





ProAc Tablette Reference Eight Signature

by Roy Gregory

2004 has been something of a bumper year as far as speakers are concerned. At the higher price points, models like the Marten Coltrane and Avalon Eidolon Diamond have established a new benchmark for performance that undercuts and undermines many of the behemoths that litter the audio landscape, making them look like the expensive dinosaurs they really are. At the other extreme, high quality stand-mounts, or mini-monitors as they are often called, have made a rather unexpected comeback: surprising simply because the compact floor-stander is so firmly entrenched in the market.

Well, people have started to realise that you can't get something for nothing, no matter how much you might want to. The extra bass and sensitivity that comes with a floor-standing cabinet has costs too – and they're nearly always paid in musical and quality terms. Whilst a compact, stand-mounted cabinet imposes inevitable compromises it also delivers a number of inherent strengths, not the least being its rigidity and the reduced cost of materials and packaging, leaving rather more for drivers and a crossover. The success of such an approach depends on the skill with which the designer selects his compromises. In other words, what he keeps and what he allows to slip away. Of course, that's true of any loudspeaker, regardless of type, but the choices are starker and flaws in the balancing act become that much more obvious the smaller the cabinet gets.



No surprise then that experience counts for a lot when it comes to building a small speaker. Which goes some way to explaining how, amidst a welter of exotic tweeters and retro crossovers, the model that has bubbled to the top of my personal mini-monitor rankings is the current incarnation of a 20 year-old design, and still recognisably the same speaker after all this time. Costing a hundred notes shy of a grand, ProAc's Tablette Reference Eight Signature adds a high-zoot bass driver and fancy togs to the (slightly cheaper) standard version. The net result is one of the most attractive little speakers you're ever likely to see, but there's far more to the Ref Eights than just a pretty face. Carefully set-up and allowed the space to breathe, they reward the listener with a remarkably coherent and beautifully proportioned view of the musical performance. Eschewing cheap theatrics and gaudy detail, the little ProAcs trade in musical integrity and drama, placing communication ahead of sheer information. The result is extraordinarily satisfying, the more so for the diminutive dimensions of the speakers producing it.

Price: £899

Manufacturer: Celef Audio
Tel. (44)(0)1280 700147
Net. www.proac-loudspeakers.com

