



Reality Bites!

The Peak Consult Dragon Legacy Loudspeaker

by Roy Gregory

It's common to describe designing loudspeakers as the ultimate audio balancing act. The would-be builder needs to consider interlocking parameters: sensitivity, bandwidth and size (or more properly, internal volume). You can't alter one without impacting the others. If you want more sensitivity you are going to have to make the box bigger or lose bandwidth. More bandwidth? That will cost you a bigger box or lower sensitivity. Juggling these parameters is no easy task but it is essential to any successful speaker design – especially when you've also got drive characteristics, component consistency, build costs (how much gets spent on the cabinet, how much on drivers or crossover and how much on finishing and ancillaries) and a host of intangibles lurking in the background. All of which made the arrival of the Peak Consult Dragon Legacy a particularly fascinating prospect. Not because of the anticipated performance – which certainly lived up to expectations – but because of the uncanny physical similarity the speaker bears to another of my favourites, the Stenheim Reference Ultime 2. That despite the fact that the two speakers offer a very different balance of electrical and sonic characteristics indeed! So – what

price those difficult design decisions and what are their musical implications.

Okay, so I know that the U2s are made of metal and feature a pan flat profile, whichever way you look at them, while the Dragon Legacy's rather more sculpted appearance is constructed entirely from wood. But get past that material difference and the similarities are stark.

The back edge of the Dragon Legacy stands 172cm tall, although the top of the baffle is nearer 167cm: the U2 stands 153.5cm (but you can add at least another 15cm for the X-base, lifting it to an overall height of around 168cm).

The Dragon Legacy is 40cm wide and 58cm deep: the U2 is 37cm wide and 50.5cm deep. But let's not forget that the Dragon Legacy's cabinet walls are 5cm thick, meaning that although the U2 is slightly smaller overall, its thin-wall construction actually contains a slightly greater internal volume.

The Dragon Legacy uses two 11" bass drivers, two 5.5" midrange units and a soft-dome tweeter: the U2 uses a soft-dome tweeter, two 6" midrange units and



▶▶ two 12" bass drivers. Both speakers use sophisticated, modern paper cones mated to soft-dome tweeters.

Both speakers are three-way D'Appolito designs with vertically mirror-imaged baffles. Both speakers have a segmented internal structure with six separate chambers individually loading their drivers and isolating their crossover. Both speakers are reflex loaded, each bass driver having its own, rear-firing port.

Despite their different cabinet materials, both speakers tip the scales at a shade over 225kg.

Put them side-by-side and whilst this clearly isn't a case of classic 'separated at birth' common DNA, the shared design themes are clearly and strikingly apparent. Which makes the differences all the more fascinating...

But let me be clear – this is not literally a side-by-side or direct comparison. These speakers are way too heavy (and way too position critical) for that. Instead it's both a review of what is a genuinely great speaker - and a chance to assess how it's distinct design choices are reflected in its performance attributes, relative to another, outwardly similar speaker: one that's the result of very different decisions.

Looking at key performance characteristics, the two that stick out like sore thumbs are the differences in bandwidth and sensitivity. The Ultime 2 is clearly aiming for the easy-to-drive end of the performance spectrum, with its 95dB 'half-space' sensitivity and non-reactive load characteristics. But those efficient and responsive qualities are equally clearly bought

at the expense of bandwidth. The U2's bottom end reaches down to a healthy 25Hz, impressive enough but a number that pales in comparison to the Dragon Legacy's -3dB point of 13Hz! Mind you, that comes at the cost of 90dB sensitivity and a considerably more awkward drive characteristic, although as we'll discover, that's got more to do with the musical presentation than it does with amplifier requirements.

Interestingly, both speakers offer bi-wire/bi-amp crossovers, even if the underlying reasoning is subtly different. In both cases it helps make the speaker easier to drive, but that statement is relative. In the case of the Peak Consult, 'easier' is about right: in the case of the Stenheim, 'even easier' might be nearer the mark. It's a distinction that informs both the differences between the musical presentation of these two speakers, but also and more importantly from the point of view of this review, it points firmly towards the way to achieve the Dragon Legacy's best performance.

Matching aspirations...

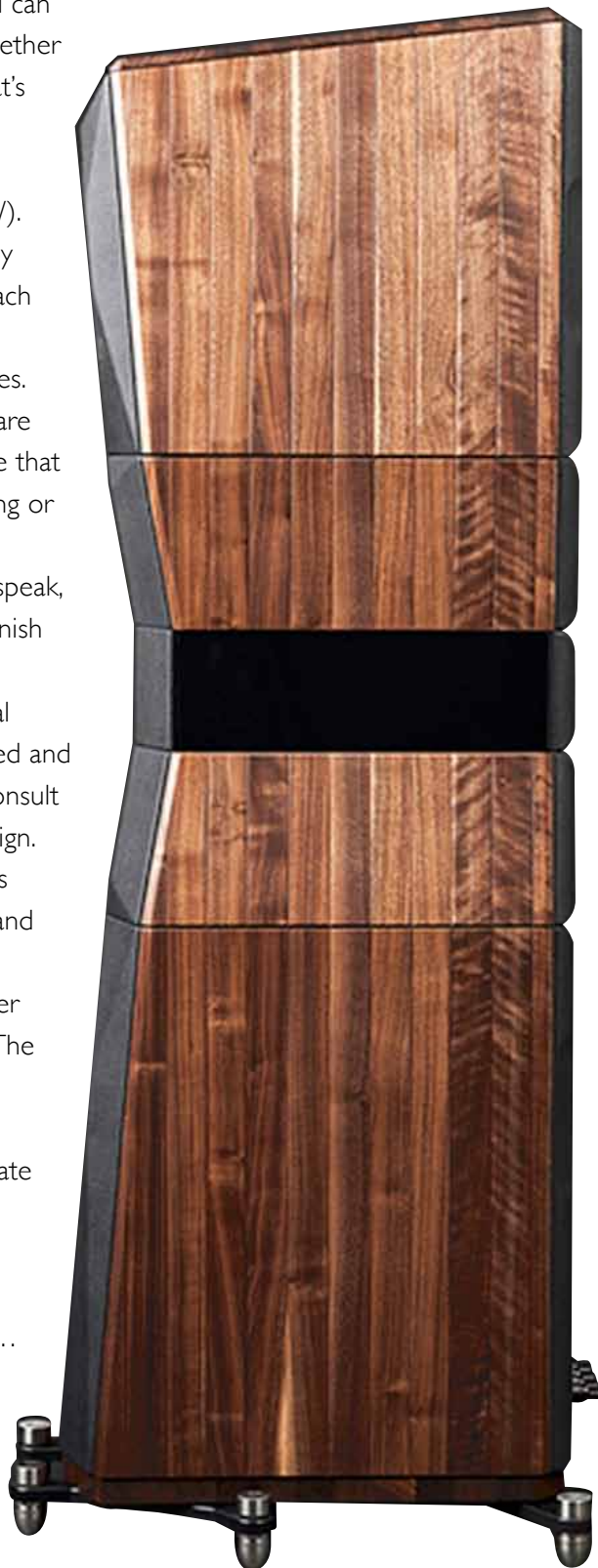
Getting into specifics, the details of the Dragon Legacy's parts and construction are suitably impressive. The laminated and hardwood skinned cabinet walls are constructed as individual boxes that are then glued and clamped together, first the tweeter and midrange cabinets, then the top and bottom bass cabinets, the lower one with its separate chamber for the crossover. Careful shaping and angling of the cabinet faces, especially



▶▶ the bass cabinets, helps disperse internal standing waves, while the lossy glue used to bond the separate layers in the cabinet walls adds damping to what is an already massive structure. As noted above, the external walls measure 5cm (or 2") thick and are each constructed of four, bonded layers, while the stacked box construction means that the internal boundaries between cabinets constitute six layers and 8.5cm of heavily damped material. You can see how the Legacy's go together and get a better idea of what's on the inside in our earlier factory visit article (<https://gy8.eu/blog/summit-meeting/>). All told, Peak Consult employ four different adhesives in each cabinet, each selected for its specific mechanical properties. Just because these cabinets are made of wood, don't assume that the construction isn't exacting or highly developed.

Drivers come from Scanspeak, another strong strand of Danish design DNA.

In each case, the electrical parameters have been refined and specified to suit the Peak Consult mechanical and acoustic design. The 280mm long-throw bass units use 75mm voice coils and a symmetrical motor system to drive their laminated paper and foam-core diaphragms. The midrange drivers are doped paper units, with similarly sophisticated motors and mate to the doped fabric dome tweeter; with its large roll-surround. Not exactly a rim radiator – but getting there... In selecting the drivers, dynamic response and elimination of thermal or resistive compression are clearly key considerations.



The massive, hard-wired and mechanically damped crossover is located in its separate chamber, built into the base of the speaker. It uses 12db/2nd Order slopes, a decision that might offend the 1st Order purists, but it's extremely hard to realise the benefits of 1st Order crossovers (without suffering the down-sides) unless you control every electrical and mechanical aspect of the driver designs. In other words, unless you build your

own drivers, something that simply isn't a practical proposition for a company the size of Peak Consult, given the volume of drivers it uses. Instead, 2nd order slopes offer better control of out of band artefacts, while maintaining phase coherence through the crossover points – critical to a coherent musical result. The crossovers are extensively modelled and then the crossover components selected by ear, an approach that tends towards the more expensive component options, although there is no brand dogma here. The best sounding component is selected, irrespective of source. One slightly unusual aspect to the crossovers is that they incorporate impedance compensation, making the network less reactive and the amplifier's job easier – which as we shall see, is an important consideration.

From the cabinet build to the cone materials, the point-to-point construction of the crossovers to the hardwood cladding, what we see here is traditional materials being used in innovative, high-tech ways. It's not really surprising, given the design oversight of Wilfried Ehrenholz (with his long history building the Dynaudio brand), Per Kristoffersen (who has



▶▶ developed the cabinet construction over a period of decades) and Karl-Heinz Fink (who provides support in terms of acoustic, mechanical and electrical design). A few people have marketed the 'Dream Team' idea over the years, but it ultimately falls apart in the face of the sheer design diversity open to the audio world. But, assuming you are going to work with wooden cabinets and a cutting edge approach to traditional driver design, this is a powerful and talented group to be working together. The rejuvenated Peak Consult gives Per Kristofferson's highly evolved cabinet construction access to acoustic and mechanical design expertise and insight that was simply out of reach before. Karl-Heinz Fink gets to stretch his design muscles with a bigger budget than he's used to and, overseeing it all, is the clear focus of Wilfried Ehrenholz. Like all the best teams, the skills are distributed but complementary, with each member knowing what it is they don't know.

As befits its price and ambitions, I hung Peak Consult's flagship speakers on the end of some serious electronics. Source components were the Grand Prix Audio Monaco v2.0, Kuzma 4Point I4 and Fuuga cartridge, Wadax Atlantis Reference CD/SACD transport, Reference Server and DAC. Electronics were the CH P10 and L10, feeding a pair of M1.1 amplifiers running in passive bi-amp mode. Experiments with the VTL S-400 and comparing A1.5s in mono or bi-amp mode against a single M1.1, clearly demonstrated the speakers preference for bi-amped operation, a system topology that delivered a significant boost to system dynamics and separation, musical immediacy and intimacy – definitely a worthwhile step, as we'll see later. Although the Dragon Legacy will run with a single stereo amp or mono-blocs, you'll be short-changing

them and yourself if you use less than four channels of amplification. The musical performance I describe here was achieved with the M1.1s, an amplifier that is perfectly suited to this set up and delivers the power and control necessary to extract full value from the Dragon Legacy's impressive bandwidth. Bad bass is worse than no bass. The combination of bi-amped operation and real power on tap delivers the benefits of all that low frequency energy without the downsides. Ignore my experience and at best the sound is likely to be smoothed off and thick, at its worst, sluggish,

turgid and uninteresting – a world away from the vitality and excitement, drama and pathos, dynamic contrasts, delicacy and shocking impact these speakers can generate.

Audio guessing games...

One almost inevitable result of reviewing audio equipment (or reading those reviews) is an almost subliminal game of consequences. You look at a product, you look at the technology and construction, thinking and materials and your mind automatically enters a realm that exists somewhere between assumption and guesswork as it tries to predict how said product will sound.

The Dragon Legacy is both a perfect example of that tendency and an interesting case in point. Given the laminated wood construction, phase coherent crossovers, lack of intermodulation distortion (thanks to the massively segmented cabinet), the advanced paper-coned drivers and the exceptional bandwidth, you can make a fair stab at the sound this speaker will produce. I'd expect dimensionality, a rich tonal balance and a livelier response to input than the moderate sensitivity might suggest. I wouldn't be wrong, although it's interesting to speculate just how much influence



▶▶ the speaker's appearance has on those conclusions. However – and not surprisingly – it's a long way from the whole story. It's not just a question of what attributes, but more importantly, the extent of those attributes and how well they combine to create a meaningful whole?

Getting the whole story is going to take no little effort and not just because of the speakers' weight. I've detailed the set up procedure in a separate piece – partly because it's instructive and partly because it's more involved than normal, the shape and nature of the speaker presenting its own specific challenges (<https://gy8.eu/blog/installation-notes-6/>). Even so, there are still a few things that you'll need to pay specific attention to.

Like any speaker that is this dimensionally capable, they demand precise alignment and symmetry relative to the listening position.

That presents its own set up challenge in that you are effectively manoeuvring an adjustable isosceles (almost equilateral) triangle within the confines of the room, balancing listening distance and placement to achieve maximum spatial accuracy combined with the best possible bass. In

other words, shunting one speaker fore and aft a little isn't going to cut it – at least not if you want to realise the performance these speakers are actually capable of. Good tools and careful measurement are your friends here, but the really fine-tuning is going to come down to the height of each speaker off of the floor and a balance of pitch and yaw – essentially a diagonal shift across the speaker, achieved by adjusting diagonally opposite feet. Just be warned: by the time you get down to the short strokes, with this much bandwidth in play, tiny, tiny adjustments are going to produce readily audible results.

An imposing presence...

In one sense at least, the Dragon Legacy lives up to its name. Its musical weight, scale and density make

recordings an almost physical presence in the room. Orchestral crescendos swell convincingly, bristling with impact and power – and post-GOT who can't relate to getting up close and personal with a Dragon? This is a speaker that does BIG with real attitude and confidence. But what makes it even more impressive is that it does small with equal presence, stability and considerable poise and manages to transit effortlessly between the two. In this case, first impressions count and they're not wrong. This is a very easy speaker to listen to, an easy speaker to enjoy and a very easy speaker to like.

I've recently been re-visiting the Sayaka Shoji recording of the Sibelius *Violin Concerto* (with the incomparable Yuri Temirkanov and his St. Petersburg Philharmonic – DGG SHM-CD UCCG 1811). It's a challenging piece and a challenging recording that finds

out too many systems, but the Dragon Legacies demonstrate exactly how it should be done, from the incisive bowing of the soloist, through to the superb direction and ensemble playing of the orchestra. It's an utterly convincing presentation of a powerful and confident performance – but it's also a window onto what makes the

Peak speakers so distinctive and special.

Playing live, Shoji is a fascinating soloist, her diminutive stature totally at odds with the focus, power and sheer substance she generates from her instrument, clamped stationary beneath her chin. It's a quality that few recordings can fully capture, few systems fully reproduce – but the Dragon Legacies are the exception to that rule. Not only does the solo instrument appear solid and surprisingly stable in space (just as she plays live) but the space that's a constant around and behind it, the layers of orchestral instruments, have a natural sense of depth, scale and perspective. The performance captures the distinctive atmosphere of the piece and performance perfectly, the orchestra underpinning and responding to the solo part with such gusto that the crescendos explode with body and colour. It's easy to ▶▶



▶▶ conclude that this body, weight and presence comes at the expense of some texture and tension, the air and vibrant anticipation that brings a performance to life. But if the performance is sounding a little smooth and rounded it's almost certainly because you are sitting too far back. At least in my room, these speakers demand a slightly closer seating position than many others – closer to equidistance between listener and speakers. Move forward (in this case around 30cm/12") and you are rewarded with an increase in focus, transparency and immediacy, instrumental texture, micro-dynamic discrimination and a soundstage that doesn't just open out in front of you, but reaches out to envelop you. Or, to put it more simply, the performance comes to life, vivid, full of energy, intent and expressive impact.

Size matters...

Once you get to grips with the Dragon Legacy's demands you realise that they open up a whole world of musical opportunity.

As I've already suggested, these speakers are capable of reproducing a remarkable sense of scale, presence and dimensionality. But unlike a lot of speakers that 'do imaging' this is no party trick, a 'lens' or 'filter' that imparts the same scale and spread to each and every recording. The Dragon Legacy is a shape shifter, with each recording and, in some cases, each track presented with its own, distinctive spatial characteristics and identity. The Shoji recording hints at this, with its instrumental presence and layering, natural perspective and sense of a consistent acoustic volume, presented at the expense of clearly defined boundaries and ceiling. But, there's no missing the location of instruments, the consistency of their single, contiguous acoustic environment, or the additional power this lends to the superb ensemble playing. Incidental noises are incredibly natural, buried in the orchestra, fixed in depth and height. The sheer presence and energy definitely make this a row E or F



experience, rather than M or N. Which is fine by me – just don't expect the same seat and perspective from every recording.

Perhaps the most startling example of this spatial fluency is Shawn Colvin's *Cover Girl* (Columbia 477240 2). As the name suggests, each track is a cover, often featuring a different location and cast of characters, a mix of studio and live recordings. But few contrasts are as stark as that between tracks two and three. '(Looking For) The Heart Of Saturday Night' is captured live, part of a solo gig at The Bottom Line that provides several tracks for the album. Colvin appears, isolated

in a spacious, slightly hollow space, her guitar displaced low and left by its separate mic. The acoustic adds a hollowness to her voice, while the upper registers clearly define the height and width of the stage, the space behind her. 'One Cool Remove' follows immediately, a gorgeous, fulsome, intimate studio recording, a full band arrangement with

duet and harmony vocals shared with Mary Chapin Carpenter. Each voice has its own distinct location, character and natural harmonic identity. Each is a solid, dimensional, credible, breathing presence, their separation as effective tonally as it is spatially: just as the band expands to fill the available space, a space that's a constant, whether the focus is on the voices and their subtle interplay, or soaring into the power and density of the chorus. The voices don't swell with volume, the studio space doesn't expand as it fills with musical energy. Instead the energy level gains intensity and power as the arrangement calls on more instruments and more level.

What the Dragon Legacy does with an uncannily natural ease is to scale the performance – in every sense of that word. It gives you an unwavering sense of, if not the original acoustic space in which the music happened, then as much of that space as the recording ▶▶

▶▶ captured. It doesn't add or embellish, but it does hold that space stable, so that the physical environment is a constant, whether it contains a solo violin or the entire St. Petersburg Philharmonic, a lead vocal with a whispered counterpoint or a full session band. As the music gains level, power or complexity, that shift is contained and concentrated within that established space, adding focus and intensity to the performance. When the musicians scale the heights, be that a soaring vocal or a massive crescendo, the Dragon Legacies don't do what so many speaker do, growing and swelling with the music: The space, the presentation, the acoustic remains stable and constant. Instead, the speakers help the music reach the full extent of that peak, driving the performers' energy into the recorded space, into the listening room, maintaining the scale of the space, but matching the musical scale of the performance. This is about more than simply delivering impressive dynamic range. By combining that capability (at both ends of the scale) with a rock-like spatial consistency, the stability imparted adds presence, power and temporal integrity to the performance: an integrity that makes for a deeper involvement and a much more convincing experience.

Music matters...

While it's another audio tradition to sub-divide and dissect a speaker's performance, dwelling over the specifics of bass, treble, colouration and a host of other specific qualities, in this case it's rather missing the point. There are few multi-way, moving-coil speakers in my experience that are as coherent and well balanced as the Dragon Legacy. The Stenheims are one possible example, but even the U2 doesn't possess the bottom-end extension, weight and power of these Peak speakers. Given that – and the use of a fabric dome tweeter – one of the few weaknesses in the Dragon Legacy's overall balance is a slight loss of extension and

air at the top-end, reflected in its warm and intimate presentation, as opposed to stark immediacy – although I suspect that's a compromise many a listener will be happy to make. In theory, adding extension shouldn't present that much of a problem, with any number of diamond or beryllium domes, ribbons or AMTs lining up for consideration. But the question isn't one of cost, at least not in terms of the BOM. The cost here would likely be measured in musical terms, risking a loss of the overall coherence, seamless integration and tonal and harmonic consistency that contribute so much to the Dragon Legacy's holistic nature. Like any loudspeaker,

its performance depends on all the different parts of the design working in concert. The Peak's ensemble capabilities put it on a par with the best bands, the best orchestras, on their best days. Which is why the speakers can deliver exactly that, accessing and



energising Shoji and the St. Petersburg, Barbirolli and the Hallé, Patti Smith or Talking Heads.

That sense of togetherness is both the Dragon Legacy's greatest strength and its defining characteristic. Play the Michelle Shocked album *Short Sharp Shocked* (Mercury 834 924-2) and there's a natural sense of body, presence, rhythmic and dynamic integrity, a natural scale and perspective to the vocals. The accompaniments/arrangement are tight and committed, with a joyous bounce to tracks like 'V.F.D.' or 'Anchorage', gentle reflection on 'Memories Of East Texas' and stark social realism on 'The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore'. There's attack and shape to the guitars, bass and mandolin, space and a connection between the instruments within the tracks. The lazy, chunky bass-line on 'If Love Was A Train' is neither sluggish nor plodding. Instead it is measured, perfectly pitched and paced. This is slow-time – not slow. The performers set ▶▶

▶▶ the pace and emotional pitch of the performance, the Peaks deliver it intact and on point.

Listening to the Dragon Legacy, what you don't get is the reach out and touch (you) immediacy and transparency, the sort that comes from a horn like the Trio G3 or a conventional but significantly more sensitive speaker system, like the U2. Like the high-frequency extension, you can buy that – at a price, be that financial or musical. But if we confine ourselves to our direct comparison with

the size and cost equivalent Stenheim speaker, the trade-offs are instructive. Even with its massive X-base attached (an addition that moves it well the wrong side of €200,000) the U2 can't match the coherence, stability, three-dimensionality and contiguous spatial quality of the Peak Consult speaker – which might be a good time to mention that the term 'stereo' derives from the Greek word for solid!

It's all there in the mix...

As a listener who values that immediacy and the speakers that deliver it, do I miss it in the Dragon Legacy's? In truth, no, because the swings more than make up for the roundabouts. The presence and connected energy generated by the Peaks does an equally impressive if less explicit job of revealing and defining the patterns and gradations that make up the music. It's a classic example of the dangers of getting hung up on a single attribute. Let's look at a couple of examples where that 'immediacy' should come into its own, like the lush textures and sumptuous, repetitive layers of Abel Korzeniowski's soundtrack for *Nocturnal Animals* (Silva Screen Records SILLP 1525). Those string harmonics should be a perfect playground for the vivid sense of bowing and vibrant energy that comes with greater immediacy. Yet listening with the Peaks, both qualities are present as part of a greater whole, a whole that spreads

the sound and individual instruments. Rather than the separate, you get the impression of the combined, adding further to the hauntingly atmospheric affect of the music.

Back to plucked strings and, if the guitars, banjo and mandolin on *Short Sharp Shocked* aren't enough, how about taking the Mandolin into a bigger and more demanding context, where its identity and individuality face an even greater challenge. Carl Davis

is a renowned composer of film and TV scores, including the title track and incidental music for the seminal, independent documentary series, *The World At War*. He later produced a longer, concert version of the music written for the series (*Carl's War*, Carl Davis Collection CDC 009), developed and elaborated, culminating with the main theme, this time sketched out on Mandolin against a dense orchestral backing. Far from submerging the diminutive instrument, the bold, sweeping strings, woodwinds and minor key offer the dark background and tonal contrast to fix the fragile hope embodied in that delicately etched and deeply poignant theme, with all its historical associations and related tragedy. Once again, the power of the whole trumps the impact of the individual.



Whole new you...

Simply because it resists sub-division and separation of the performance, the Dragon Legacy invites us to look at understanding it in a different way. Rather than a laundry list of distinct and separate sonic attributes, it invites us (rather like a live concert) to examine the music as a whole. Instead of categories such as dynamic range, resolution, bass or treble quality, transparency and neutrality, the Peak Consult's presentation begs different questions: who, how, why, what and where? ▶▶

► Interrogate it (and its competition) on the basis of those questions and you'll start to understand what this speaker does and why that makes it so different.

'Who' and 'How' are questions of personality and technique. Do you recognise a familiar performer's style, voice or distinctive approach? 'Why' is all about expressive range: what does the music offer and why are the performers playing it? 'What' is concerned with the completeness and intelligibility of the piece and performance: does the music make sense? 'Where' is about the acoustic environment in which the recording was made, whether that's a single space, a multi-tracked studio or a mixture of the two. As such it is about the space within as well as the space around the recording and, crucially, its contribution to the creative chemistry that fuels the music as a whole.

If we apply those categories to the examples already cited, you can see (hear?) the speakers' performance taking shape.

We see it in the life, presence and intent that invests the Shoji/Temirkanov performance, that captures so much of what makes Temirkanov and the St. Petersburg such astonishingly complete performers. We see it in the way that each track on *Cover Girl* gets its own distinct feel and frisson. We hear it reflected in the easy confidence and insouciant attitude of Michelle Shocked, the sculpted sonic landscape of the *Nocturnal Animals* OST, the carefully calculated power of the emotional cues that Carl Davis incorporates in his music. Measured on this spectrum, the Dragon Legacy clearly goes long in the 'Where', 'What' and 'Why' categories, carrying the 'Who' and the 'How' along for the ride. Interestingly, that makes it the complete opposite of the U2, a speaker which excels in the areas of 'Who' and 'How', yet what is really interesting is where the Venn diagram of opposing performance intersects. What is it that makes both of these speakers so engaging and enjoyable to listen to, despite their differences? Just as the Peak embraces the 'How', the Stenheim gets a good grip on the 'What', but what really brings both speakers'



performances to life is the 'Why'. Neither speaker leaves you in any doubt as to the intent behind the performance, why and just how hard the performers are working to express that intent. Both speakers let the performers and their performance breathe.

Ultimately, if I want to know more about Shoji's technique and Shoji as an artist (as opposed to Batiashvili or Hahn for example) I can learn more, more quickly from the U2, thanks to its immediacy and transparency, stemming directly from its sensitivity and ease of drive. But if I want to experience the Shoji performance as a whole, embracing as it does, the

brilliance of Temirkanov and his orchestra, his sense of musical balance, support and sublime direction, then the Dragon Legacy is the speaker for the job. Its presentation is more akin to the concert experience – and a direct result of the choices made in its design. It reflects both the Peak's balance of sonic virtues and, more critically, the way

those sonic virtues are deployed to serve the musical whole. If you want to revel in the sonically spectacular there are plenty of speakers you might choose. Most of us want sonics and music – and there the field starts to get seriously thin. But if your interests really do lie entirely with the musical as opposed to the sonic, the choice is limited indeed – and currently the Dragon Legacy sits firmly in pole position.


I've left what is perhaps the most telling example of the Dragon Legacy's ability to present and make sense of the music until last. Whilst I find the music of John Cage fascinating and in places challenging, I've always struggled to understand or relate to his pieces for 'prepared piano'. Giving them one more go, I bought Bertrand Chamayou's *Cage2* (Warner/Erato 5021732253521) an album of pieces for said 'prepared piano'. This isn't just Cage doing deconstructed music: he's deconstructing the instrument itself. It's music that can sound clashing, disjointed and splintered – and in my experience generally does. Yet the Peaks hold the pieces together, the human agency in the playing, ►►

▶▶ binding and driving the unpredictable response of the instrument into recognisable and provocative/emotive patterns. The presence of the piano is big and stable, reproduced with a physical volume and authority that demands attention and respect. The speakers and the system driving them are simply left behind, rendered visually and musically irrelevant by the box of musical tricks that's just stepped, living, breathing and attention seeking, right into the room. This isn't just making sense of the music, it's lifting it entirely clear of its means of reproduction. Definitely the 'What', the 'Where' and a very healthy dose of the 'Why'! But it also illustrates the fundamental and essentially musical quality that underpins the Peak's performance.

Making music make sense...

We often read about speakers or systems that allow you to see or reach into the performance. The Stenheim U2 is just such a speaker. The Dragon Legacy comes at things from the other end of the telescope and in a more organic fashion. It's as if it builds from the inside out. Hence the substance and almost physical presence it generates. Whether it's the power and impact of Neil Young's guitar on *Sleeps With Angels* or the way that the thunderstorm in Beethoven's Sixth (The Böhm/WPO Original Source pressing) explodes into the room, there's no missing the physicality and concentrated energy the Peaks bring to recorded music. But best of all, is the subtlety they bring too. Playing the Villa-Lobos *Bachianus Brasileiras No.2* (Capolongo and the Orchestra De Paris, EMI ASD 2994) the shape and order, weight, power and building momentum with which the speakers invest 'The Little Train Of The Caipira' before it settles into its steady rhythm, the ebullient cacophony of sounds and percussion, brass and bells that are somehow hitched to the spine of the music, the coaches of the train, that accompany its progress, manage to make perfect sense. It's a riot of noise and energy, purpose and movement – as evocative as it is entertaining. Yet contrast that with the more orderly and organised performance by Bakharev and The National Orchestra of the U.S.S.R. (Melodia/ Le Chant Du Monde LDX 78 644) and there's no doubting which performance captures the mood of the music better – despite the massive dynamic and

rhythmic challenges presented by the recording, and so impressively mastered by the speakers.

It's this ability to bring order out of recordings that can easily descend into chaos, to create a planted and stable musical foundation on which to build, to make sense of the music, the performers and their performance that makes the Peak Consult Dragon Legacy so special. I can think of nothing that's more affordable that gets close and I could name plenty of speakers that cost way more and don't come close either. The Dragon Legacy isn't cheap but it's capable of a musical performance that can eclipse all but very few alternatives – and most of those are considerably more expensive. In a few short years, the reenergised Peak Consult has moved from walking dead to setting the pace – and it's not only the Dragon Legacy that indicates that transformation: the other, more affordable models are just as strong at their price points. All of their speakers demand care in terms of set up and respond to system matching, but feed them properly and the results are incredibly engaging and naturally communicative. There's a – very – short list of speakers that I might want to live with, might be affordable and I might actually want to afford. As of today that list is one model longer, the Peak Consult elbowing its way firmly to the front of the line. The Dragon Legacy speaks music to me and, with the proper care (and not a little money), it will speak music to you. 

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Price and availability
Peak Consult Dragon Legacy
€185,000 (Walnut or coloured acrylic,
with other finishes to special order)