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 new model he had been warming up in a penthouse suite on the 35th floor. How could I refuse? I've been looking 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 I was filled with a classical work in a way that could not have been any more jaw dropping if the entire ISO were camped out behind the drapes. The presentation was huge, organic and thrilling 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 midrange 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 20kHz, 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 8in 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 'sidest' 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
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 toe-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 does not 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-blowing upper-end dynamic, the bass kicks in and blows you away.

The opening bars of ‘The Real Thing’ from The Blues Brothers soundtrack punch 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 0-

**THE MUSIC FURTHERS WHAT YOU DEFINE AS A MUSICAL REFERENCE**

**ART OF THE MATTER**

The Klint Series is named after Austrian symbolist artist Gustav Klimt (1862 – 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 Klint 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 Klint range are also named after the artist’s famous paintings, including the The Kiss standmount and (for the US market) the Poetry centre channel.

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LAB REPORT

VIENNA ACOUSTICS MUSIC (£19,750)

Vienna Acoustics' claimed 90dB sensitivity for The Music is rather optimistic, the 87.95dB pink noise figure we obtained suggesting that an 88dB figure would be more realistic. The large difference between the measured sensitivity figures is a sure indication of a less than flat crossover frequency response (confirmed by Graph 1, below) by the ±11.0dB and ±10.9dB response errors, 30Hz to 20kHz, recorded in the test table (all three test 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 20kHz. This is due not to any misalignment of the midrange crossover but caused by a large resonance in the flat midrange diaphragm, which is clearly not stiff enough to operate without breakup across its whole passband.

A depressed presence band and shelved-up treble are other notable response features and, given the inclusion of the Murata tweeter, the extension of the ultrasonic response is a little disappointing. Overall, the matching is very poor on the highs at ±11.0dB but the largest discrepancy occurs across the lower frequencies, associated with the aforementioned resonance and the step up in response around 6kHz. Elsewhere the pairs matching is much tighter. A minimum impedance of 3.06ohms at 20kHz and minimum 20kHz of 2.51ohms at 7kHz indicates 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.

ELEGANT 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 bank.

H-F NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

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