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Don't Knock it 'til you try it

Gershman Acoustics makes its foray into the budget priced marketplace with the introduction of the new Sonogram loudspeakers.

I first heard these speakers in April at the Festival Du Son, the Montreal Consumer Electronics Show — and I was impressed. Eli Gershman, principal designer of this family-owned business, has been designing loudspeakers for about 18 years. He has introduced new designs almost yearly, resulting in a line of loudspeakers that ranges from a mere \$2,700 to a whopping \$35,000. It is apparent to me that, in the process, Gershman has established a signature sound, that is consistently audible in each of the company's models. The Sonograms under review are brand new and the lowest priced pair of speakers in the Gershman line-up.

Appearance

Most Gershman Acoustics speakers traditionally feature a pyramidal enclosure. However, this new model is a traditional six-sided box design with a twist — a pyramid within the speaker enclosure. Available in a number of different veneers, these speakers may look like the many thousands of models currently on the market, but there are a number interesting and cost saving innovations. They do not look as modern as Gershman's other models, but they will blend well with almost all interior designs.

The Sound

I have auditioned and reviewed almost every Gershman loudspeaker (starting with their first model GAP) and while I expected better than average performance, I did not expect anything near the caliber achieved in high-end designs. I first connected the Gershmans to the EAR amplifier reviewed in this issue and began listening to one of my favourite CDs, Carmen McRae's *Fine and Mellow* (Concord SACD 1005-6). Imagine my amazement when I heard Miss McRae focused right in front of me, centre stage, backed, quite literally, by bass, guitar, Hammond B3, drums — all in their particular spaces. I would have expected this in some six, seven, or more thousand dollar designs, but certainly not in loudspeakers priced under 3ks. The Sonogram's imaging capability is on par with the GAP design which retails for more than 8Ks. However, this isn't the speakers' only accomplishment as I quickly noticed tonal equilibrium second to none. Not one tone seemed out of symmetry and all segments of the frequency range integrated effortlessly. That's bass with convincing whack, and quick reaction to every note below 50Hz. I played back some bass-dominated Jimmy Smith CDs and admired the speakers' ability to deliver a sense of reality along with impressive bass control. However, bass resolution alone does not a speaker make as most of the music takes place in the midrange areas which is divided into upper and lower mids. In the Sonograms, midrange — and I mean all of it — is transparent and unconstrained.

When I connected the Musical Fidelity kW 500 integrated amplifier (reviewed in Vol. 17, No.1) I was once again impressed. This system provided plenty of emotional warmth with great bass resolution, outstanding midrange clarity and excellent high frequency extension. With the Simaudio Moon electronics — the W-8 amp, P-8 preamp and Andromeda CD player (all reviewed in Vol. 17, No. 3) — the Sonograms reacted like any high-end loudspeakers — clearly reflecting the sonic characteristics of the electronics used to drive them. There is nothing to nitpick and only one thing to do; sit back and enjoy the music.



Having lived with the speakers for a couple of months convinced me that they can do everything a good loudspeaker ought to do

Synopsis & Commentary

Try as I might, I can't get worked up about low-end loudspeakers, which is why some folks call me an audio snob. This may be so, but my experience with inexpensive designs has clearly revealed many shortcomings with which the consumer is asked to live. I will admit that many budget-priced goods provide good value, but there will be compromises. Personally, I can live with some concessions (as I have learned to be tolerant), but I can't live with too many shortcomings. Having lived with the speakers for a couple of months convinced me that they can do everything a good loudspeaker ought to do. That's excellent bass, transparent midrange, great high frequency extension, superbly delineate image and last, but not least, their ability to reflect quality amplifier performance. So, one may ask the very good question: why spend more on a pair of loudspeakers? The answer isn't cut and dry as one must first understand the difference between good vs. accomplished performance; or to put it in a more comprehensible manner, the difference between a natural, great voice and one which has been trained for a number of years.

I should, perhaps, be ashamed to admit that, had I not listen to Sonograms in Montreal, I might have dismissed them as being too cheap. Needless to say, I am glad I paid attention to these speakers and, in the process, discovered an astounding sonic achievements in a reasonably priced loudspeaker design. I must say that the Gershman Sonograms are likely one of the industry's best buys. If you are in the market, be sure to listen to a pair of Sonograms before you make a decision.



TECHNOLOGY

The Sonograms are three-way ported designs with an eight-inch woofer made to Gershman specs, a three-inch Israeli-made Morel midrange driver and a one-inch Vifa soft-dome tweeter. The speakers have a square port located at the bottom rear which runs the width of the enclosure. What's interesting and a bit unconventional is the cabinet construction. There is a secondary triangular enclosure inside the cabinet, constructed to prohibit internal reflections. Gershman opted for single wiring in this design, but suggests the use of premium speaker cables. The frequency response is quoted from 25Hz to 20kHz (+2, -3dB); efficiency is 90dB watt/metre; impedance is 8 ohms.

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Sonogram

RATING



PRICE

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CONTACT

Gershman Acoustics

905.862.2882

gershmanacoustics.com

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Thu May 8th 2008