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A different style of listening

Professional audio manufacturer enters the completely different world of common living rooms – this is the essence of what Daniela Mangers latest design is all about. In his article on the Manger MSMc1 (HIFI-STARs No. 3) my colleague and chief editor Winfried Dunkel has already told the whole story about the Manger active studio monitor. Now it's my turn to introduce you to a new Manger creation, the MSMs1.

Features

Without any doubt the most eye-catching feature of this loudspeaker is the Manger sound trans-

ducer. It works according to the bending-wave principle similar to an inverted ear (for further insight you might take a look at the principle of the basilar membrane). On the edge of the membrane the system employs an effective aperiodic mechanical damping – the famous „Manger star“. Due to its design the bending-wave transducer produces an almost coloration-free sound and depicts each instruments characteristics in a most natural way. The technical background of the system is very complex and therefore explanations shall remain excluded from this article as I am no (health) physicist.



The Manger transducer reproduces music and other sonic events with almost no time-lag. An extremely fast rise time of 13 microseconds and a frequency response of 80 Hz to 40 kHz are part of the reason why even rapid transients and complex musical structures evolve naturally from a single center. The realistic spatial imaging of instruments results in an extremely explicit resolution of musical details. These really demanding requirements can only be met by fast driven systems. For the Reference Active MSMs1 graduate engineer Daniela Manger uses two integrated analog power amplifiers. The amplifier driving the bending wave system has 180 watts RMS and 250 kHz bandwidth to offer, which results in a rise time of a mere two (!) microseconds. According to the product description this fast acceleration speed is necessary to preserve the quality between the small signal (preamplifier output) and large signal

(power amplifier output). The amplifier driving the woofer provides healthy 250 watts and a damping factor of >200 . As a result the electronics are capable to control the chassis perfectly which results in excellent impulse response.

Construction

The new Manger 2-way active loudspeaker is surprisingly easy to integrate into almost any living room. Plus it has the so-called WAF (for those of us not being married: wife acceptance factor). With dimensions of 44.9" x 10.6" x 8.3" / 114 x 27 x 21 cm (H x W x D) its closed system fits really well into modern living environments. Closed systems, due to their construction, do avoid many problems other principles bring along with them, e.g. standing waves caused by bass reflex ports. An important advantage. The MSMs1 is beautifully crafted and weighs respectable 106 lbs/48 kg a piece. Therefore it stands solidly on whatever kind of floor you may have. If required, conical spikes can be attached to the bottom side to reduce the area of contact. For this review the speakers were seated flat on the carpeting of the listening room which resulted in perfect acoustics. No spikes were needed. As Manger recommends a minimum room size of 60 sq. ft./20 qm all I had to do in my 120 sq. ft./40 qm room was aligning the transducers to my listening position. The basic color of the tested monitors, called „basalt metallic silk mat", has a smooth and pleasant touch that visually oriented people will love. The finish looks perfect and conveys an almost „erotic" touch. On request the MSMs1 is available in all RAL colors as well as in Nextel[®]-Suede Coating and Ultra High Gloss at a surcharge.

The loudspeaker chassis' are mounted behind the 38 mm front panel in two separate chambers reinforced on the sides by 22 mm medium density fiberboards (MDF). This effectively avoids acoustic interference between the two systems. Rounded edges reduce diffractions to a minimum. The whole mechanical construction is very rigid and strong. The amplifiers are seated at the bottom in the back of the enclosure where they can fully unfold their potential without influencing the drivers. They are equipped with a 230 V power cord socket and balanced XLR connectors. In addition a plethora of adjustments can be made which will



make your life a lot easier in case of acoustic problems. Included are room correction filters, near-field and cinema screen correction settings as well as input trim switches, which adapt two-channel and multi-channel configurations in the range of a tenth of a decibel. Also worth mentioning is the clear and self-explaining control panel layout. Excellent – this will save you some time as there's no need to peruse the owner's manual.

Sonic Encounter

Please imagine this scenario: An enthusiastic fan of dedicated high-end gear and tube amplification is confronted with the perfectly linear Manger transducer. Which new experiences will he go through? This was my starting point when I approached the Reference Active MSMs1. I remembered a remark by my chief editor: „You are hooked on the so-called ‘hot-blooded kiss of the midrange’, aren't you?“, he said. „Plus a smooth and silky touch throughout the treble range“, I added. Well, back to reality. The first test set-up consisted of a Restek EPOS CD player directly connected to the MSMs1 via XLR. This resulted in a very pristine reproduction of music, as expected. It soon became clear that this special loudspeaker would call for special efforts. As an audio critic there are „two souls dwelling in my breast“. One belongs to the straightforward and objectively analyzing technical writer. The second one is the self-confessed wine-loving high-end gear enthusiast with a strong inclination to tube sounds. The roots of the latter are easily explained: I belong to the generation which grew up with the sound of tube radios and was fascinated by the „magic eye“. So it comes as no surprise that this typical sound is an important part of my listening experience. In addition as a longtime band member the sounds of tube amps like VOX AC30s have left their marks. On the other hand I greatly enjoy the pureness and clear soundscapes of modern High Fidelity. According to Daniela Manger the typical MSMs1 customer is involved in live concerts, either actively or passively. People who are accustomed to the direct, technically unadulterated sound of instruments – in other words music fans who love live events. Just like me.



The backside of the MSMs1 offers many options for individual adjustments

The Audition

As I mentioned before, the starting test set-up was based on the Restek EPOS which I'm using as reference for more than two years now. This CD player reproduces music in a straightforward and unvarnished fashion without altering the quality of the original recording. Nothing more, nothing less. The EPOS with its internal volume control and the two MSMs1 complemented each other perfectly and formed a very minimalistic 2-channel stereo system. The cabling consisted of Sommer "Excelsior" XLR signal cables (2 x 4 m) and a HMS power cable. That's all you need to listen to music. Except for the media, of course ...

I started with the Manger CD which by now has become one of the most renowned presentation CDs worldwide. Track 1 named „Volles Geläut“ – I shook my head in disbelief and noted on my scratch pad: “Oh boy, that's unbelievably good!”.

After that I programmed some of my favorite songs into the CD player and continued the session. Track 11 „Isn't She Lovely" by Livingston Taylor made me push the repeat button and turn up the volume almost automatically. Never before did the whistling of the singer sound so clean. „Amazing" says it all.

Some years ago I had been trying to find out the differences between some preamplifier tubes by listening to Stings „Brand New Day" for hours and hours. And I never listened to this CD ever since. Until now. How would it sound? Well, Sting is becoming one of my favorites again and I like him even better singing and playing through the Manger transducers.

„In Concert" recorded by the Jan Garbarek Group in October 2007 at the „Alter Schlachthof" in Dresden thrilled my ears. The recording is meant to sound that spectacular and the MSMs1 made clear to which extent the sound engineers had reached their goal.

A recording of Jocelyn B. Smith and her band from 2003 is next in line. With „jo-jo" all the

strong and mellow facets of her voice unfold in the room. Compact and rich sounds enthrall the listener. With track 2 „The Lady is A Tramp" my feet start tapping right away. Extremely tight big band passages threaten to overrun me. I'm sitting in the front row while the musicians play at their best. What a treat!

Even at higher volumes listening to the Manger MSMs1 is absolutely stress-free. And higher volumes mean up to 116 dB maximum output level ... To really understand what I am talking about, you must hear the Manger Reference Active with your own ears! Its fidelity of reproduction and its almost merciless directness are simply unsurpassed. John Lee Hooker's album „The Healer" with Carlos Santana originates from the good old days of uncompressed studio recordings, in this case from 1989. Anyone with a liking for this record should at least have heard it once through the Manger transducers. The essence of this CD will embrace you, I promise. OK, this is not going to end in an ode to the MSMs1, but the sonic reproduction of this loudspeaker is so perfect and consistent that





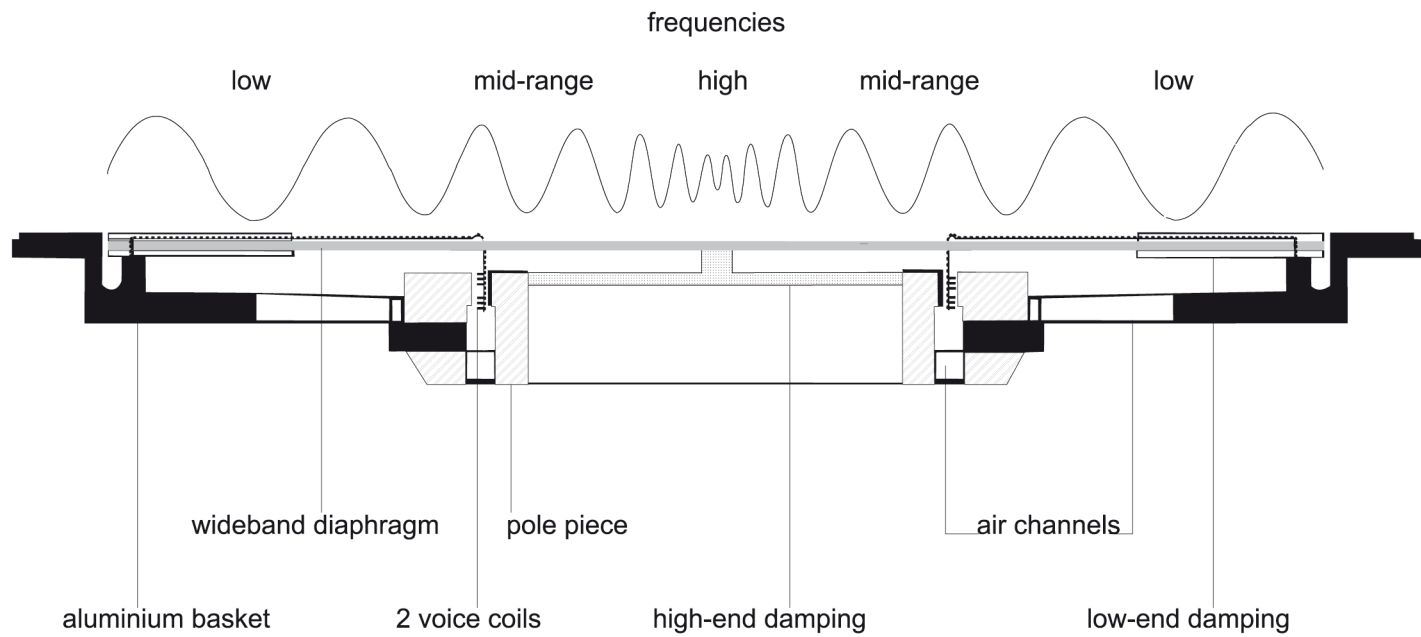
you must have heard it to believe it.

The album „The Cactus of Knowledge” by Rabih Abou-Khalil could serve as another example. This recording, made by radio station WDR Cologne, is pretty „honest”, too. Track 3 starts with a cello which is soon joined by the oud of Rabih Abou-Khalil. The arabic-moorish oud (arabic: `ūd) is the predecessor of the occidental lute (span: la úd) and exhibits plenty of tonal intricacies – i.e. rapid transients and delicate tonal variations from coarse to melodic – which are extremely difficult to reproduce for conventional loudspeakers. The MSMs1 solves the task with surprising ease. It’s the seamless, fast-as-lightning, coherent reproduction delivered so naturally that entralls the listener time and again.

This listening session ends with one of the reference CDs of our editorial staff: „Argentina” by Sexteto Mayor. In particular fascinating is the last track with bandoneon, piano and violin – from the era of uncompressed, unmodified masterings. An acoustic tour de force for the Manger transducer and a sonic delicacy for the listener.

Some Tubes for Dessert?

Imagine two audio critics grinning broadly and deeply enjoying their successful experiment! We had tried to connect the Reference Active MSMs1 via cinch-XLR-adapter to an unbalanced tube pre-amplifier and it worked. (There are balanced tube preamps with XLR connectors available on the market, we know, but...) Thanks to the premium preamplifier of our „chief engineer” Klaus Sigl and two „Excelsior” Sommer cinch cables (2 m each) we could surrender to the „hot-blooded kiss of the midrange” and the „smooth and silky touch throughout the treble range” after all. I swear, the Sigl tube preamplifier is a real powerhouse that sparkles with vitality and elegance. And the Reference Active MSMs1 depicts every nuance of its character with utmost fidelity. As far as imaging, resolution and velocity are concerned the Manger MSMs1 is definitely superior to other loudspeaker systems.



cutaway of the Manger bending wave transducer



Hit the mark

Without any doubt the tonal reproduction of the Manger transducer is the most pure of any speaker system I've ever heard. The minute you experience this impressive kind of sonic clarity you will be captivated. This system suits both technically oriented studio experts and HiFi fans with a fondness for tube sounds alike. And taking into consideration the price/performance ratio the Reference Active MSMs1 is almost a bargain!

ALEXANDER ASCHENBRUNNER

Information

Floor-standing 2-way active loudspeaker
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