

How hard can it be?

With a “little” experience and thought it’s actually possible to create a sensible speaker that is affordable.

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There is no reason to go through all of Stig Carlsson’s Ortho-acoustic principles once more. You can read about them in earlier issues of HIGH Fidelity and at Larsen’s webpage: www.larsenhifi.com.

It may surprise some of this magazine’s readers that there are music lovers without a listening room, listeners who only have a living room that the rest of the family also has to live in and with. This is where Larsen speaker comes to the rescue.

When I unpacked these cute speakers from their boxes, my wife immediately said: “They look like something from Bang & Olufsen”. I think that outburst qualifies as a compliment.

They are small, elegant and require neither use of a forklift or a trolley. They are two and a half feet high and weigh around 11 kg.

Experience and sensibility

It is more than 10 years since Stig Carlsson died. He worked on his speakers for around 40 years - 16 of those years he worked with John Larsen who is continuing the principles and the traditions. Which somewhat equals a combined 50 – 60 years of experience.

When you make speakers in this price range it is very important to prioritize. The drivers used in this speaker are normally only found in speakers of a higher price range. On the other hand the finish is nothing special to brag about. The cabinets are MDF, with a glued on cherry or maple veneer. They are also available in black or white lacquer. It is abundantly clear that the first priority is the sound.

Simplicity

The construction is simply a square tube that is closed in the bottom and equipped with a triangular bass reflex port at the top and a “chimney” that contains the bass driver. The bass has 22 liters available and the port is tuned to 28 Hz (According to our measurements 24 Hz).

The bass/midrange unit is from Seas. It is a traditional 6.5-inch driver with a cast cone and paper membrane.

The soft-dome tweeter is from Peerless and stems from the earlier Vifa-series. The speaker has gold-plated terminals for one set of cables. The well that the terminals are situated in is very small and it can be slightly complicated if you have big fingers to fasten your cables. My cables with WBT-fasteners did on the other hand fasten really well, once they were installed – which is more of an exception than the rule.

The crossover filter is placed directly in connection with the drivers – actually almost at the back of the tweeter. The components are of a fairly high quality and are usually only seen in higher price ranges – foil capacitor and massive coils. The seven components are mounted on a glass fiber print.

Test

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Terms

Here the reader should note that these speakers are quite different from the norm. The speakers were placed flush against the wall, as they were meant to be, with the same distance from each other as to the listening position. We kept them around 3 feet from any sidewalls and of course – without placing them at an angle.

Another unusual aspect is that our test was performed with the fabric grille on. The cover contains absorption material to control the spread of the sound waves, and therefore has to remain on.

We used a DAC and quality CD player. The music we reference stems from our reference CD no.66.

Astonishing

Considering their size the Larsen 4 delivers a solid bass. It has depth and level. Take for example track 6 from our reference CD where Mads Winding is brilliant on his bass, it sounds detailed and powerful. The bass is firm, clear and at the appropriate level. There is no rumble or discords – aspects that you usually find in this price range. Of course there are limits to how loud you can play, but if you're looking for a nightclub speaker then you probably wouldn't look at a Larsen speaker anyway.

The next thing that you notice is the very large and airy sound stage. The perception is very close to reality – not the very precise “pinpoint” sound stage – but more of a large and comprehensive sound stage, that we recognize from the real world of music.

Track 13, the organ piece, delivers a very convincing illusion of the large, cool and hard church room that we also recognize from the real world. Also here the bass is exquisite and deep. There really is nothing to complain about in the quality to price ratio.

Observations

This speaker reproduces sound in a very pleasurable manner. The tweeter is pleasant without lacking detail and without being super-analytical. Metal sounds are reproduced without any unpleasant tendencies. Both the midrange and tweeter are very airy – especially acoustic music – jazz, classical and other forms are rendered alive and passionately and without any aggressive tendencies.

You get the desire to hear more and are continually surprised at how much sound you can get for around \$1500. The sound stage is huge and several people can listen at the same time.

The limitations that are bound to appear in this price range (maybe a \$7000 tweeter would be an improvement?) are of no consequence. The elements are combined to yield the optimal result. The knee-high perspective that some at times attributed to the Carlsson speakers has magically disappeared.

The placement and relative size make it special which in some instances might cause it to be overlooked, but it shouldn't be. Here modesty and discretion is a virtue, no chrome or giant drivers are needed or wanted...

Conclusion

In times as these, where it is not unusual for a good speaker to cost the same as a car, it seems almost unnatural that it is possible to create a speaker like Larsen 4 around \$1500.

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It is small, discrete and easy to place. It provides a large, open and airy sound stage, with an easy flowing and pleasing sound that most people easily could live with.

People who are looking for a good speaker with a maximum WAF - (wife approval factor) no longer has an excuse for not having good sound - that the speaker only costs the same as a pair of good cables should not deter anyone.

If you are short on cash, room and goodwill from your family then try out a pair of Larsen 4.