



The Penaudio Serenade Loudspeaker It Doesn't Disappoint

May 2007



Associated Equipment:

Analog Front End

"The Source" Turntable
Alphason HRS 100
Tonearm
Benz Micro ACE L
Magnum Dynalab DT-5
AM/FM Tuner

Digital Front End

Classe Audio CDP102

Amplification

Electrocompaniet EC4.7
preamp
Jungson DA200
Integrated Amplifier
BAT VK1000 Mono
Amplifiers
Clearaudio "Smart
Phono" Phono Preamp

Loudspeakers

Escalante Design
Fremont

Cabling

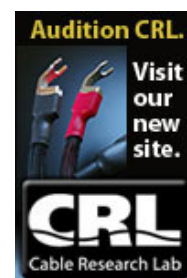
Stealth Audio Petite
Dream speaker cables
Stealth Audio
Metacarbon and Air
King interconnects
Argento Audio Serenity
Cables
Revelation Audio
Paradise Cryo-Silver™
Reference RCA Cables

AC Conditioners

Modified APC Power
Conditioner



I first came across Penaudio during the HE2003 Show in San Francisco. I was initially struck by the sleek looks of their two-box Chara/Charisma loudspeaker system. But after a brief listening session turned into an extended one, I knew that I had come across something special. I can still remember Penaudio's U.S. distributor Val Kratzman, one of the nicest guys in the business, asking for the names of all the discs I had brought in to hear on the speakers. I also remember that a very lovely young lady had sat next to me half way through the listening session without me even knowing it. That's just how immersed in the sound I was. The three of us (and the dozen or so other people who had come into the room) were completely astonished by all of the glorious sound coming from these sleek little speakers. In fact, that young lady actually bought a pair on site. I love that this show is open to



the public. Later that year I reviewed the Chara/Charisma system and recognized it with a Stereo Times **"Most Wanted Component"** award. Fast forward to the 2006 CES and I once again found myself in the Penaudio room enjoying yet another new speaker design, the Serenade.

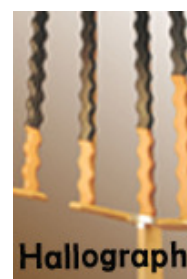
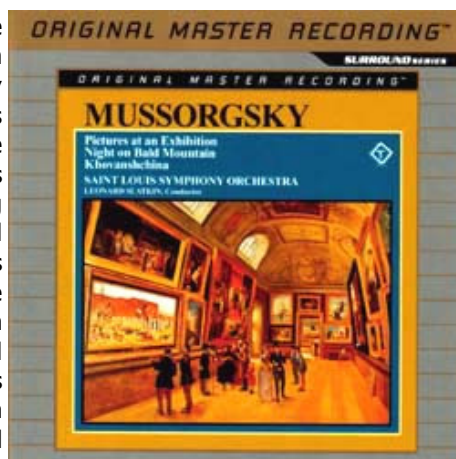
After waiting several months, due to the new speaker's popularity, I finally got a pair in for review. Both the Chara/Charisma system and the Serenades share comparable footprints and both are basically three-way designs. So I didn't exactly expect there to be a huge difference in the sound. That wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing though. The Chara/Charisma system was one of the most musically natural systems I've heard and a flat out steal at its less than \$6k price. But at a cost of \$9,000 there is certainly an expectation that the Serenade would be significantly better than its predecessor. Does it disappoint? Read on Bud.

The Penaudio Serenades are made in Finland by brilliant speaker designer Sami Penttila. He builds speakers by making sure that all components are of the highest quality and modified to his specs, and he makes sure his designs are practical and an enhancement to a lifestyle where a love of music is integrated. He's not likely to design a speaker that will dominate a room like some armor-wearing centurion. Instead, his designs will be loved by interior designers and music lovers alike. My girlfriend swears that they are the closest thing to a "perfect" speaker that I have brought home. She even went out and bought a couple of Persian floor rugs that she thought looked nice in front of the speakers. I could hardly blame her though; the 6" x 11" x 44.5" tall Serenades feature a gorgeously finished ¾" thick MDF covered with a beautiful birch veneer. These babies are simply stunning to look at. But of course, none of this means anything if the speakers don't sound good. Thankfully, they sound great.

Listening

The hallmark of the Chara/Charisma system was its wonderful musicality and surprising bass performance. The Serenades carry this forward by also delivering an extremely well-balanced presentation. I was always mindful of the fact that the Chara and Charisma were in separate enclosures and suspected that there was some loss of cohesion on large scale orchestral pieces. This was not an

issue with the Serenades. When I listened to "Night On Bald Mountain" from *Mussorgsky - Pictures At An Exhibition* [MFSL UDSACD 4004] I was more in tuned to the delineation of the fine details of the musician's performances. This probably had a lot to do with the excellent SEAS Excel-1 1" fabric dome tweeter. I've heard this driver in a couple of other speakers and have always felt that it delivered an enormous amount of detail. And combined with the 4.5" midrange driver (also a SEAS unit), the Serenade offers near holographic treble performance. "Movin' Me On" from Eliane Elias' *Dreamer* [Bluebird] bears this out. The sensuality of her mellifluous voice really comes through with the Serenades, and when listening in the dark, they put her in the room with me. My girlfriend hates it when I say that to her.





The Serenades use an 8" side-firing aluminum cone woofer (again a SEAS driver) that gets the best musicality from bass instruments. One of my favorite discs is Rob Wasserman's *Duets* [MCA]. The third track is a duet with Bobby McFerrin called "Brothers." Wasserman's rhythmic strumming on his upright bass is a treat to hear through the Serenades. They don't go down as deeply as my reference Escalante Designs Fremonts do, but bear in mind that the Fremonts sport a pair of direct coupled 12" woofers. So while this is not a fair comparison, the fact that it was worth mentioning is a testament to the capabilities of the Serenades.

Conclusion

Overall, this is a loudspeaker that satisfies on many levels. First and foremost is the fact that Penttila serves the music with this speaker. A great deal of listening, more so than being a slave to tests and measurements ensures that musical joy is what the owner gets from this speaker. Second is the mindfulness that these speakers will reside in a person's home and should fit in with the lifestyle of people who enjoy their music but also enjoy their homes. And third, this is a wonderful sounding loudspeaker. There was no one style of music that it excelled with most. Its balanced presentation makes it ideal for people with eclectic tastes in music.

As I mentioned before, my earlier experience with the Penaudio Chara/Charisma system resulted in my awarding it a Stereo Times "**Most Wanted Component**" award. With the Serenade, history is repeating itself. Highly recommended.

Dave Thomas

Technical Specifications:

Type: Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker
 Drivers: SEAS 1" fabric dome tweeter, SEAS 4.5" treated-paper cone midrange, and SEAS 8" aluminum woofer (all drivers modified to designer specifications)
 Crossover: 4th order @ 180z, 4.5 kHz
 Nominal impedance: 4 Ohms
 Sensitivity: 87dB/W/m
 Dimensions: 44.5 x 6 x 11 (HxWxD in inches)

Price: \$9,000/pair

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