

Vienna Acoustics The Music (£19,750)

'Music through technology' is Vienna Acoustic's mission statement and the flagship in its Klimt series delivers it
Review: **Richard Stevenson** Lab: **Keith Howard**

Back in January 2009 I was swanning around the Grand Ballroom of the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas with a dry Martini in each hand. I chanced upon Vienna Acoustics' Kevin Wolff. It was late, I had just spent the day at the CES show and most of the evening at the Adult Movie Awards, which runs concurrently. Kevin asked if I wanted to meet a hot model he had been warming up in a penthouse suite on the 35th floor. How could I refuse? I've been lusting after that model ever since – The Music from Vienna Acoustics' top end Klimt series.

Nearly two years later, unpacking the enormous crates and lifting each speaker's 85kg bulk seemed a small price to pay. I recall walking into that suite at the Venetian. It was about the size of the Royal Albert Hall and The Musics were filling it with a classical work in a way that could not have been any more jaw dropping if the entire LSO were camped out behind the drapes. The presentation was huge, organic and tangibly real. The lack of 'speaker' in the sound was a revelation and, in a word, I was smitten.

From the top down, the Klimt series' focal point is the flat-plane spider-cone coaxial driver. Aiming to reduce the upper frequency horn-loading colouration of traditional midrange cones, designer Peter Gansterer and his team spent many years perfecting a perfectly planar 7in midband driver for the series. The key technology of the unit lies in the bespoke cone materials and the ribbed bracing of the mid driver, coaxially mounted around a hand-built 25mm silk dome tweeter.

The flat plane driver is said to operate down to an incredibly low 100Hz and up to 2.6kHz, offering a theoretically seamless crossover-free response through the critical vocal range. The silk dome tweeter from Eton of Germany extends through the audio band to around 20kHz, effectively making the separate upper section of the speaker, which Vienna calls the Music Center, into a near full range speaker in its own right. This separate cabinet is adjustable for toe-in angle and vertical inclination independent of the main

body of the speaker, theoretically affording easy fine tuning.

The speaker cabinet is relatively narrow with an elegant swept-back footprint. The lower part is divided into isolated sections that house a trio of custom-built 9in bass drivers and a Murata Super Tweeter. The bespoke spider-cone bass drivers are completely transparent and look cooler than a penguin's toes. Had I been the designer I would have integrated blue LEDs inside the cabinet to show this particular aspect off, which probably explains why I am not one.

More importantly, as this section takes over LF duties from the coaxial driver only from 100Hz and below it can be engineered more precisely. It is effectively a purpose-built and tuned sub-bass system. For very fine room tuning there are three switches mounted on the rear panel offering a very small amount of adjustment (I'd guess this to be less than 1dB with wide Q) to Midrange (M), Upper Bass (UB) and Lower bass (LB) if desired.

THE TRICKY BIT...

I have witnessed Vienna Acoustics' fastidious attention to speaker positioning and set-up on many occasions and it is 'intense'. The 13-page manual details techniques for getting the overall room positioning correct for bass response and then fine tuning upper and lower section toe-in and inclination to balance imaging and soundstage. I owed it to Kevin to get this just perfect, so I crafted four 'skids' from timber and carpet tiles enabling these weighty bad boys to be slid around on my polished wooden floor. Only when I was 100% happy with the set up did I use The Music's enormous floor spikes and floor-protecting pads to set the speaker in place.

While position for best bass was relatively easy, getting the imaging and presence perfect proved rather more

RIGHT: Bespoke drivers include a 7in coaxial with flat-panel mid and silk dome tweeter, super-tweeter and a trio of transparent 9in spider-cone bass units





finicky. The Musics were begging for about an extra foot of room width on top of my dimensionally challenged 10ft 6in wide listening environment, so I had to trade a little imaging width for more precise focus. I settled for the main speaker bodies aiming about three feet behind the listening position and the Music Centers toed in a few degrees to focus just behind my ears. Getting the vertical angle of the Music Centers correct is a simple matter of raising a rear hand-screw and locking the unit into place.

Yes, the set-up is fussy but as a customer your VA dealer will go through this for you as part of the experience. Frankly, The Music is so well built, so gorgeously crafted and so immaculately finished that the day I get bored of dancing around the room with such a beauty in residence will be the day I hang up my listening hat for good.

A REVELATION...
As a hi-fi reviewer every few years something comes along that messes with your head then shortly afterwards messes with your bank account. It furthers what you define as a musical reference and makes the eventual return to your own kit a disappointment. Editor Paul Miller suffered such an event at the hands of the Devialet D-Premier amplifier and I am between the very same performance rock and fiscal hard place over The Music.

It's a speaker that once dialled in simply disappears. It has a huge sound – monstrously dynamic yet graced with rare articulation and delicacy throughout the top end of the spectrum. It has a smoothness and sophistication, particularly with vocals, strings and brass, that simply doesn't sound like a traditional loudspeaker. There is no grain, no tweeter ringing, no cabinet colouration, no introduced character. You can't hear the material of the mid cone and the imaging is immaculately focused and tangible. And while you are trying to get your head around the

mind-scrambling upper-end dynamic, the bass kicks in and blows you away.

The opening bars of 'The Peter Gunn Theme' from *The Blues Brothers*

soundtrack punches out with the speed and power of a heavyweight boxing champion. Each note is a cornucopia of textural detail. The Music's bass performance is a fantastic combination of power, precision, depth and detail that, after 20 years in the industry, I have never heard delivered in the same place at the same time. My room, like many, has its LF issues but The Music delivers faultless timing, incredible extension and LF transient attack so sharp it ought to come with a safety guard.

The rear-mounted trim controls injected yet more warmth and energy into the mix but never

'The Music furthers what you define as a musical reference'

ART OF THE MATTER

The Kliment Series is named after Austrian symbolist artist Gustav Klimt (July 1862 – February 1918), a prominent member of the forward-thinking Vienna Secession movement that sired a whole new phase in classical painting. This 'revolutionary' philosophy is embodied across the Vienna Acoustics' Kliment range, which is said to employ new technologies, new ideas and new ways of cracking old acoustic 'issues'. The Music, named after perhaps Klimt's most famous work, owes its tuning direction to the sound of Vienna's famous Musikverein concert hall. Consistently rated in the top five concert venues in the world it is highly regarded for its wide dynamics and naturalness across an unusually large proportion of its seats. Other models in the Kliment range are also named after the artist's famous paintings, including the The Kiss standmount and (for the US market) the Poetry centre channel.

LOUDSPEAKER

VIENNA ACOUSTICS MUSIC (£19,750)



RIGHT: Single-wire terminals with The Music's subtle midrange (M), upper bass (UB) and lower bass (LB) switches each offering an estimated 1dB adjustment

Vienna Acoustics' claimed 91dB sensitivity for The Music is rather optimistic, the 87.9dB pink noise figure we obtained suggesting that an 88dB rating would be more realistic. The large disparity between our three sensitivity figures is a sure-fire indication of a less than flat on-axis frequency response [confirmed by Graph 1, below] and by the ± 11.0 dB and ± 10.9 dB response errors, 300Hz-20kHz, recorded in the test table (all three EQ switches in their default down position). As the Graph 1 shows, these exceptionally high errors are principally due to a deep, narrow notch in response just above 2kHz. This is due not to any misalignment of the midrange-tweeter crossover but caused by a large resonance in the flat midrange diaphragm, which is clearly not stiff enough to operate without breakup over its whole passband.

A depressed presence band and shelved-up treble are other notable response features and, given the inclusion of the Murata supertweeter, the extension of the ultrasonic response is a little disappointing. Pair matching error is also on the high side at ± 1.8 dB but the largest disparities occur over narrow frequency bands, associated with the aforementioned resonance and the step up in response around 8kHz. Elsewhere the pair matching is much tighter. A minimum impedance modulus of 3.0ohm at 83Hz and minimum EPDR of 2.1ohm at 70Hz indicate that The Music is relatively easy to drive, not least because the crossover network appears to incorporate impedance correction at low frequencies. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [see Graph 2, below] indicates the presence of some further HF resonances. KH

over-stepped the mark. I loved the ultimate bottom-end tightness in the flat position but could not resist the additional weight and energy of the UB and LB switches in the up position. By the third run of 'The Peter Gunn Theme', the volume getting ever more serious by the play, I was finally overcome by the urge to duck-walk around the sofa playing air-sax like my life depended on it. What a ride...

WICKEDLY FAST

Fast forwarding to Aretha Franklin's 'Think' from the CD of the same name simply compounded the whole uncontrollable dancing issue. The Musics craft the wickedly fast opening piano notes as if there was a Steinway parked in the room, each note blessed with tonal detailing of remarkable integrity and precision, finely positioned just to the right of the main soundstage. Then pow! Aretha's voice powers through the mix with a vast amount of energy and projected power. Her upper range soars dynamically with no discernable compression, resulting in a highly articulate and goose-bump realistic performance.

Switching to the jazz classic 'Minnie The Moocher' sealed the deal. The trumpets kicked in with stunning power and pace, the bass beat nailed the rhythm immediately and Cab Calloway stepped into the room, right there on my rug between the speakers. His voice exuded every bit of its full dynamic range and feelgood character. It was spine-tingly good, articulated with the tonal quality and raw passion that I have only ever heard one

other speaker reproduce as well – and that costs £15k more than The Music! I knew right then this was going to be one of those products... oh my aching bank account.

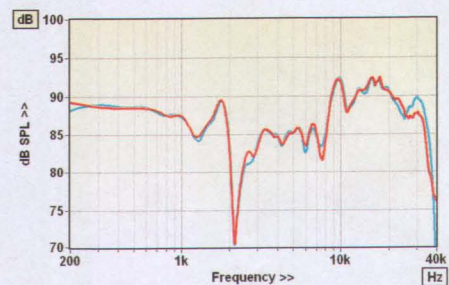
Two weeks with Vienna's The Music and I had spent more time romping through CDs and vinyl for simple pleasure than I have done for years. The speakers revealed forgotten gems, recaptured precious moments, delivered classical works to make you weep or had you boogying the night away.

Yes, they are tricky to set up and they would have preferred a slightly wider room than mine, but can I find subjective fault with the delivered result? None at all. If you're not careful, reviewing equipment year-in year-out can introduce a disconnect; you listen to sources, amps and speakers rather than what they are actually playing. In my experience, no other speaker connects you with the music quite like The Music. ☺

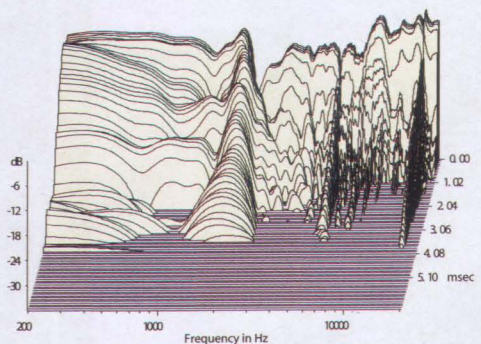
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Elegant, dynamic and incredibly natural sounding, Vienna Acoustics' The Music sets the standard for musical communication, in my experience. Always engaging, the even balance and superb bass are perfect for rock and pop; the rich treble and articulate midband a classical buff's dream. But remember, letting a well-trained Vienna retailer do the set up is best for your ears and your back.

Sound%



ABOVE: Vienna's The Music loudspeaker displays a deep and narrow notch in its forward response



ABOVE: Low distortion through the bass and a clean treble but breakup modes are evident in the midrange

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms - Mean/IEC/Music)	89.4dB/87.9dB/86.6dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	3.0ohm @ 83Hz 19.5ohm @ 2.2kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	-44° @ 3.4kHz 46° @ 1.2kHz
Pair matching (200Hz-20kHz)	± 1.8 dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	42Hz / 34.1kHz/35.6kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.4% / 0.2% / 0.4%
Dimensions (HWD)	1295x273x630mm