

Peak Consult Sonora loudspeaker

Steve Dickinson

It's almost twenty years since I first encountered Peak Consult. I remember the, then current, Princess model as a modestly-sized, but inordinately heavy, floorstander. It was beautifully and elegantly built as so many Danish products are – real hardwood cabinets gorgeously finished, with leather front facings, it sounded as it looked: beautiful, elegant and understated, if a little bit traditional. It was easy to admire, though I never loved it. The Princess's problem was that it didn't boogie quite so well; tonally rich and expansive, with exemplary timing and coherence, but dynamically it could be a little bit self-contained.

That was then.

Things are different there now. It all changed with a change of ownership. Wilfried Ehrenholz was looking for a new project to keep him interested after selling Dynaudio, the loudspeaker company he co-founded. Together with Lennart Asbjørn in the role of CEO, they took on Peak Consult in 2021, retaining Per Kristoffersen, Peak's founder, putting him in charge of designing the exquisite cabinets for the model range.

Per's talents are strongest in cabinet design and construction, and these are now complimented by Wilfried's huge expertise in loudspeaker and driver development. They engaged the services and measurement facilities of Karl-Heinz Fink's team for crossover, and final tuning development work. The results of all this collaboration have led to a truly remarkable four model line up.

The Sonora sits at the bottom of the Peak range (plus a centre-channel speaker if you're so inclined), but this is about as far from an entry-level product as I have encountered. For starters, the £23k selling price doesn't exactly scream 'entry-level', but also, the construction and overall quality is every bit as good as the larger Sinfonia, El Diablo and Dragon Legacy models that sit above it.

Peak's approach is to make the best loudspeaker they can for any given configuration, there's no cost-cutting or compromise evident here, it's not a question of hitting a price point. Wilfried determines the best component, or driver specification, for the task, and that's what is used, regardless of the 'bill of materials' cost.

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» The aim for the Sonora was to produce a loudspeaker to rival Sinfonia, but which is easier to accommodate in smaller spaces. To that end, the Sonora is a two-way design, whereas the others are all three-ways, with increasing driver complements as you move up the range. It further differs in having a rear-firing auxiliary bass radiator, rather than a ported cabinet. It may be a floorstander, but conceptually, it's closer to a standmount design. The actual loudspeaker enclosure occupies a little under half the cabinet volume, an internal divide runs from just below the mid/bass driver to under the ABR at the back.

Below this is the crossover, in a space filled with fine sand to isolate the network from structural and airborne vibrational energy. The crossover uses Peak's Linear Impedance Control technology, which helps keep the loudspeaker impedance as amplifier-friendly as possible. Alongside the choice of solid hardwood and deep section HDF for the cabinet itself, the sand-filled base helps explain why each domestic-friendly size cabinet weighs in at a hefty 68Kg. The front baffle where the drivers mount is canted backwards for time-alignment, subtly faceted to minimise diffraction effects, and the rear panel slopes forwards, avoiding parallel faces, so the cabinet tapers from bottom to top. This taper also helps reduce the impression of size and visual mass, while retaining a footprint broad enough to ensure stability. A gloss black strip of acrylic runs down each side of the cabinet, the better to break up the 'wooden slab' appearance of the sides

Domestic-friendly

The 'domestic-friendly' bit is important here, my listening room is not large, roughly 4x4m, and the bass output of the larger, three-way, designs can be prodigious, not to mention the somewhat larger and deeper cabinets they occupy. Though the Sonora, Sinfonia and El Diablo are not hugely different in size, if space is tight the Sonora is usefully slimmer and shallower, with a footprint much the same as a moderately-sized standmount. It also partners my Accuphase DP570/E5000 combination more appropriately from a cost perspective, albeit still around twice the price of the FinkTeam Kims that usually sit there. And comparison with those Kims is worth a quick mention, too. The Kims' cabinet volume is larger than the loudspeaker section of the Sonoras, and their 8" bass/mid driver is larger than the Sonora's 6" design (though the Sonora's 8" ABR, does mean their total bass radiating area is somewhat





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» greater). Two different approaches to getting decent bass output from a modestly-sized driver set, and both equally successful in their own terms. I've previously described the Kim as a standmounter that thinks it's a floorstander; the Sonora might almost be thought of as a floorstander that thinks it's a standmount. And in case you think that driver complement and enclosure volume are definitive in terms of bass performance, be very clear here that the Sonora's bass is not lacking in depth, weight, or impact, and goes deeper and harder than the Kim, on the end of the same system.

All Peak loudspeakers arrive with a set of outriggers which mount securely across the underside of the baseplate. A set of snub-nosed, adjustable feet screws through these outriggers, secured on the top side by a cylindrical stainless steel cap which screws down onto a threaded section of the foot, and bears onto a washer made of a damping polymer material. The combination of outrigger, baseplate and feet forms the interface with the floor, damped to some extent by the washer between clamping cap and the outrigger's upper surface. The feet's rounded shape obviates the need for floor protectors on hard surfaces, though I experimented with my usual 50mm AcouPlex disc floor protectors under them. And it's definitely worth experimenting with how the caps, washers, and indeed floor protectors affect the sound, during setup. The Sonoras sound different if the caps are screwed down firmly finger tight, and in my room, this wasn't a great success. Nipped up gently was better; just screwed down until the barest resistance was felt against the washer was better still, but in my room, on hard wooden flooring, I got the best results leaving the locking caps off entirely. The threaded part of the foot is of relatively large diameter and screws snugly through the outrigger so, even given the weight, this was entirely secure. The review was mostly done with them configured like this.

Sound

Michael Gandolfi's orchestral suite, 'The Garden of Cosmic Speculation' (Telarc, SACD) musically depicts various areas of a real garden inspired by cosmology and physics. It opens with 'The Zeroroom' in which pulsating woodwinds lead us into the garden. I found myself thinking '*how are they making that pulsing sound*', something it has never previously occurred to me to wonder, but quite clearly now this is not the usual way these instruments are played. The next track, 'Soliton Waves' passes thematic material around



the orchestra and there's real movement here, a vivid invocation of the propagation of energy. The *pizzicato* in 'Passepied' was, frankly, uncanny, and so it went on.

Almost from the first moment you play music, there is a 'rightness' to the sound of the Sonoras. Textures, timbres, pitch and spatial information are resolved so finely and accurately, it's as though what you've experienced before has been an approximation. Instruments sound natural and real, it's not just timbre, they have texture and form, pianos have an appropriate sense of mass and size, vocals are scarily real. Soprano saxophone is an instrument I have real problems with, so often it is strident, hard and oppressive. Which is a shame because experienced live it can be almost ethereal. Jack de Johnette's 'Ahmad the Terrible' from *Album Album* (ECM) is a case in point. Often I play this as a test because if the timing doesn't work, it's just a bit of a racket. This time, not only was the timing absolutely on the money, the timbre of John Purcell's soprano sax breathed like a real instrument; the sax and bass pairing now feels playful, a lighthearted dance like a cakewalk, and it soars over the rest of the ensemble when the groove really gets going.

And insights like these just keep coming. Alongside the tonal colours and textures, there's also a quite extraordinary level of spatial resolution. Listening to the LSO/Previn



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» account of the Brahms *Deutsches Requiem* (LSO Live), it's clear that this was recorded in an auditorium, not a studio. The orchestra and chorus are laid out before you, the scale, and space between the various sections is very redolent of a live concert. And the impression of effortless realism continues. In the opening 'selig sind' the orchestra and choir are clearly being held back, the sense of substantial, powerful forces being restrained is palpable. This is a very humane requiem, and Previn's evocation of the human spirit comes through very clearly.

I found myself digging ever deeper into my collection of classical recordings, just to revel in the structure and organisation the Sonoras bring to large-scale works. Normally, if I find myself gravitating to one genre of music, that's a warning sign. In the case of the Sonoras, I listened to more classical than usual because I've never heard my classical recordings rendered with such a natural sense of scale, form and structure. Sometimes, it felt like I could resolve sections of the orchestra down to the level of individual instruments, certainly it became much easier to understand what the composer was trying to do, how they employed the parts of the orchestra, and how the conductor had marshalled the forces at his disposal to bring us their interpretation. The Sonora's ability to organise, and keep separate, a multitude of interwoven parts, is unmatched in my experience, certainly at this price. And one aspect of that is the accuracy of pitch information.

Tearing myself away from large-scale classical: Bokante and the Metropole Orkest, *What Heat* (Real World) and 'Fanm' has massive energy and drive, but still finds space to show us the variety of voices, allowing the music to develop its own shape and form over the powerful *ostinato* that propels the piece. The various lines are easier to follow partly because you can hear deeper into the music, but also because the pitch information is so finely resolved; you find yourself noticing a line of music because you can follow the melody, or hear how the notes played contribute to the harmony. Jazz in particular stands or falls on the interrelationship between the performers, so when one performer pulls back and supports another solo, you can still hear their contribution. Renaud Garcia-Fons, 'Berimbass' from *Arcoluz* (Enja) the two leads are double bass, and Spanish guitar, and when bass passes the baton to guitar, he doesn't stop playing, he contributes to the harmonic structure below and behind the guitar lines. Mostly I'm just vaguely aware of it, but here and now, I can hear the notes he plays, and how they underpin the music.

So...

There is absolutely no doubt the Peak Consult Sonora is an extraordinarily accomplished and musical loudspeaker. Their ability to resolve timbral, spatial, pitch and timing data is beyond anything else I've experienced and the results are uncannily real. They put the listener in front of a musical event, no willing suspension of disbelief required, and they do it without apparent effort or artifice. That also requires them to deliver on the dynamic range, too, and here they are not found wanting either, though this is the area that is most obviously rewarded by careful setup. Like many products at this capability and price level, the performance they are capable of requires and expects your attention to setting up, and the rewards when you do amply repay the effort involved. These may not be 'entry level' in any meaningful sense of the term, but they could easily be an end-game loudspeaker. +

Technical specifications

Type: Two-way, passive, floorstanding loudspeaker with sealed enclosure and auxiliary bass radiator

Driver complement: One 25mm soft, silk dome Scan-Speak Illuminator tweeter, built to Peak Consult specifications, pair matched to 0.1dB.

One 15cm (6") audio Technology mid/bass unit, one piece sandwich moulded cone, die cast magnesium chassis with internal magnet system comprising 6 neodymium magnets in star configuration, Kapton voice coil with aluminium wire and hexacoil winding.

One 20cm (8") passive, polypropylene, rear-mounted auxiliary bass radiator.

Crossover frequency: 2500 Hz

Frequency response: 28Hz – 30kHz (± 3dB) (in room, typical)

Impedance: Typical 7Ω, minimum 4Ω

Sensitivity: 85dB/W/m

Dimensions (HxWxD): 1130 x 280 x 385mm

Weight: 68kg/each

Finishes: American Black Walnut/acrylic with leather front trim; pure white or midnight black acrylic with smooth leather front trim

Price: £23,000

Manufacturer Peak Consult Denmark ApS

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