Reading Newspapers On The Moon

Spinning tales is left to others. The Manger MSM s1 simply tell the truth – loud and clear

MANGER MSM S1 • 15,000 EUROS
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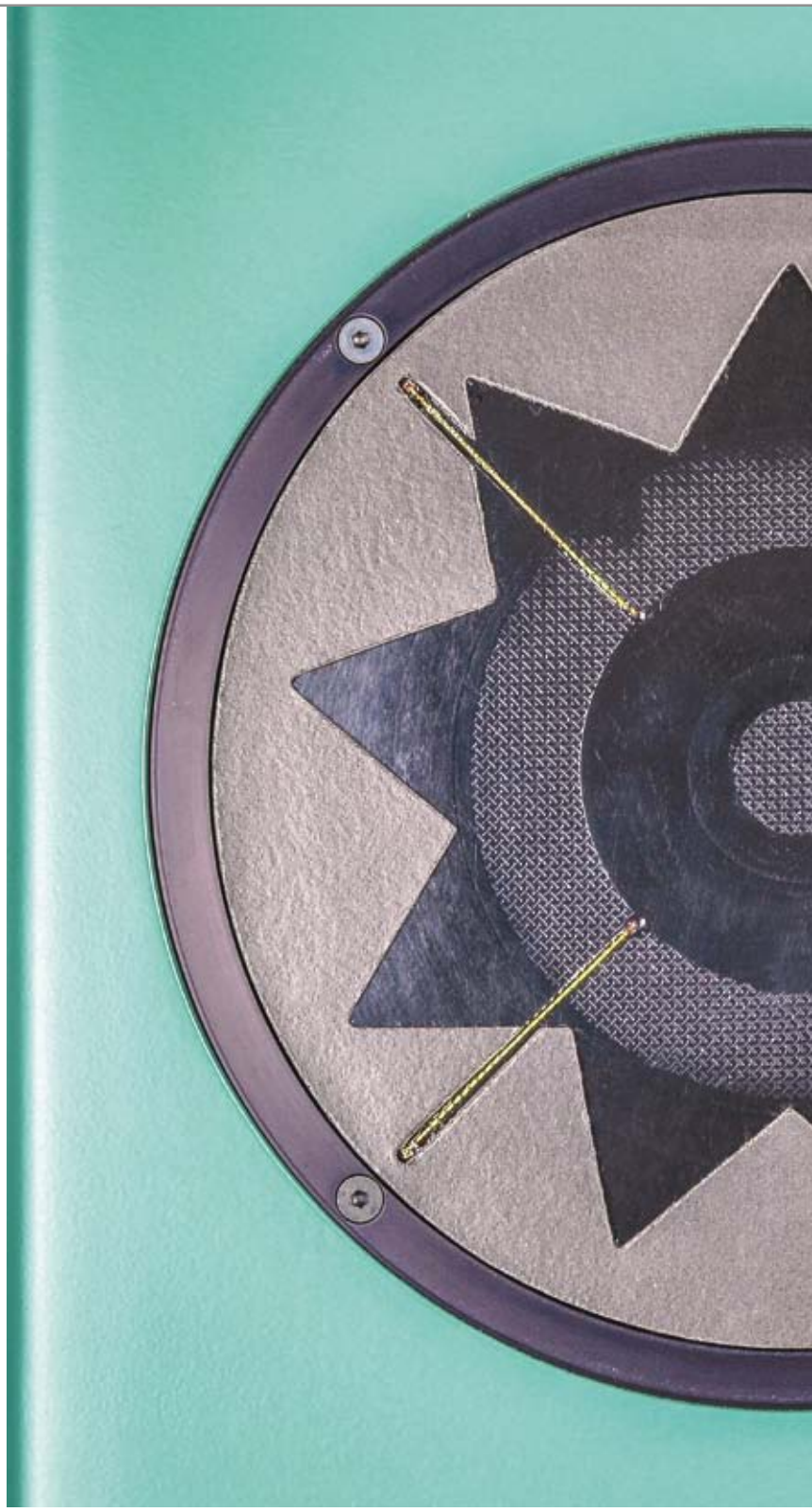
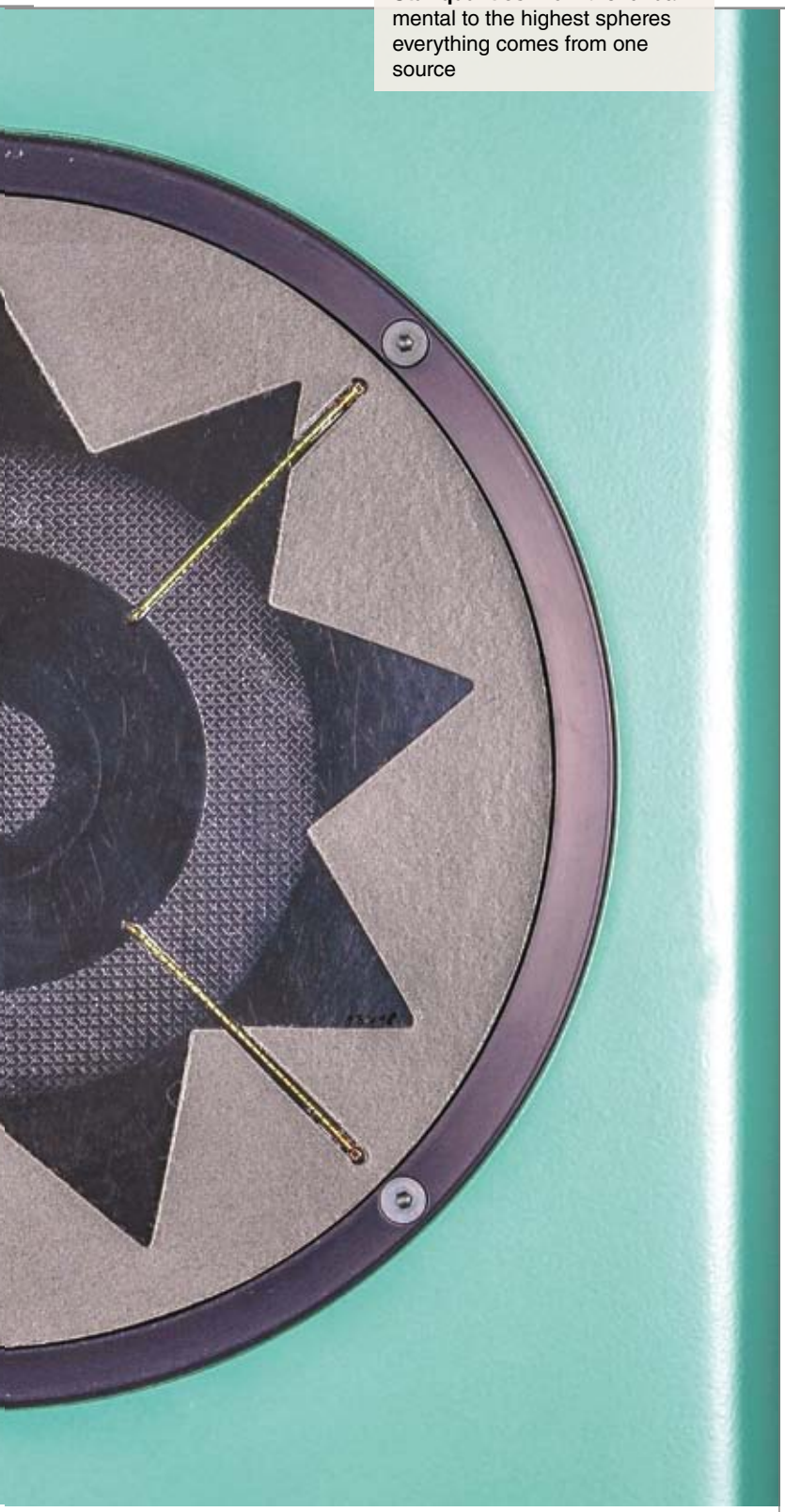




Star qualities: from the fundamental to the highest spheres everything comes from one source

Good coaxial loudspeakers like the studio monitors from ME Geithain are ideal assistants when you want to explore in depth what is happening in the virtual space between the two loudspeakers. Who is sitting where? Are spot microphones correctly positioned in panorama? And everything precisely to the point, of course. Not only pretty close.

That's why I'm frequently using these Saxon workhorses for years. But they are more than convenient and helpful tools. Every time when I'm getting tired of the euphony of some high-end valuables and can't stand the sugar coating any more, I ground my ears with this clear and true information. Then I experience the unpretentious sound stage which gives me nothing but the stored information. There is no developer who wants to explain his view of the world to me. How wonderful!

Although I must confess that the "aesthetic" loudspeaker versions which I may have criticized a bit too much in the previous lines have a right to exist, of course, and that I enjoy them time and again as well. But in the long run and - most notably - exclusively I can't cope with them.

So the Manger MSM s1 fit in perfectly: a no-nonsense product for studio use – and an active design on top of it. Plus a rounded enclosure and a fancy finish. The MSM s1 is so stylish, that all visitors are thrilled by their looks while my puristic Geithains hide from the limelight like Cinderalla. Hardly ever did I see such a niftily integrated active section: silk-mat aluminum, gently rounded, slick heat sinks. It doesn't look like studio at all.

The Whole Story ...

You cannot review a Manger loudspeaker without at least touching on the history of this unique transducer. The Manger Transducer is almost 40 years old by now. In 1974 Josef Manger presented his first models which were ready for series production to an amazed public. Since then the Manger company experimented, modified, and fine-tuned a lot, but for about ten years the transducer is being produced almost unaltered in its current design.

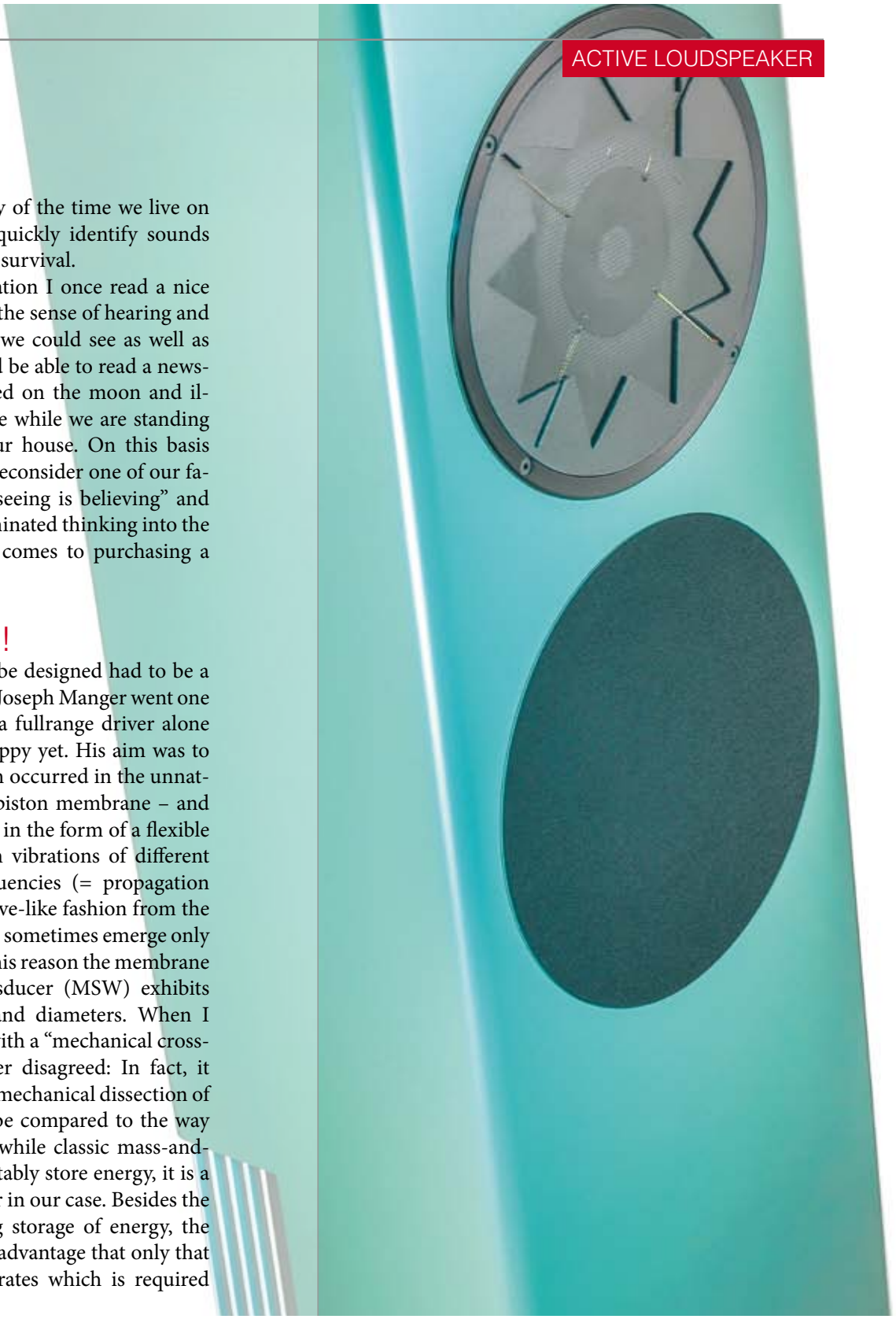
Josef Manger and his daughter Daniela attach great importance to the clean and rapid processing of impulses across a wide frequency range. Because the moment of sound generation contains a lot of vital information for the human ear. For example, to distinguish an oboe played in the high register from an Eb clarinet is not at all easy when the tonal range has been cut. If you should ever have the chance to attend such an experiment, you will be surprised by the results. Since I am working with orchestras every day I can constantly compare loudspeaker reproduction with reality and I notice time and again that not all loudspeakers succeed equally well in reproducing the transient phase of a sound. With loudspeakers, whose step response looks pretty adventurously, it is especially difficult to distinguish instruments which are located close together and are being played in the same tonal range.

This phenomenon is rooted in the evolution of our hearing. Simply put: our ears have not been made for slow signals such as gently flowing music. Instead our hearing is supposed to tell us within fractions of a second, who (or what) made a branch crack, how far the danger is away, and from which direction it approa-

ches. For the majority of the time we live on earth our ability to quickly identify sounds has been essential for survival.
In a scientific publication I once read a nice comparison between the sense of hearing and the sense of sight: If we could see as well as we can hear we would be able to read a newspaper which is located on the moon and illuminated by a candle while we are standing on the balcony of our house. On this basis we should definitely reconsider one of our favorite phrases "only seeing is believing" and push our visually dominated thinking into the background when it comes to purchasing a new loudspeaker.

Do Not Store!

So the transducer to be designed had to be a fullrange chassis. But Joseph Manger went one step further because a fullrange driver alone did not make him happy yet. His aim was to avoid the losses which occurred in the unnatural movement of a piston membrane – and he found the solution in the form of a flexible membrane, on which vibrations of different amplitudes and frequencies (= propagation speed) spread in a wave-like fashion from the center to the edge and sometimes emerge only in certain areas. For this reason the membrane of the Manger Transducer (MSW) exhibits different structures and diameters. When I compared the effect with a "mechanical crossover" Daniela Manger disagreed: In fact, it rather is some sort of mechanical dissection of sound, which could be compared to the way a prism works. And while classic mass-and-spring concepts inevitably store energy, it is a negligibly small factor in our case. Besides the virtually non-existing storage of energy, the concept provides the advantage that only that part of the plate vibrates which is required



Space flight: The MSM s1 can be adapted to every room via various switches

for the corresponding frequency and thus the moving mass is much smaller than with conventional designs. Daniela Manger admits, that very small und very light super tweeters are slightly faster than the MSW, but normal dome tweeters and common midrange loudspeakers can't compete with the Manger Transducer. This is easily reproducible when you compare how the different drivers handle a square wave signal: cone midrange drivers and most dome tweeters already start rounding when the Manger Transducer still exhibits plane edges.

But minimizing storage effects is not confined to the membrane itself. Even the voice coil with a weight of only 0.4 grams became a target of the developers, as the inductance of a coil also acts as some sort of energy storage which counteracts the input signal. The problem was solved using two coils wired in parallel but coiled in opposite directions, which compensate each other and reduce the storage effects to virtually zero.

With the MSM s1 the Manger Transducer is being supported in the low range by an 8" Visaton chassis, which uses a fiber glass sandwich-type membrane and ensures maximum precision in a closed cabinet. The results are excellent, by the way, although I also like bass reflex designs when I'm listening for my own pleasure, because they occasionally sound more colorful.

The electronics are housed in a nifty aluminum compartment and have been developed according to Manger's specifications. They are manufactured by a renowned pro audio OEM company. There are manifold finetuning possibilities to adapt the loudspeakers to room acoustics – as you would expect from a studio monitor.

As early as during my first encounter with these sound transducers I realized that their transient response is simply phenomenal - regardless of personal taste. Even my cat was misled and strolled with hackles on end between the loudspeakers looking for an alleged intruder (singer). This is not a criterion for an excellent listening experience, of course. But it shows that these loudspeakers must be doing some things the right way. Better at least than all the other loudspeakers because my cat had never reacted before with this CD.

Clear View!

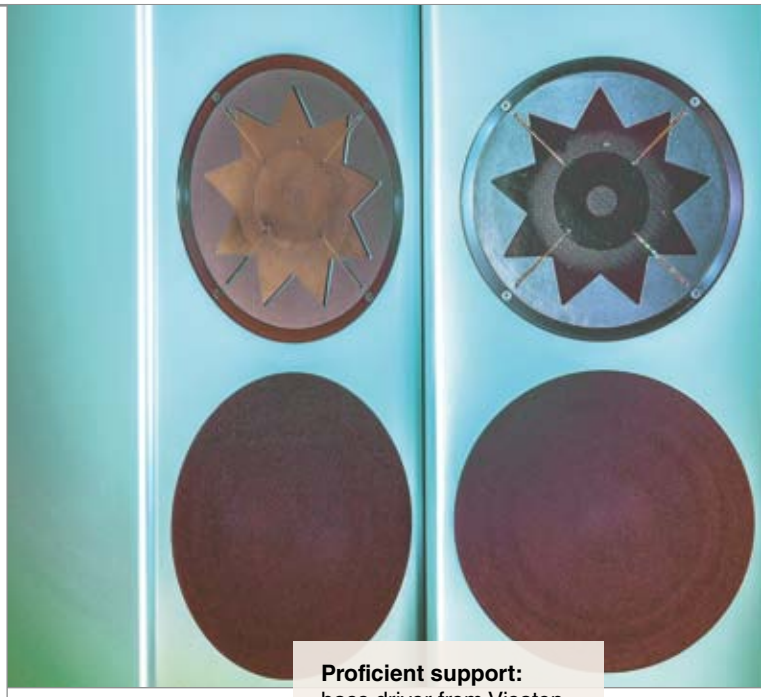
After I had aligned the MSM s1 meticulously to my listening position (base width 2.6 meters, loudspeaker axis intersect half a meter in front of my listening position) and connected them to suitable devices from RME, Apogee, and Funk, I played back the first master from hard disk. And as is often the case when the "real" resolution increases, it doesn't sound that spectacular. The string quartet sits in front of me – slightly behind the loudspeaker base – and enthuses me with Beethoven's "Geisterquartett". My peers opposite to me play fluently and completely naturally. Only the spot microphone of the viola clouds the picture. It is clearly panned too far to the right. Not merely "somehow too far", but rather exactly one finger's breadth referring to my listening position. I never before experienced such a high degree of precision regarding the depiction of very small distances on the stereo panorama. And I don't want to hype nuances. Even the Geithains which are very good in this regard must take a back seat compared to the MSM s1. This clarity also helps you to understand complex scores. Even during the biggest turmoil of Olivier Messiaen's Turangalîla symphony all the sonic events are meticulously separated from each other. And when everything is clearly distinguishable (laid out in front of you) you don't have to look very hard for the relevant information – the common thread. Even in the large percussion section strong impulses from vibraphone, carillon, tubular bells, and other metal instruments can still be distinguished effortlessly, when other loudspeakers have already drifted away into a disastrous and diffuse rattling. Thanks to its speed the MSW is even able to resolve the single notes of a vibraphone passage during an orchestral tutti. Respect!

In fact, it is the first time that I recognize this all too familiar part (how much of my lifetime have I spent to "swallow" this heap of notes) note for note through a stereo system. By the way, I also detected two cutting mistakes which the recording engineers may have overlooked. Because they probably didn't listen through Manger loudspeakers …

A little less orgiastic, although no less impressive are the performances of the Beaux Arts Trio. Given the small lineup the aerial and clearly structured depiction of a piano trio in a music room is not spectacular as such and is accomplished by quite a few audio systems. But the fascination of the MSM s1 lies in the details. Rarely did I hear piano strings decay so cleanly or high violin pizzicati evolve so smooth and yet so tight. Of course, a very small and fast driver can reproduce them with the same speed, but most often the body will be missing.

Which instantly makes me think of a nasty crucial test: Nothing is more challenging for a loudspeaker than a well recorded solo triangle. All you need is a room, a good microphone, an A/D converter, and an interface to directly transfer the signal unprocessed and in high resolution to hard disk. When you play back the triangle sound it most often deteriorates to a silverish whirring, which hardly conveys the impression of the instrument's mass – in our case three pounds of bronze after all. Or the weight is correct, but the harmonics don't fit into the picture anymore. In addition there is an extremely fast transient effect, since the metal beater does not set the instrument into vibration before the actual impulse, as padded mallets do. And – you may be guessing it after my extensive prologue – the result is as expected: In this regard the Manger MSM s1 sets absolute standards.

Up to now I wrote a lot about precision and got



Proficient support: bass driver from Visaton for the bass range

lost in details. So what about the music? I'd say it depends on what you expect from your listening experience. For those of us, who regard recordings as documents and want their reproduction to be as clear and precise as possible, the Manger MSM s1 definitely belong to the best that money can buy. It is very rare that you can dive into all levels of a recording so easily and – provided that the production has been carried out carefully – find out every detail about the instrument, the musician's interpretation of the music, or his playing technique. However, the MSM s1 dispense with sonic fireworks in infinite spaces and extensive tonal coloration.

If such a lush "room" and a slight "coloration" is desired you can influence the overall sound by inserting the appropriate preamplifier. I used an Audio Research preamp, for example, and lo and behold the MSM s1 depicted everything larger, juicier and brighter. Although they can't be totally brushed against the grain, but why should they? Manger, Geithain & Co. are actually not intended for people who would like to recreate sound within their own four walls.

After the first - and maybe even rushed - listening session the Manger MSM s1 are indeed frequently underrated, as the many artefacts which are firmly anchored in our listening habits are simply missing. Listening to this transducer can be compared with eating a meal that has been cooked without flavor enhancers. The first bite is somehow unspectacular – but so much closer to the authentic taste. ■

Manger MSM s1

2-way floorstanding loudspeaker, active, closed cabinet
Configuration: Manger Sound Transducer (MSW), 8" bass driver from Visaton with fiber glass sandwich-type membrane; amplifier module with 180 and 250 W output power
Frequency range: 30 – 40,000 Hz
Crossover frequency: 330 Hz
Features: flexibly adaptable to room acoustics and signal sources (adjustable input sensitivity, nearfield and perforated screen compensation, treble and bass volume control, polarity, adjustable AV high-pass filter)
Input: balanced (XLR)
Finish: basalt metallic (or any RAL color) silk-mat, real wood veneer or Nextel lacquer optional (800 € surcharge) or high gloss lacquer (2200 € surcharge)
Dimensions (W/H/D): 10.6/44.9/8.5"
Weight: 105.7 lbs
Warranty period: 3 years
Price per pair: 15,000 €

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