



## Vienna Acoustics • Beethoven Concert Grand Reference Loudspeakers

*"... a speaker that obeys the first rule of audio by putting the performance first, breathing life into recordings irrespective of genre or scale."*

by Roy Gregory | June 23, 2021

There are certain brands for which the mere mention of the name provokes an almost automatic mental association. With Vienna Acoustics the word is value. Not "value" in the sense of sheer quantity; "value" in terms of musical satisfaction and longevity. The Vienna Acoustics speakers don't just deliver a lot of music for the money, given the chance, they'll go on doing so for years and years to come. Sadly, it's something of a hidden virtue, playing neither to the quick-to-impress requirement of comparative demonstration, nor the audiophile-hobbyist's incessant requirement to swap equipment. Yet, despite that, Vienna Acoustics has quietly built a solid fan base of listeners who appreciate the virtues and recognize the cost of getting them anywhere else.

Since its launch in 2008, the flagship The Music hasn't just been an exceptional loudspeaker, it has been the best-value, genuinely full-range model on the market -- a status that has only increased as the competition has gotten progressively more expensive. In fact, The Music is now so underpriced (in performance terms) that it has dropped off the radar, with few audiophiles taking it nearly as seriously as its performance warrants.

That's partly down to fashion and the assumption that progress means that newer models must be better; partly down to the structural factor that makes it hard to get reviews, attention or even a mention in the press when it comes to anything other than a new product. Yet, for me, the converse is often true: Any product that has been around for a decade or so, largely unchanged, has to be doing something fundamentally correct. The Music is proof of that particular pudding. If you don't believe me, just take a listen -- you are in for a shock.

Why the long preamble before even getting to the speaker under review? Because the Beethoven's family tree and its evolutionary arc are central to understanding both its achievements and why it represents a step change of what was already an extremely positive performance/value equation for Vienna Acoustics.



The Beethoven uses a conventional soft-dome tweeter, but an all-new driver construction for the midrange and bass drivers. Dubbed "Composite Cone" by the company, it represents a significant development, extending identical flat-diaphragm construction across both drivers. However, where things get really interesting is in the middle of the drivers. Built around large, 5cm/2" voice coils, that central zone contributes significantly to the upper-range output of the different drivers. Rather than a flat face or conventional dust cap, Vienna has chosen to use an inverted fabric dome, double-coated on its inner side. This combination of two different materials means that they can be combined to further control not only the driver's output but its out-of-band behavior -- something which is fast being recognized as a key factor in speaker performance.

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Clever drivers (and make no mistake -- Vienna's drivers are genuinely clever) don't guarantee a great result. But that's where 30 years of experience building and optimizing cabinets from their chosen materials comes in. Vienna Acoustics was an early adopter of accelerometer technology, and combined with narrow but incredibly thick baffles and substantial cabinet walls, it convinced them of not only the need to brace cabinets, but that the shape and distribution of the braces -- as well as the shape and distribution of the internal chambers that resulted -- were critical to performance. The result is cabinets that are as beautifully and exactly constructed on the inside as they are flawlessly finished on the outside. Vienna Acoustics has always produced exceptional cabinets to go with its unusual and innovative drivers -- and the larger the cabinet, the greater the benefits that accrue.

As regards driving amplifiers, I've run the Concert Grands with the Gryphon Diablo 120 and Levinson No.585 integrats (perhaps its natural partners) as well as the more ambitious Simaudio Moon 860A v2s (in stereo and -- spectacularly -- mono form) and the VTL S-200 tube amp. You'll note that all of these sit well to the right side of 100 watts rated output, and even though the Beethovens are friendlier than previous Viennas when it comes to partnering amps, a healthy three figures should still be considered a working minimum. Having said that, I'd never have reached for the 200Wpc S-200 with past Viennas and here it worked astonishingly well. But for me, there was a beguilingly convincing quality to the Vienna/VTL combination that lifted the overall performance to a very special place indeed.



## When it comes to partnering amps, a healthy three figures should still be considered a working minimum.

The Beethoven Concert Grand is, in its latest guise, a very special product indeed. It's special in the general sense, but it is also special in terms of what it represents for the company. If it is the balance of virtues that is the secret strength behind all great products, it's no surprise that the Concert Grands excel. That innate sense of balance has always been the Vienna hallmark, the reason why their speakers have so often proved so satisfying.

Listen to the Concert Grands and, despite their impressive sense of space and scale, the first impression that's going to really hit home is the ease with which they allow the music to breathe. It also reflects two other facets of its performance: the musical continuity it displays right across the audible range, and the level of immediacy and microdynamic expression that belies its modest efficiency. That's all about driver integration, but it's about more besides. It's about a really well-behaved cabinet, whose resonant behavior isn't allowed to intrude on the sound -- or place unproductive demands on the amplifier. It's about really well-behaved drivers -- both within and beyond their passband. It's about a carefully crafted crossover -- one that subtracts the minimum amount of musical energy. It's about a deftly voiced and weighted bottom end -- one that carries weight where it matters and doesn't overflow into areas it shouldn't. But above all, it's about balancing those virtues.



The Concert Grand has a natural sense of coherent space and weight that combines with its textural and harmonic resolution to dramatic effect. Performances are lively and vital, with no sense of dead, constricted or constipated energy.

The Vienna speakers bring such a sense of presence and clarity to the performance that the development and complexity of the instrumental conversation that grow from that simplistic, almost jaunty theme takes on a captivating fascination.

You'll rarely hear the different string instruments so clearly and naturally separated in tonal terms -- and certainly not by a speaker at this price. It might not have the absolute immediacy and reach-out-and-touch intimacy of more efficient speakers like the Wilson Sasha DAW or the Living Voice OBX RW, but it's considerably cheaper than one and goes way deeper than the other.

Acoustic music might be the Concert Grand's natural forte, but make no mistake, they have the bandwidth and dynamic range to do rock with serious intent too. These are not exactly unfamiliar attributes. I associate them with many of my favorite speakers, perhaps most notably the Sasha DAW and the Stenheim Alumine 5. It's just that both those speakers are considerably more expensive than the Concert Grands.

So, what is it about the Beethoven Concert Grands that makes them special? What they deliver is that most elusive of audio qualities, musical connection.

That's not just punching above their weight -- it's getting in the ring and trading a few blows. That's an incredible performance at the price. Genuinely engaging and expressive, nearly full-range loudspeaker performance just got a whole lot more accessible -- both in terms of price and drive requirements.

So, what is it about the Beethoven Concert Grands that makes them special? The ability to satisfy, the ability to deliver enough, that they don't leave you craving more. This is a speaker that obeys the first rule of audio by putting the performance first, breathing life into recordings irrespective of genre or scale. It's a speaker that has the knack of disappearing -- and taking the rest of the system with it. Small and intimate or huge and imposing, the Beethoven Concert Grands are all about access: access to the event, access to the energy that generated it, access to the emotional range expressed. What they deliver is that most elusive of audio qualities, musical connection.

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