fifth Beatle! I thought, as an image of George Martin flashed in my head. That's what a soundstage can be—and what the Model

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources Moon 260D CD transport, Benchmark DAC 3B and iFi iDSD Diablo DACs.

Integrated amplifier Grandinote Shinai.

Cables Interconnect: Kimber Kable 1016 (RCA). Speaker: Kimber Kable Monocle-XL (w/banana plugs). Digital: Audience AV Studio ONE (RCA S/PDIF), AudioQuest Forest (USB). Power: Shunyata Research Black Mamba CX, LessLoss DFPC, DR Acoustics Red Fire Ultra.

Accessories DR Acoustics Polynice; Sbooster BOTW P&P ECO MKII external 5V power supply; a component rack and a wood plinth stand whose brand names are lost to time.—Rob Schryer

Ones were capable of. Just as George Martin's arrangements enhanced the Beatles' compositions, so does an immaculate soundstage bring out the best versions of the music.

The Model One's resolving nature reminded me that Pink Floyd's compilation *Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd* (2 CDs, Capitol 7243 5 36111 2 5) is among the band's best-sounding releases. When the drum roll that launches CD 1's first track, "Astronomy Domine," boomed out sounding gustily forceful, it triggered a flashback—to the Audiofest in the Galion/Pearl Acoustics room.

From there came a huge wreath encircling the speakers, made of thick, fuzzy guitar chords and soaring notes interspersed with rich, luminous vocals alternating between the left and right channels. Images were not only well separated but filled in between them with vivid sublayers that added depth and realism to the scene.

Such as the helicopter one that opens "The Happiest Days of Our Lives." I'd heard it many times in various rooms, but never quite this real. I even felt a twinge of the impulse to duck as the whipped wind and the *wop-wop-wopping* of rotor blades bore down on me.

To cap off the listening portion of my review, I added a physical element to the mix: I was so engrossed by the next song, "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2," with its pounding rhythm, saturated soundstage, and youthful rebellious streak, that I flung my notepad and pen onto the beer-stained table in front of me and, well, pretended I was that kid again, shuffling my feet to the music. It was a fitting end to my time with the Model Ones—that they should make me dance.

The end

Sold direct, the Model Ones are shipped everywhere in the US from a warehouse in Milwaukee. They come with a 30-day in-home trial, with the caveat that the customer incurs all delivery charges.

If you order a custom pair, be prepared to wait. According to the Pearl Acoustics website, lead times can run from 12 to 22 weeks, depending on the model's color and finish.

The Model Ones are worth the wait. With their full-range, cross-overless, phase-coherent, bass-friendly design—implemented with what seems like meticulous precision—they sound transparent and natural.

Audio reproduction is fundamentally about *conveyance*, about how much realism and emotion a system conveys from a recording. The Model One conveys a lot of both—realism and emotion—through a mixture of presence, coherence, transparency, a better-rendered soundstage than most speakers, regardless of price, and bass response with enough oomph, definition, and impact to satisfy most people with most music. The Model Ones are among a handful of speakers I've heard that can blur the line this well between reproduced sound and the natural world. ■