



# Gershman Acoustics GAP-828 Loudspeaker

by Roy Gregory

If hi-fi should be about the music rather than the system delivering it then these Gershmans are a great place to start (or finish). The infectious life and energy, the weight, presence and vigour they bring to the Cure and the Deluxe Edition of *Seventeen Seconds* draws you into the undulating throb of the pulsing bass lines, winds you in the subtle shifts and evolution of the meandering guitar trails; it's almost hypnotic – repetitive yet never the same. There's a solidity and substance to the music that speaks of real events without the accent of reproduction. You hear it first in the emphatic smack of Lol Tolhurst's drumming before you realise that it's there too in the slashing edges of Smith's (seriously underrated) guitar and the tactile thrum of the Gallup-ing bass. The swirling wash of keyboards sets the scene, providing the backdrop for the orderly parade of patterns and interlocking phrases that build into the tracks, layer on layer leaving just enough space for the claustrophobic vocals. It's what this album is about and the GAPs get it, which means that the listener gets it too. No sludgy mess of overlapping phrases and instrumentation, no impenetrable morass of leaden low frequencies. This is about subtle textures, exquisite timing and placement.

Change the disc to classical or put on Art Pepper's *Smack Up* and you'll hear the same bold, substantial presentation, just scaled to suit the material and recording. There's energy when required, and restraint too. But above all there's that presence, a quality that speaks directly to the listener. It was fascinating to notice the way that visitors spoke about nothing but the appearance of the speakers until they started playing – then

they spoke about nothing but the music. That's what the GAPs do. They give the music a commanding presence in the room; they make it hard to ignore, and they do it regardless of genre. They're engaging and above all they're enthusiastic. That makes them both unusual and in many ways quite special. The question is how do they do it?

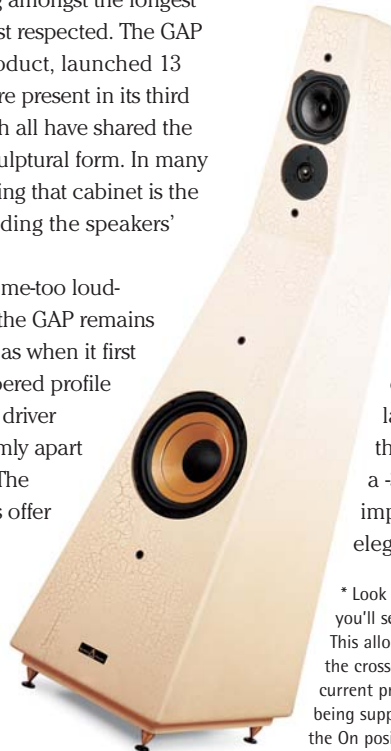
Whilst Canada might not be first on the list when it comes to countries with a long and illustrious hi-fi heritage, that reflects perception rather than the facts. Think a little harder and names like Oracle, Magnum-Dynalab, Meitner and Moon all spring to mind. And that's before we get to speakers: the likes of Coincident, Reference 3A and Gershman are representative of a thriving and adventurous tradition, with the Gershmans being amongst the longest standing and most respected. The GAP was their first product, launched 13 years ago and here present in its third iteration, although all have shared the same, striking, sculptural form. In many ways understanding that cabinet is the key to understanding the speakers' performance.

In a world of me-too loudspeaker designs, the GAP remains just as distinctive as when it first appeared, the tapered profile and upsidedown driver array setting it firmly apart from the crowd. The pyramidal shapes offer obvious benefits when it comes to overall rigidity and low diffraction, resisting resonance and

offering a constantly varying distance between the edge of the baffle and the drivers mounted on it. But they also distract from the care that's gone into the internals. The lower half of the cabinet is a double skin construction, a 19mm internal enclosure being bonded to the 25mm HDF carcass with a lossy adhesive. The resultant differential constrained layer is acoustically inert (as well as contributing to the speaker's considerable 57kg mass) and minimises transmission of mechanical energy into the upper cabinet where the midrange driver and tweeter are mounted. If that wasn't enough, the 250mm bass-driver is reflex loaded by a long, critically tuned slot port that doubles up as an internal brace to further stiffen the low-frequency

enclosure. Just the difficulty of gluing and clamping such a complex structure should give a clue to the obsessive attention to detail that's gone into these speakers. Efforts that reap a clear dividend; mass loading the driver diaphragm with a brass ring combined with the large volume of air in the long port results in a -3dB figure of 22Hz, impressive from such an elegant cabinet.\* ▶

\* Look closely on the photographs and you'll see a switch above the terminals. This allowed some user adjustment of the crossover but has been deleted in current production, with all Gaps now being supplied aligned to the equivalent of the On position.



▶ Interestingly this approach combines elements from two of my long-term favourite speaker designs. The long, folded port and separate mechanical environment for the upper registers are reminiscent of the Audioplan Kontrast, while the mass loaded bass unit and composite cabinet structure

echo the Sonus Faber Electa Amator. The difference is that the GAP is much bigger than either, and thus offers prodigious extension and subtlety at low frequencies, without the crippling impedance curve

and efficiency of a speaker like the Amator. Be warned though that such generous low-frequency output can be demanding of listening rooms and placement. I experienced no real difficulties in my (extremely well-behaved) room, but small adjustments of around half a centimeter were necessary to achieve the optimum balance of bass weight, power, speed and attack from the speakers.

What proved to be far more critical was listening distance and height. The warm balance favoured a slightly closer than expected seating position, at odds with the distance between the mid and bass drivers, which suggests that space to integrate their outputs might be a good thing; I actually

ended up just inside a notional equilateral triangle, a point which maximized dynamic range and definition. More importantly, I found a slightly higher than usual listening position (a more upright stance) was essential to achieving proper musical life and energy from the GAPs. Too low and they sound dark, sluggish and disjointed, images overblown, voices elevated. Sit up straight and suddenly everything locks into a single, gloriously coherent and transparent soundstage. Images are beautifully scaled and dimensioned, with real substance and presence. It's a situation that isn't exactly helped by the large, brass cones that anchor the speakers in place, but they too are essential to the final result. Potential purchasers who slouch or own futons had better include a new listening seat in the budget or be prepared to play with angling the speaker forward on its conical feet. Me? I just sat up straight...

Integration is always the greatest challenge facing a speaker designer, one that becomes dramatically more difficult and complex once you move from two- to three-way designs. The sheer distance between the GAP's bass and mid unit

(the upper of the two top drivers) combined with the variety of materials used across the different frequency ranges (fibre-glass at low-frequencies, carbon-fibre for the mids and a silk dome tweeter) suggest that designer Eli Gershman is going to have his work cut out. But once you sort out your listening position, seamless integration is one of the GAP's most appealing qualities, doubtless helped by the use of first-order cross-over slopes. The striking forward tilt of the head array doubtless contributes, but this is a speaker that defies appearance and assumptions with equal ease. However, there's one important caveat:

those grilles have got to go. The yellow-coned bass unit might encourage you to leave the lower cover in place, especially on the optional Antique finish as supplied for review, but that would be a mistake. Do so and you'll hear a stark discontinuity between bass notes and their harmonics, as well as a darkening and blurring of the rest of the range.

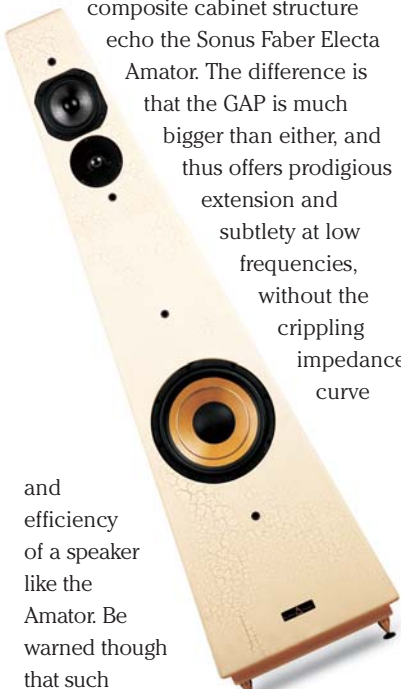
Removing the grille restores balance and illuminates the soundstage, adds attack and purpose to playing, injects the life and energy that

makes these speakers so appealing.

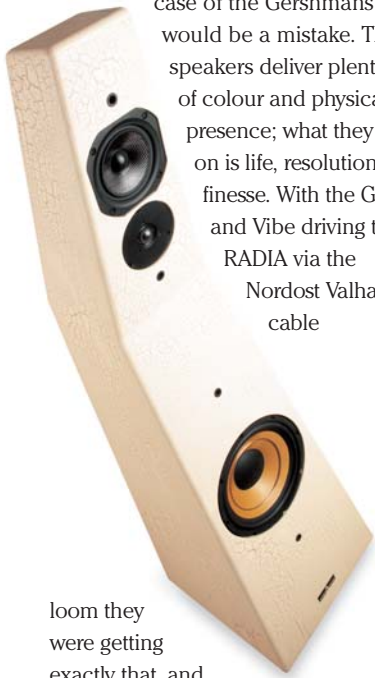
Oh, and a word about finishes.

At nearly five-feet tall, the GAPs make a serious aesthetic statement, even taking their slimming proportions into account. Standard finishes are Black or Burgundy lacquer, the former looking particularly striking in a Darth Vader-ish sort of way. The Antique finish shown here (I'd call it "Adobe") costs extra and is more successful than you might imagine, softening the visual impact of the speaker considerably. After that, the world is your oyster as far as colours go, but the options do cost extra and should be considered with care, given the shade of the bass driver and the sonic necessity of removing the grilles.

With the speakers placed 72cm out from the rear wall, giving the rear-facing port plenty of space to breathe, and with a modest amount of toe-in, the GAPs began to deliver in earnest. Their ▶



► moderate 88dB efficiency and bass extension demand a capable amplifier and the RADIA proved an ideal partner, combining textural subtlety and agility with the necessary control. Whilst it's tempting to reach for a muscle amp when a speaker goes this low, in the case of the Gershmans that would be a mistake. These speakers deliver plenty of colour and physical presence; what they thrive on is life, resolution and finesse. With the Groove and Vibe driving the RADIA via the Nordost Valhalla cable



loom they were getting exactly that, and it showed in the music they delivered.

The GAPs were faced with following the Nola Pegasus into the system, which sets a serious benchmark for transparency at low frequencies, yet they didn't shrink from the challenge. They couldn't match the bigger (and much more expensive) system's transparency and focus, the sense of contained air within the acoustic, although their natural warmth and slightly shut-in highs mimicked the overall balance to an uncanny extent. Their soundstage was slightly elevated, although with correct listening height, coherence, volume and integration were all excellent, especially depth.

I've said it before (and doubtless will again) but so much of music is built on the quality and presentation of the lowest frequencies. There really is no substitute for bandwidth

– or low frequency energy. The dry, clipped and over-damped bass favoured by so many designers gives impressive, even exaggerated definition and focus, but at what cost? Eli Gershman delivers realistic weight and extension from the GAP. It doesn't have the intimacy and immediacy of some across the mid-band, it doesn't have the stark transparency either. But what it has is reassuringly convincing weight and substance, beautifully placed bass notes and a harmonic complexity that brings shape, colour and texture to instruments. This is all about musical enthusiasm and energy.

The Yepes Rodrigo places the soloist (perfectly scaled) in front of a velvety backdrop. His playing might lack the sheer detail and attack that comes with some other speakers, but the shape and volume of the guitar, the placement and sustain of his notes, the shape he works into his phrases is all gloriously apparent. The orchestra is arrayed in a wide, deep soundstage, and if it lacks the reach out and touch quality that can come from this recording (down to that texture in the acoustic space) the purpose and power of their contribution is never in doubt. Just listen to upright bass if you want to hear both the texture and agility that these speakers are capable of at low-frequencies. Ed Thigpen's lines and solid plucking on that old chestnut 'You Look Good To Me' are wonderfully tactile, his instrument beautifully scaled and placed within the soundstage.

That combination of texture and shape flows throughout the GAP's music, bringing power and purpose to pop and rock, underpinning the emphatic delivery of heartfelt vocals, be they Ella or Eliza, communicating the scale

and power in playing, whether that belonging to a full orchestra or a Jazz quartet that's really cooking. I started in with the early Cure and where better to finish. Thoughtful, emotive and subtly powerful, their music is a test for any speaker system's integrity. Gershman's GAPs pass that test so convincingly that you don't even notice them doing it. If you really want the message in the music rather than the last ounce of inner detail or spatial precision then these speakers deliver just that. I waited a long, long time to get the GAPs into my system at home; it was worth it. Just like Robert wrote in 'Seventeen Seconds' – they're a "A measure of life..."



#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Three-way, port loaded loudspeaker
Driver Complement:	1x 130mm carbon-fibre midrange 1x 25mm silk dome tweeter 1x 250mm mass-loaded glass-fibre bass
Bandwidth:	22Hz – 24kHz
Efficiency:	88dB
Impedance:	8 Ohms
Dimensions (WxHxD):	395 x 1470 x 395mm
Weight:	57kg each
Finishes:	Black or Burgundy lacquer (Others to order)
Price:	£10950

#### UK Distributor:

Select Audio  
Tel. (44)(0)7962 176477

#### Manufacturer:

Gershman Acoustics  
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