

CONCERTO

MJ ACOUSTICS Audio System

Glyn Madden reviews a home speaker system, designed and built in the UK, that unites quality workmanship with highly polished luxury.

Just before Christmas John Jefferis and Richard Hutchinson of MJ Acoustics delivered a speaker system for me to try over the holiday. I was interested to begin with because the system is manufactured in the U.K. and, judging by the pictures I'd been shown, was obviously aimed at the 'luxury' end of the speaker market.

I'm used to gigging speakers - and there are some wonderful systems to be had if you pay enough. Finding speakers for the home (and especially for the keyboard) that both sound great and have the looks of really high quality furniture is a far more difficult task - but I do believe I've found it in MJ Acoustics' Concerto Audio System.

I am by no means any kind of technical expert - so I'm going to begin with the things that impressed me as a layman, as a musician and as a home owner...

The packaging:

It's unusual to mention the packaging in a review but I have to here because I don't think I've ever come across items that have been so 'lovingly' packed for delivery. Each part fits snugly into compartments made of a material called 'soft closed cell foam'. This is more expensive than polystyrene but reduces the likelihood of scratching during transit. There are soft pockets for the smaller parts and everything fits gently, but firmly, into place without the usual pile of crumbling pieces I seem to end up with when trying to re-package items such as this.

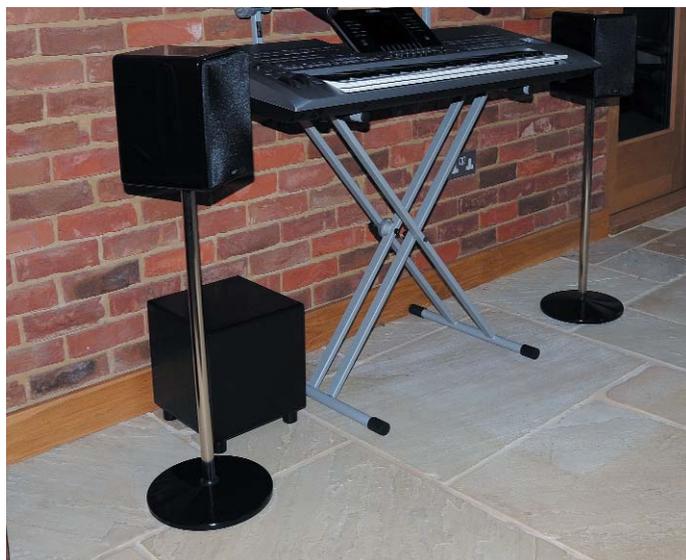


The XENO - XM1 speakers:

The speaker cabinets that I saw (which have stand or wall mounting capability) were finished in a highly polished piano black - but I'm told that they can be given a multitude of finishes including wood veneers and even a stone finish. I loved the inclusion of a pair of white 'snooker referee' gloves to avoid leaving finger marks on the glossy finish - and unwoven soft cloth bags to shield the speakers when they're not in use. A touch of class there I thought.

The gloves may also be useful when assembling the highly polished chrome stands - with their equally polished cast iron bases. Everything has a 'solid' quality about it - and it all fitted together smoothly and easily.

For those who enjoy reading the technical stuff, here is what MJ Acoustics has to say...



The finer detail...

XM1 speakers are individually full range with a frequency response of 48Hz - 23kHz (-3db in room). Apart from the obvious requirement for outstanding audio quality there are some unique touches provided within the Concerto Audio System design...

- * High Grade crossovers using the very best tightly wound coils and superior passive components.
- * Ability to be fed with a full range signal, removing the need to use bass cut measures.
- * Bass driver technology derived from our extensive experience of subwoofer transducer design.
- * Tweeter employing soft dome technology and higher strength magnets, for sweeter higher frequencies.
- * Cabinet finish to match the finest quality paint finish with super gloss shine and consistent colour depth.
- * Heavy weight dedicated stands designed to offer maximum stability and ease of room positioning.
- * Boundary effect rear ports to enhance the refraction effects from the lower frequencies.
- * Dedicated and vocally accurate speaker with twin drivers, exceptional power handling and extended band width.

Each XENO - XM1 loudspeaker features a critically shaped

paper pulp cone mid/bass driver providing transparent and dynamic mid/bass registers.

Utilising technology from our subwoofer drivers we have built into the design an extended cone travel and ultra linear motor assembly to control the bass accurately down to the rated frequency. The tweeter (treble driver) is a soft textile dome unit with Neodymium magnet, providing matching transparent and crisp higher octaves. These drivers have been specifically matched to compliment each other. The system is audibly bound together with the inclusion of a high quality crossover using audiophile matched capacitors and specially wound induction coils to precise specifications. Additionally each cabinet is hand crafted from high grade MDF which is finished in a luxury high Gloss quality two part paint coating.

The bass subwoofer:

The use of a Subwoofer is essential for a full bass extended sound stage and organists and keyboard players alike will appreciate the way it handles a floor shuddering 32' bass pipe voice. This absolutely transformed the Tyros5's sound - which was particularly impressive when I used the keyboard's huge classical organ settings. I'd thought this was an astonishing sound before - but with the pure bass of the Concerto system, it's to die for (and I turned it up... LOUD!!).

Happily I'm told that you can't blow it up either - as it has a digital protection clamping system that defends the system against overload.

Again, here is some more in-depth information from MJ Acoustics.

Reference 100Mk3 Active Sub-Bass

Frequency response of 13Hz - 200Hz (-3db in room)

MJ Acoustics is immensely proud of its achievement with this profound new addition to the range. Those that have auditioned it have marvelled at its sheer audio quality, bass muscle and rich feature set. Housed in a hand crafted cabinet and available in balanced real wood ash veneer which is painted in a special non-reflective satin black lacquer.

We adopt a very light and highly rigid cone structure with ultra compliant roll surround and minimal motor drive resistance.

We employ the very best grade of magnet material and energise it to the maximum. The result is a super fast driver that requires much less power to control it. Make no mistake the sound pressure levels are very high and the Reference 100Mk3 is a room shaking subwoofer when required.

The Reference 100Mk3 produces bass down to a staggering 10Hz which, for its size beggars belief. Everything MJ Acoustics provides is for a good reason. Like the option of small rubber inserts pushed into the feet. These serve to decouple the cabinet from the floor when placed on hard surfaces. Spikes are also available for those that feel point loading is required.

The amplifier crossover and transducer have been perfectly



Upper: Bass subwoofer
Lower: Viewed from below



matched to extract every possible element of audio efficiency and the results are immediately present when turned on. Perhaps we should also clarify that we have designed all our subwoofers to be highly efficient. For MJ Acoustics, efficiency is a tightly controlled amplifier capable of delivering fast and controlled transients, coupled to a transducer with world beating tolerances and some innovative use of construction methodology. The transducer is a 10 inch ultra stiff cone with light weight motor assembly and soft compliant roll surround. The cone and coil carrier are bonded to make a one piece constructed element with immense rigidity, yet light enough to be moved with complete control from the amplifier under extreme loads and high output levels. A rolled rubber surround with a special EDPM mixture provides big brother like stability to the position of the cone as it is thrust back and forth in its piston like movement. The basket is pressed from a one piece steel sheet for ultra stability and rigidity and mounted using eight fixing points for complete audio coupling of the driver motor assembly to the cabinet structure.

XENO - Core Amplifier

"Open", "transparent", "delicate", "controlled", "detailed" and "warm" are just a few of the words used to describe the Xeno amplifier - which faithfully reproduces whatever is thrown at it...

The amplifier is hand crafted with matched components, all of which are hand soldered by the engineers at MJ Acoustics and housed in a discrete case incorporating anodized sides and black front. Even the binding posts for the speaker cables are made from 24crt gold plating to ensure the very best connection! There's that luxury touch again...

Finally, each amplifier is soak tested for many hours prior to being signed off for handing to its new owners.

In conclusion

I really enjoyed using the MJ Acoustics Concerto system and I only wish I could afford one for my home. It has the richest tone of any home system I've experienced and enough power to easily fill small to medium venues. At £1995 it sits unashamedly at the luxury end of the market - although a second system called the 'Minuet' will be introduced at the Cavalcade Festival at Hemsby in April. The Minuet system's amplifier is integrated into the subwoofer cabinet - which makes the cabinet taller but removes the need to find a place to mount the amplifier. The Minuet system is priced at £1750.00.

If you're looking for something a bit 'special' to give your keyboard/organ a wonderfully big, warm sound - whilst looking fabulously chic in your home, do take the time to check these audio systems out.

My thanks to John and to Richard for their help and enthusiasm. You can contact them for more information at www.mjacoustics.co.uk or by phone at 01945 467770.



Upper: Amplifier (front)
Lower: Amplifier (rear panel)

