



the Stereo Times

The Complete Audiophile Magazine

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ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES
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Associated Equipment:

Digital Front End

Electrocompaniet EMC-1
CD
Creek CD53
Musical Fidelity A3.2 CD

Amplification

Portal Panache integrated
amp
Spectron Musician II digital
amp
Musical Fidelity A3.2
integrated amp

Loudspeakers

Totem Model 1
Penaudio Rebel2

Cabling

Audience Au24
loudspeaker cables
Acoustic Zen Hologram
loudspeaker cables
Analysis Plus Oval Nine
loudspeaker cables
Kimber Select 1030
interconnects
Argent Audio Pursang
interconnects

Power Conditioning

Shunyata Hydra 8

Accessories

Sound Anchor
Loudspeaker Stands
Argent Audio Dark Matter
Base
Black Diamond Racing
Cones #3 and #4

THE PENAUDIO REBEL2 LOUDSPEAKER

Rebel With A Cause

Nelson Brill

January 2005



"If a sick person is not cured by tar, spirits or sauna, then they will die."
- Finnish proverb



Recently, I had the good fortune to attend a live performance by the jazz pianist, Patricia Barber and her trio in a wonderful, small, nightclub space here in the Boston area. On this night, Ms. Barber and her bandmates plunged into a musical exploration spanning jazz, blues, bossas and ballads, with such passion and invention that I was left breathless by the end of the set, literally hanging on the band's every note 'til the last. I left the concert in a state of complete invigoration, as if I had been rejuvenated by the heat of a Finnish sauna and then plunged into the icy waters of the Baltic. I am sure that each of us has experienced this kind of exhilaration after listening to live performances of our favorite music and I would bet this is why most of us are passionate about our home audio systems. We seek to replicate such experiences from live performances in our own living spaces to feel renewed, refreshed and truly alive.

This sense of renewal through artistic inspiration, of seeking well-being through listening to one's favorite music, is captured in the motto of the Finnish company that makes the Rebel2 loudspeaker Penaudio. Penaudio's motto is "auditional well-being," a phrase that captures the essence of seeking renewal in one's life through music. The science of critical listening forms the basis for all of Penaudio's speaker creations. Penaudio's founder, chief designer and musician, Sami Penttila, states that every Penaudio speaker is designed and voiced on live music and based on listening impressions in different rooms. In other words, he wants to make sure that a violin sounds like the real thing. A panel of professional and amateur musicians composes the final litmus test for all Penaudio speaker designs. Sami states that his goal in designing these speakers is to bring the listener not only closer to the recorded music, but into the venue in which the music was originally



created.



The Rebel2 is a two-way, stand-mounted, reflex-loaded design, utilizing a 20mm soft ferro-fluid textile dome tweeter and a specially treated 120mm midrange/bass unit. Penaudio only uses soft, non-resonant tweeter units in their speakers. The Rebel2 frequency range is noted in both anechoic response (80-2200Hz) and in room (50-20000Hz) with a quite high crossover at 4000Hz.

Sensitivity is rated at 85 dB and nominal impedance is 8 ohms, with recommended amplification at an optimistic minimum 30+ watts. As one would expect with a speaker of this modest size (9.4" W x 11.2" D x 5.5"W), the Rebel2 preferred a good deal of current flow to achieve best sonic results. Solid-state amplification of around 100 watts into 8-ohms suited it quite nicely.

I auditioned the Rebel2 primarily in my small office space which measures 8' x 12'. Although I spent most of my listening sessions with the Rebel2 mounted on 24" Sound Anchor stands. I also listened to them simply placed on a desk facing me at ear height about 8' from my listening position to test their versatility. I know that a lot of us are looking for small speakers to place in small to medium office spaces with the goal of integrating that Finnish sense of renewal right into our daily lives. In my office, I found the optimal placement of the Rebel2 to be 1' from both side and rear walls with the speakers slightly toed outward facing my shoulders, not at my ears directly. The Rebel2 owner's manual is quite good with regards to the level of detail that speaker placement is discussed. Of course, the small footprint of this speaker makes experimentation with positioning all the more easier and flexible.

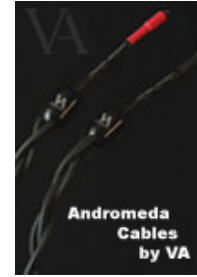
The Rebel2s arrived in exemplary packing, in a wonderful light oak grain. The Finns have another great saying that "in the sauna, everyone is equal." In the land of loudspeaker aesthetics, however, I would opinion that all are not equal, and I would offer that the Rebel2 is a speaker of understated beauty for its size. It will be equally pleasing to the eye in either a small office or a family den. A minor quibble: I was not enamored with the metal grills that came with this pair, with their sharp edges and propensity to bend even with care upon their removal. I thus left these grills off entirely and enjoyed the pair much more in their absence. Apart from this small detail, the overall sense of design and fit of these handmade speakers is superb.

Capturing Interstitial Beauty

In order to convey the critical sonic signatures that I heard while listening to the Rebel2 on a daily basis in my office for several months, I would return to Patricia Barber as well something we may all have been taught in high school biology. I am talking here of "interstitial," defined as "relating to or situated in the small narrow spaces between tissues or parts of an organ." What we have here, in the Rebel2 speaker, is the epitome of a vehicle for interstitial exploration on a small, intimate scale. We are talking here of interstitial exploration, not of a frog's anatomy (remember those dissection days in



biology class?) but of what we love the most: the search for musical truth, intent and expression in an audio recording. In Patricia Barber's recent live performance, her creative mining of the interstitial spaces existing BETWEEN the rhythms and syncopations, the life-beating forces of the bossas and blues numbers she explored, was simply divine. Between the spaces of the melodic lines laid down by her bass, drums and guitar accompaniment, Barber took off running on her piano into creative lines interwoven magically between the rhythms and melody without confusion or harm to the main theme. Barber would also use her vocals to scat, harmonize and fragment further this reality existing between the notes, to a degree that was inspiring. Each piece would somehow come to a perfectly harmonizing conclusion, all wrapped up in a beautiful coda, leaving the listener fascinated from whence he or she came.



The Rebel2 speakers allowed me this same window into glorious interstitial exploration on most recordings I played; particularly revelatory on small-scale jazz, chamber music and acoustic string selections. The Rebels clearly excel in correct and accurate timbre and ravishing detail, notably in the mid and high treble regions. They provide this precision without any treble grain or harshness. Some might prefer more added warmth in the treble regions, as the Rebel2 is anything but soft or dull in the treble. Some may also hear a slight forwardness in its presentation. This was not an issue for me and indeed, I was completely captured by the unique, inner detail presented



in the treble regions that this speaker afforded. For example, one of my current favorite audiophile discs to test tonal accuracy, is the brilliant analog recording, *Sampler #4 Classical* [Naim 061]. On *The Devil's Trill* by Tartini and performed by Yuval Yaron, Yuval's violin is conveyed pitch-perfect by the Rebel2, with no nasal quality or excess dryness. Yuval's breathing is heard distinctly as his bow punctuates the beautiful passages of this music. There is terrific imaging here, with Yuval present in my office, lifelike and breathing in a realistic performance space. Again, the sense of inner detail, that interstitial magic, is conveyed by the crystalline treble provided by the Rebel2.



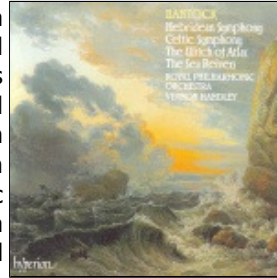
Another good test of mid-treble accuracy is the voice of Cassandra Wilson whose unique, sonorous tone can be difficult to accurately capture. One of my favorite recordings of hers is "*Belly of the Sun*," [Blue Note 72435], for its pristine recording and the breath of its creative vision. On Wilson's version of *Wichita Lineman*, the Rebel2 conveys her deep voice in an open and natural way, existing independent of the speakers. This disc also uniquely illustrates the strengths of the Rebel2 in capturing Sami's goal in his speaker design: conveying a particular recording venue. Several of these cuts were recorded in a train station on hot August days in Mississippi, while a few were recorded in the confines of a box car because the train station was not available to the recording crew at one point. Checking out the sonic differences between these cuts was a revelation with the Rebel2's, as they painted a completely different sonic picture of the two recording spaces: one open and spacious and the



other, confined with lots of reverberation off the box car's limiting walls. The Rebel2 conveyed this interstitial detail with skill, accuracy and a lifelike portrayal of the recording venue.

Moving down to the lower mids and bass region, I can best describe what I heard by comparing the Rebel2 to another outstanding speaker in its class and price range, the Totem Model 1 (\$1600). My listening sessions with these two speakers was courtesy of my generous colleagues at Goodwins High End Audio, in a room slightly larger than my office space. The Totem Model 1 is a larger bookshelf speaker with a slightly larger aluminum dome tweeter and woofer unit. Its sensitivity is rated at 87 dB and frequency response specs are very similar to the Rebel2. For these sessions, the classically warmer electronics composed of the Musical Fidelity A3.2 integrated and A3.2 CD player were substituted for my Portal Panache and Creek player. The bottom line was that the Totem threw a

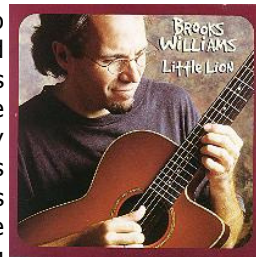
deeper and wider soundstage, with a more rounded, smooth mid-band and bass presentation. The Rebel2 held its own, with its smaller dimensions, and cast that magical treble that the Totem just couldn't muster. For example, on orchestral works, like Bantock's "Celtic Symphony," [Hyperion 66450] (a wondrous recording of great emotional delivery), the Totem was delicious in providing a dynamic, deep soundstage for such a small speaker, while the Rebel2 did the same, with slightly less fullness and dynamic range in the lower registers. At the beginning of the Celtic Symphony, the strings enter playing a slow, beautiful soft passage, highlighted by a harp. The Rebel2 captured this soft passage with a delicacy and lightness that the



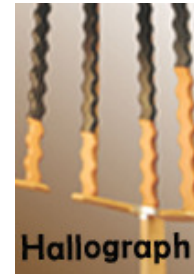
Totem did not, as the Totem offered a rounder, smoother presentation in which this inner detail in the mid band was not presented as clearly. The bass of both speakers was tight, clean and quick. However, the Totem offered a noticeably deeper, more robust bass, especially on hard driving rock and roll numbers. On Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Come On (Pt. III)," from his rollicking disc,

"Couldn't Stand The Weather" [Epic 65871], the Totem provided a noticeable deeper bass foundation and a rounder sound overall to Vaughan's vocals and guitar. The Rebel2 provided a leaner bass underneath but its portrayal of Vaughan's vocals was extraordinary in its chiseled glory, without harshness and with complete realism. I think in a smaller room, I would prefer the Rebel2 for its lithe treble

accuracy and probably would not miss too much its lack of the weight as compared to the Totems. The Rebel2 was in all of its interstitial glory on instrumentals like those found on Brooks Williams sweetly recorded, "Little Lion" [Signature Sounds 1255], and captured Williams precise bass lines with power and inner beauty. The Totems were enticing as well, adding



more body, weight and roundness to the presentation. If you adore your acoustic guitar down to the last fret squeak and harmonic tone, audition the Rebel2 and enjoy its nimble accuracy.



Revel In A Rebel!

I thoroughly enjoyed my wondrous hours listening to the Rebel2 and highly recommend it, particularly for those looking for a speaker that provides glorious tonal accuracy and treble liquidity in small to medium living or working spaces. It will bring you pleasure in its dexterity, mining of inner detail and interstitial delight. Some might find a rounder, more full-bodied presentation more enticing, but the Rebel2 gets to the heart of the musical matter quickly, with few sonic diversions. The Rebel2 also enjoys companionship with cable that suits its solid state brethren, so investigate this synergy carefully. I found the Audience AU24 speaker cable to be a match made in heaven with this speaker, as this cable sprung even more inner detail and dynamics to life, dancing with the Rebel2. Kippis! ("Finnish Cheers") to All!

Specifications:

Frequency Response: anechoic 80-22K; in room 50-20K

Sensitivity: 85 dB/1m/2.83V

Power Handling: 30 watts minimum

Impedance: 8 Ohms nominal

Connections: single

Size: 5.5 " W x 11.2" D x 9.4"H

Weight: 2.25 lbs. each

Price: \$1,500/pair

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Pen Audio Rebel2 Loudspeaker

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