

VIENNA ACOUSTICS HAYDN GRAND

A Sonic First Date That Went Really Well

Neil Gader

Reviewing high-end audio gear is a little like going out on a blind date. Sometimes you don't have a lot of information to go on, but you've still got to be prepared to make that leap of faith. In the case of Vienna Acoustics loudspeakers, my only exposure to them has been in the sterile confines of trade shows. Frankly, I wasn't sure what I was in for when I unboxed the Haydn Grand compacts but, following my own advice, I kept an open mind.

I certainly liked what I saw. Here was a sumptuously built two-way compact in a cleverly realized bass-reflex enclosure. Rather than situating the port in back or extending cabinet height with a front vent, Vienna Acoustics has positioned its port in the forward-firing position directly behind the tweeter. The tweeter is essentially mounted in the throat of the port. Named an "airflow control wedge port," this configuration keeps enclosure size to a minimum, and is said to improve phase coherence. It's also said to reduce port noise by 12dB. At a mere fourteen inches tall, the Haydn Grand might only be the size of a humidifier, but that doesn't make it any less of a feast for the discriminating eye. Fit and finish are exquisite. My pair was surfaced in optional rosewood veneer, flawlessly applied on every side; the thick 1.25" front baffles were delicately radiussed. Vienna Acoustics' X3P cone material, used in the Haydn Grand's transparent mid/bass driver, is derived from VA's polypropylene-hybrid cone technology and combines TPX, a thermoplastic used in VA's XPP cones, with three polypropylene-based synthetics. The combination has been engineered to achieve very low mass with high damping and high rigidity. The transducer uses an inverted rubber surround to reduce cone-edge resonances. A hand-coated silk dome tweeter is assigned treble duty. The gold-silver alloy terminal wheels are another nice tactile touch. Even the grilles have a V-shaped phase diffuser to control dispersion.

The purpose-designed stands (manu-



factured in cooperation with U.S. importer Sumiko) not only support the Haydn Grands but are also perfect aesthetic complements to the speakers. To prevent a tipping incident, the single-post, heavy-duty stands secure the speaker to the top plate with a pair of threaded knobs that screw into the bottom of the Haydn Grands—a superb blend of integration and function. Clearly the Haydn Grands were a tonic for the eyes—a good start—but did my date have the sonic spark that might imply a future together?

First impressions are everything, or so the cliché goes. In this instance, my initial sonic impression was that I had made a set-up mistake and wired up the Synergistic Tesla Apex cables to a different and much larger loudspeaker. Convinced I was going to descend into the world of miniaturized soundstages and hyper-clinical tonal profiles common to so many small compacts, I was surprised by the Haydn's overall natural tonal balance—more akin to larger speakers designed to move greater amounts of air. In reality,

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Uncanny dynamic poise that far exceeded its size

the Haydn was a veritable explosion of uncanny dynamic poise (even near orchestral-assault levels), tightly defined midbass, natural transient response, and authoritative midrange voicing that far exceeded its modest physical size. A singer like Jennifer Warnes retained lifelike scale and full-blooded energy. During “Song Of Bernadette” [*Famous Blue Raincoat, 20th Anniversary Edition*, Shout], her voice sounded as if it were firmly rooted to the stage, rather than just an amorphous presence disengaged from chest and throat. Reinforcing this impression were the Haydn Grand’s generally warm character, full lower midrange and upper bass, carefully tuned midbass, and slightly

restrained upper-mids, which relaxed and darkened vocals somewhat.

On a more general note, I’ve been noting (with admiration) a new level of dynamic composure and ultimate output in small speakers of late—from the recently reviewed Amphion Ion to the PSB Alpha B and Silverline Minuet. Each maintains its intrinsic tonal character and balance even as output levels push SPL meters into the red. Nor does any, on most occasions, demand a subwoofer. The latest small speakers no longer exact a stiff penalty for their modest profiles. The Haydn Grand joins this group and happily raises the ante a couple of notches. It’s a speaker that will gladly “play chicken” with your darker head-banger habits, until you decide to save your hearing and take your foot off the volume pedal.

Perhaps the best illustration of what the Haydn Grand is all about is a quirky track from Norah Jones’ recent album. The song “Broken” [*Not Too Late*, Blue Note] is a spare mix of electric guitar, cello, and pizzicato and bowed double-bass arranged in a jumpy, highly punctuated style. Jones’ vocal is round and full, and you can easily hear the added top end courtesy of the engineer. The strings are warm yet detailed enough to be identified as the bowed instruments they are. The transients off the plucked bass viols have plenty of texture and micro-dynamic nuance. Even more of a revelation is the doublebass’ rosy transient growl, quickly followed by the warm bloom off the soundboard, as the bassist digs into the bottom octave of his instrument. Resolution of this information might be expected on a three-way or, at minimum, a small floorstander, but it’s hardly a slam-dunk in a speaker of this size.

The Haydn’s solid midbass response stabilizes and broadens the soundstage and lends even Dire Straits-style melodrama [*Brothers In Arms*, Warner] genuine foundation. There are no cabinet resonances that I can hear, either. However, there were moments when a bit of thickness in the lower bass suggested the greater burden being placed on the port, in support of the 6” midbass driver. Under stress, this could slow the speaker down slightly in the lower octaves, especially in comparison to its sparkling transient behavior at

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the other end of the spectrum. But make no mistake: The Haydn Grand achieves a small speaker balancing act worthy of a gymnast.

On occasion, I thought the tweeter asserted itself more than it needed to in the lower treble, but this was often highly recording-dependent. For example, I recently picked up a pair of discs of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D Major, one the classic Heifetz [Chicago, Reiner, RCA-XRCD] the other with Anne-Sophie Mutter [LSO, Previn, SACD]. Interestingly the Heifetz—a fifty-year-old recording—sounded pretty much the same on the Haydns as it did on my reference speakers; yet the Mutter—an SACD recording—had a bit of mid-treble glitter and spotlighting that my neutral reference did not. This was not disagreeable *per se*, and easily acclimated to, but it was present and repeatable, nonetheless.

Note: With such a highly resolving loudspeaker scrimp on amplification at your peril. True, it’s reasonably sensitive at 89dB, but the Haydn Grand is still a 4-ohm speaker and happiest with 100W+ integrated amps, like the 125Wpc Plinius 9100.

Frankly, you’d have to have a screw loose not to enjoy this speaker. Small, unimposing, but an aesthetic delight to behold and a sonic pleasure to experience, the Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand is a giant killer of the old school. Love at first sight? Darn close, proving sometimes even a blind date can be a real eye-opener.

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Specs & Pricing

Drivers: 6" mid/bass, 1" silk dome tweeter
Frequency Response: 42Hz–20kHz
Impedance: 4 ohms
Sensitivity: 89dB
Dimensions: 6.85" x 14.2" x 10.4"
Weight: 44 lbs./pr.
Price: \$1295, maple, piano black, cherry;
\$1495, rosewood

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