

ArtVibes Audio

Model Dali

Beyond the sound

LE MAGAZINE

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IMAGE

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Sometimes life brings surprises. For a hi-fi reviewer, one is the emergence of a new high-fidelity project, particularly when it is a product developed by a new Québec-based brand. Noted at the recent Montreal Audio Show, **ArtVibes Audio** is a bright new entry in the loudspeaker market that is in the process of joining Québec's shining



lights in hi-fi. The company was formed by three musicians who share a passion for music and sound. About fifteen years ago, they decided to design and develop a loudspeaker that could meet their expectations in audio and music reproduction. Ten years of work and investment have culminated in the release of the three-way **Dali**, which we put through its paces in this issue.

PREFACE

It is often said that musicians are particular about sound and how it is produced. Violinists seek out the perfect timbre, guitarists the appropriate tone wood, and drummers and percussionists the right resonance from their drum skins. Sound, taken as expression and intensity, generates the attributes in large part responsible for the range of musical emotion. The questions, "How does it sound?" and "Does it sound good?" reflect how important sound is for musicians and their audience. They also define how an audiophile experiences an audio system. Given all of that, is it surprising that audio systems and music systems are still called sound systems?

That said, sound and its characteristics cannot fully explain the rich musical and emotional experience they produce. Like a craftsman who recasts his work time and time again, the **ArtVibes Audio** project was the result of meticulous incremental work. According to the team, every component went through this wringer. The cabi-

net wood selection process investigated MDF and HDF of various thicknesses before settling on Russian plywood. They experimented with and tested multiple brands of 6- and 8-inch low-frequency drivers before selecting a 10-inch paper cone driver from the Scan-Speak Classic series, which proved capable of communicating the emotion contained in the low frequency range. They conducted listening tests of the best resistors and capacitors on the market, acoustic material, internal wiring – from solid to multi-strand copper, silver and Teflon –, terminal blocks and floor coupling spikes. The prototype even had the crossover outside the loudspeaker to counter unwanted vibrations. The task of designing the loudspeaker, selecting internal acoustic materials and developing the crossover was given to Denis Ouellet, the founder of Solen, who has been at the forefront of the industry all of his professional life, including as a designer and manufacturer of exceptional loudspeakers.

OVERVIEW

The **Dali** is a three-way ported bass reflex loudspeaker that measures 1119 mm (44.05 in) in height (1167 mm with the floor spikes and Corian floor isolators), 332 mm (13.07 in) in width and 407 mm (16.02 in) in depth. Each unit weighs 45.4 kg (100 lbs). The front panel is 38.1 mm (1.25 in) deep. With a sensitivity of 87.5 dB at 8 ohms, the **Dali** is suitable for amplifiers from 20 to 200 watts.



The frequency response is 27 Hz to 30 kHz (± 1 dB). The speaker drivers, made by the renowned Danish manufacturer Scan-Speak, include a 2.54 cm (1 in) diameter cloth dome tweeter with protective grill, a 10.16 cm (4 in) paper cone mid-range with a neodymium magnet, and a massive 25.4 cm (10 in) SDM (Symmetrical Drive Motor) carbon-injected paper cone woofer. The second-order crossover is equipped with a Linkwitz-Riley filter optimized for a Zobel compensation circuit. It is mounted to the back of the loudspeaker in a see-through enclosure to showcase its design and exacting assembly.

In its Lamborghini white lacquered finish, the **Dali** is incredibly striking, despite its imposing volume and footprint. Other finish colors are available as an option. In addition, the Da Vinci TAG special edition features unique black and white abstract visual art designs on each speaker pair as well as 10-inch Scan-Speak Revelator woofers. This more expensive driver is designed with greater mechanical excursion and membrane and cone movement, a more powerful magnet system, a larger two-inch voice coil and increased power handling. Here is what one colleague has to say in his review of Davis Acoustics loudspeakers in this issue: "I have always believed – and today I am completely convinced – that the quality of an excellent loudspeaker resides above all in the use of extremely high quality drivers." The reputation of Scan-Speak drivers is well-established, and the Classic and Revelator series units selected by **ArtVibes Audio** are high-end models.

The semi-pyramidal design of the **Dali** is similar in some respects to the Wilson Audio Sophia and Sabrina series, as well as Elegance loudspeakers produced by Kharma in the Netherlands. Its generous dimensions require an equally large listening room to make full use of its potential, particularly the power of its 10-inch woofer. Scan-Speak, the Danish designer and manufacturer of the drivers used in the **Dali**, was founded in 1970 with a mission to never compromise on product or sound quality. While there are other manufacturers of high-end speaker drivers, given ArtVibes Audio's high design and manufacturing standards for the Da Vinci, the selection of Scan-Speak drivers makes perfect sense.

INSTALLATION

We installed the **ArtVibes Audio** Dali loudspeakers five feet from the rear wall and close to the three lateral walls. The pair were positioned seven feet apart and angled slightly toward the listening position.

ÉQUIPEMENT ASSOCIÉ

- C.E.C. TL51X CD transport
- Cary Audio DACt converter
- Jadis DA88S integrated amplifier
- Roksan Xerxes/Artemiz/Dynavector XX2 MkII turntable
- Phono preamp: Benedict Audio HotHead phono C
- Cables: Bis Audio Maestro & Vivat/Nordost Heimdall 2

PERFORMANCE

This was my first prolonged contact with three-way loudspeakers equipped with ten-inch woofers.

My first impression of Dali is of an impressive nearly-holographic sound stage. Even at generous amplitude, the sound intensity and bass on *Jogo*, a 2013 CD release by Québec's Carlos Jiménez jazz trio, was a pure listening delight. The low frequency range rested on the exceptional foundation of presence from the ten-inch driver as well as the response of the large-volume cabinets commonly associated with high-end loudspeakers.

This listening ease was equally apparent for the album *In this Present Moment* by guitarist Matthew Van Doran on the B•Cat label. The track "Vanity Strikes" was a particularly good demonstration of the speed of execution and

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solid bass reproduction as well as the snap of drummer Marcus Baylor's hard and fast bass drum work. The Dali were poised and speedy, effortlessly delivering an accurate reproduction of the dimension and volume of each instrument. Clearly, these loudspeakers – and the ten-inch Scan-Speak drivers they harbor – require a listening environment of appropriate dimensions and volume to fully express their impressive sonic capabilities.

On the beautiful interpretation of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* by the Europa Galante ensemble, conducted by Fabio Biondi from his Paolo Antonio Testore violin (1750, Milan) for the Opus 111 label, the Dali rendered the rhythm and nuances of the work exceptionally well, naturally and with a measured respect for the authentic timbre of the ensemble's period instruments.

Moving on to a vinyl pressing of the Japanese edition of *Diamond Life*, the first opus from Sade, the deep bass line grooves that drive a number of its tracks were handily reproduced by the Dali. The listening experience was engaging and revealed a great deal of control in the separation of the instruments and a spacious soundstage with extraordinarily stable imaging.

Listening to Larry Carlton's *Friends* on Warner Brothers, "Blues for T.J.," with special guest B.B. King, considered by many to be one of the finest blues tracks by the renowned American guitarist (Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, Billy Joel, etc.), we could not help but be struck by the Da Vinci incredible balance of bass, mid-range and treble – both in terms of quantity and quality – and the undeniable depth of tonal structure, finesse and detail. A work of art!

VERDICT

All things considered, I've always felt that the loudspeakers in the magazine's listening room – three-way two-enclosure designs that put two 6 1/2 inch woofers in the lower cabinet – adequately filled the open-concept area (9 feet 3 inches high, 14 feet wide and nearly 20 feet deep). That is, until the ArtVibes Audio Dali were installed.

And although their larger size requires more floor space and placement must be carefully considered, the Dali are well worth it. The transparency, foundation, amplitude and linearity of the ten-inch Scan-Speak Classic and the resulting listening pleasure leave no doubt about the high level of sound realism of these loudspeakers. Beyond the sound that they handle with aplomb, given appropriate programme material, the musical emotion stands out, much to our delight. The **ArtVibesAudio** Da Vinci is a high-end loudspeaker that takes its just place among Québec's best. According to the team at ArtVibes Audio, if the market responds well to the Dali and Da Vinci TAG, a more affordable two-way model is waiting in the wings.



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Da Vinci TAG model