

BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £1000-£3000

ProAc Response D18 £2100

Spend about a grand more than the ATCs and you have ProAc's beautifully balanced D18s. At first glance it might not look like a particularly great deal. The drive-unit format remains a two-way configuration and the only real advantage seems like a bigger cabinet and a rather nice ebony veneer. The ebony finish is a £400 extra over the price we've quoted.

Start listening and you'll understand exactly where the money goes. The D18s' larger cabinets and clever side-firing bass port arrangement

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result in a presentation of massively greater sonic scale and authority than the ATCs manage. This means they can convey the majesty of large-scale classical music such as Holst's *Jupiter* more convincingly, as well as rattle the furniture when your mood calls for a little Bob Marley. The lowest notes aren't as taut as they could be, but they're agile enough to keep track of any fast moving bassline we choose to throw at it.

Move up the frequency range and the ProAc's really start to shine. The midrange is wonderfully transparent, but avoids the slightly

matter-of-fact presentation of a monitor like the SCM 11. Instead, the D18s deliver vocals of tremendous subtlety and articulation with just a smidgen of extra warmth. It's an inviting sound, one that can enchant with well-recorded material. A lively, sweet shimmering treble completes the frequency range, giving the ProAc's that rare combination of insight with a lack of fussiness, particularly when it comes to source equipment.

These speakers will shine with top-class recordings, but give them something less than perfect and they won't sulk. They'll still reveal where the recording is weak but they'll never be rude about it. That's a rare quality in high-end speakers, and one that we value greatly.

Amplifier pairing made easy

Two grand will buy many a great speaker. That amount of money will certainly get you more drive units, greater bass power and a higher maximum volume level. But for most people in most rooms the D18s go loud and deep enough, and no rival we've heard can match the ProAc's combination of sweetness, insight and sheer liveability. They're not even particularly demanding of partnering amplifiers, either. You can use something of relatively low power and still get great results as long as the amplifier is of decent quality. Put it all together and it's enough for the ProAc D18s to claim top prize at their price level this year.

