

Loudspeaker Focus



YG Acoustics Tor

For a Song

Andrew Quint

The “YG” of YG Acoustics stands for Yoav Geva, the brilliant engineer who, in 2002 at the age of 24, founded the Denver-area company that quickly established itself as a manufacturer of some of the finest loudspeaker systems on Earth. Then, unexpectedly—at least to many in the general audio community—Geva sold the company to a group of Colorado investors in 2017 and departed YG altogether in 2020. The company then partnered with Cambridge Acoustic Sciences (CAS) in Cambridge, England. YG’s CEO is now Dr. Matthew Webster, a physicist and lifelong audiophile with

expertise in computational modeling. The company’s R&D is largely accomplished in the UK, but YG Acoustics remains very much a Colorado enterprise. Since the ownership change, more than \$2 million has been invested in the Arvada, CO, factory, with more square footage, more CNC machines, and more production employees.

YG loudspeakers in 2017 were impressive performance-wise but were also, by any measure, very expensive. An early goal of the company’s new leadership was to develop products more affordable than what would come to be known as the “Reference” line, by employing the “advanced measurement capabilities and supercomputer models” in place at CAS. The Peaks series was quickly born: “We have enjoyed the fastest technology and product development in our history,” notes Steve Huntley, VP of Global Sales. There are six Peaks speakers, all with mountainy names, costing from \$8500 to \$25,000 per pair; every one of the dozen-and-a-half Reference models are above this price point, ranging all the way up to the Sonja XVI, the full-sized version of which will set you back \$359,300.

What allows for the Peaks loudspeakers to be substantially less costly than the long-established Sonja, Hailey, and Carmel models? Much of it has to do with the construction of the enclosures. Reference series cabinets are made entirely from aerospace-grade aluminum in multilayered structures, sometimes with thousands of exactly machined parts in a single speaker. Peaks loudspeakers have

an aluminum front baffle, but the rest of the sealed enclosure is fabricated by contractors in England, Poland, and Germany from a dense, inch-thick resin-fiber material and finished with one of several veneers, including the exquisite flamed-Rosewood of the review samples. The aesthetics of Peaks speakers are probably more likely to gain them admission to the living room than the more severe look of the all-metal Reference series products.

There are differences, as well, in the drivers utilized in the Peaks product range compared to those in their cost-no-object brethren, though not nearly as many as you might expect. The midrange/bass cones for both lines are made with YG’s BilletCore process—the cones are machined from a solid chunk of aluminum—and both lines have ForgeCore magnet systems, for which precision cutting of a driver’s motor parts on a CNC machine achieves the introduction of “computer-optimized, highly sophisticated, 3D geometries in the magnet system.” Only Sonja and Hailey models have BilletDome tweeters, featuring an extremely difficult-to-manufacture aluminum “airframe” that supports the soft dome and moves the breakup to a frequency above human hearing, reducing distortion to vanishing low levels. The crossovers in Reference series loudspeakers are highly complex and utilize some handmade (by YG) parts that are quite labor-intensive to produce. Still, a case can be made that there’s a substantial amount of “trickle down” going on: A lot of advanced engineering is migrating down

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Specs & Pricing

Type: 2-way sealed-box loudspeaker

Driver complement: One ForgeCore dome tweeter, one 7" BilletCore woofer

Frequency response: 37Hz–40kHz

Sensitivity: 88dB

Impedance: Average 7 ohms, minimum 3.5 ohms

Dimensions: 9.1" x 16.7" x 11.8"

Weight: 40 lbs.

Price: \$10,500 (dedicated Tor stand, \$1500/pair)

YG ACOUSTICS

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from cost-no-object products to the realm of the audiophile Everyman.

The Tor, priced at \$10,500 per pair, is the larger of the two bookshelf/standmount models in the Peaks line—an eye-pleasing, truncated, trapezoidal box measuring 9.1" x 17.7" x 11.8". (In case you didn't know, according to my good friend Merriam-Webster, a tor is "a high craggy hill.") It's a two-way design, incorporating a ForgeCore tweeter and a 7" BilletCore woofer; the high-frequency driver operates in its own sealed compartment. The enclosure's interior eschews parallel surfaces and utilizes "meta-material absorber/diffusers" optimized for the Tor's specific cabinet and woofer. Frequency response is given as 37Hz–40kHz (how often do you come across a top treble specification like *that* with a dome tweeter?), and, with a sensitivity of 88dB and an average impedance of seven ohms, Tor doesn't present an especially difficult load to an amplifier.

Steve Huntley took no more than two hours to unpack and install the Tors on their dedicated stands (\$1500 per pair) in my 225-square-foot listening room—he's done this a few times—and I didn't feel the need to adjust their position by as much as a micron over the weeks I spent with the product. The speakers were 24" from the CDs and GIK diffusers behind them, 104" apart (mid/woofer to mid/woofer), and 116" from the front baffle to my ears. Associated equipment for this review included a Beatis Reference server, a Theoretica Applied Physics BACCH-SP audio processor (XTC filter defeated for critical listening) and a Sony X1100ES disc player as digital sources; a Vertere MG-1 turntable and SG-1 tonearm fitted with an Acoustical Systems Archon moving-coil cartridge, and a Pass Labs XP-27 phono-stage comprised the vinyl playback system. Tidal Ferios amplifiers powered the Tors and a Tidal Contros controller/DAC was often in the signal path. Analog cables were Transparent; digital wires were a smorgasbord of Transparent (USB), Shunyata (AES/EBU), and Apogee Wyde Eye (SPDIF).

The YG Acoustics Tor is an outstanding all-around performer; its only deficiencies are the "sins of omission" expected with a physically small loudspeaker. But after only a short period of close listening, it was apparent that Tor excels in one area of considerable importance to most audiophiles—the faithful representation of the human voice. My usual review playlist features a few female vocalists—Diana Krall, Shelby Lynne, Kevyn Lettau—and after their selections came and went, I felt compelled to play other artists to recall their way with a good song, jazz and pop treatments alike. I greedily consumed the great lady singers of the past—Ella, Billie, Sarah, Dinah, Betty Carter, Peggy Lee—as well as more recent practitioners—Diane Warwick, Linda Ronstadt, Holly Cole, Madeline Peyroux, Melody Gardot, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Jacintha ... even Karen Carpenter. I did this for a few hours and, truly, I could have done it for a few days.

Opera aficionados will have favorite artists not just for a particular corner of the repertoire—verismo, bel canto, singspiel, French Baroque, etc.—but also for specific roles within the genre. I'm

a big fan of Richard Wagner (the music, not the man) and, with the Tors, I listened to three well-known arias sung by three highly regarded Wagner tenors, Ben Heppner, Klaus Florian Vogt, and Jonas Kaufmann. For "Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond" from Act I of *Die Walküre*, Kaufmann was the clear winner, his smoky, somewhat baritone voice capable of both the passion and crooning tenderness the scene requires. "In fernem Land" from the final act of Wagner's *Lohengrin* is ideal for Vogt, whose lighter but still substantial tenor has an ethereal quality that manages to be both heroic and sublime at the same time. Finally, Heppner's stentorian, ringing vocal instrument is just what's needed to assure that the famous "Prize Song" at the end of *Die Meistersinger* is the soul-satisfying experience one deserves after five hours or so in the opera house. The YG Tors fully reveal the unique qualifications of these three top heldentenors for roles that they have all performed on stage and recorded.

This accuracy in reproducing vocal timbre extends to instrumental tone color, as well. With the Tor at the end of the audio chain, it's easier than it often is to distinguish a Stradivarius violin from a Guarneri, a trumpet from a cornet, or a bass clarinet's highest notes from a standard B-flat clarinet played in the middle of its range. With all these examples, the pitch may be the same, but the overtone structure is profoundly different. Tor gets it exactly right.

The ability of a small standmount to precisely localize dimensional images in an expansive soundstage is well



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known, and the YG provides plenty of spatial specificity without crossing a sonic boundary into what audiophiles sometimes refer to as “overetched” territory. A selection I’ve been using to explore this aspect of recorded sound is an older EMI recording of Christian Ivaldi and Noël Lee playing Darius Milhaud’s insouciant *Scaramouche*, a concise three-movement suite for two pianos. This busy, jaunty, percolating music can get texturally confusing, but the Tors maintain clarity: We know that we’re hearing two pianos in close proximity and not two guys sharing a piano bench and pounding away at a single keyboard.

You’d anticipate that bass reproduction and dynamic range would be compromised with small loudspeakers like Tors and you wouldn’t be wrong. But YG’s engineers have seemingly overcome the laws of physics to a remarkable degree, especially if you enjoy your metal and Mahler at less than life-like levels. On *Songs of the Police*, Kevyn Lettau’s electric bass player employs a five-string instrument, and when he lands on the open B string, as he does repeatedly on “Wrapped Around Your Finger,” there’s surprisingly good bass extension, if not the heft and weight you’d get with a big floorstander. You can try judiciously adding a subwoofer, as I did, because in my room, measured bass response with the Tors began to fall off at a higher point than the published specifications would indicate.

In terms of dynamics, subtle shadings of vocal and instrumen-

tal lines or the initial attack of a quietly plucked string bass—microdynamics, if you will—are rendered very effectively. At the other end of the dynamic spectrum, full-out big band did quite all right up to a point, when signs of strain began to creep in. The key is to recognize where that point is and not go beyond it. Pretty obvious, wouldn’t you say? I suspect your spouse or condo association will be telling you to turn it down long before audible distortion becomes an issue.

Let’s be honest. If your musical day consists of Shostakovich symphonies, Woody Herman and Buddy Rich big-band arrangements, Franck organ spectaculars, and Dead Mau5 (I’d like to

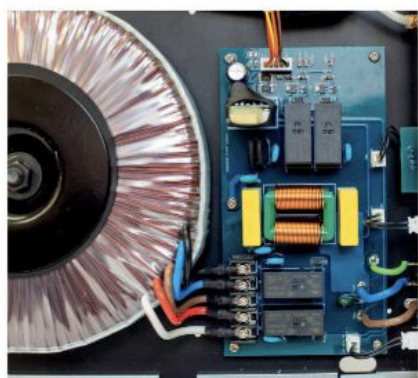
meet *that* guy), the YG Tors are probably not for you, especially if your listening environment lets you crank the volume as much as desired. For \$10k, you’re better off purchasing a pair of quality floorstanders that can move a lot more air. The Tors don’t come cheap—“for a song,” as the saying goes—though the entire Peaks product line does make ownership of an elite loudspeaker a possibility for many more real-world audiophiles. But when it comes to the representation of the human voice—folk ballads, rock anthems, operatic arias, jazz standards...*songs*—these little guys are pretty special. The YG Tors are heartily recommended. **tas**

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HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

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