

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

**JAZZ IN
EUROPE**

stereophile

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WHARFEDALE
DIAMOND 225
LOUDSPEAKER
P.81



IN-DEPTH REVIEW

AURALIC'S ALTAIR

**THREE-
CHANNEL
AMPLIFIERS
FROM ATI AND
MONOPRICE**

STREAMING DAC



**ULTIMATE ANALOG
PLAYBACK FROM AUDIO
UNION AND MARK DÖHMANN**

AC CONDITIONING FROM TORUS POWER

**EUROPEAN SPEAKERS:
BOWERS & WILKINS, LARSEN, WHARFEDALE**

**A HIGH-PERFORMANCE AMERICAN
BOOKSHELF SPEAKER FROM AERIAL ACOUSTICS**



MARCH
2017

B&Ws, the speakers not being fazed by the loudness I craved: 100dB(C) at the listening position (measured with Studio Six Digital's SPL iPhone app set to Fast). And if you want to talk drums, my reference for a live drum recording is "Moby Dick," from Led Zepelin's *How the West Was Won* (24/48 ALAC file ripped from DVD-A, Atlantic 83587-9). Eddie Kramer didn't just record the close sounds of John Bonham's kit; he also captured just enough of the auditorium's ambience to place you in the front row of the audience without smearing the impact of each drum's sound: masterful drumming laid bare by equally masterful engineering, as revealed by the B&Ws.

A word I kept returning to in my auditioning of the Bowers & Wilkinses was *brilliance*. Though the mid-treble seemed a touch laid-back—something this speaker shares with the Silver Signature—the top two octaves were present in full measure, especially when compared with the KEF LS50 and Aerial 5T. Analog tape hiss in old recordings was a little more audible than I expected—while the 805 D3s were in the system, I was archiving to digital some cassette recordings from the various bands I'd played with in the 1970s—as was the hiss from Jim Hall's guitar amplifier in the right channel of *Jim Hall/Charlie Haden*. Vocal sibilants were also emphasized to a small degree.

While I'd begun my auditioning with the B&Ws driven by MBL's Corona C15 monoblocks, the high frequencies



In the 805 D3, B&W's designers have managed an optimal balance between bass power and control.

in the Trondheim Soloists' superb performance of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* sounded a tad chromium-plated (from *Reflections*, MQA-encoded 24/352.8 FLAC file, 2L 2L-125). Changing to the Pass Labs XA60.5 monoblocks brought the top octaves into better balance, but this is a speaker that will verge on the edge of excess with

measurements, continued

trolled reduction in level, the speaker's balance doesn't change in an aggressive manner to its sides up to 8kHz or so, when the tweeter's increased directivity makes its presence known. Vertically, the use of low-order crossover filters means that a large suckout develops in the crossover region 5° below and 10° above the tweeter axis (fig.6).

Fig.7 shows the B&W 805 D3's spatially averaged response in my room. (I average 20 1/6-octave-smoothed spectra, individually taken for the left and

right speakers using SMUGSoftware's FuzzMeasure 3.0 program and a 96kHz sample rate, in a rectangular grid 36" wide by 18" high and centered on the positions of my ears. This mostly eliminates the room acoustic's effects.) The balance is not as smooth as that of the Aerial 5T, which I also reviewed for this issue, and there is both a slight lack of energy in the presence region and a slightly boosted mid-treble.

The red trace in fig.8 is again the spatially averaged response of the

805 D3 in my room. The excess of mid-treble energy is apparent when compared both with the BBC LS3/5a (blue trace) and the KEF LS50 (green),¹ both measured under identical conditions. However, the B&W lacks the LS3/5a's small peak between 1 and 2kHz, which adds a touch of nasality to that vintage speaker's sound. The LS50's in-room response shelves down in the top octaves compared with the

¹ See www.stereophile.com/content/kef-ls50-anniversary-model-loudspeaker.

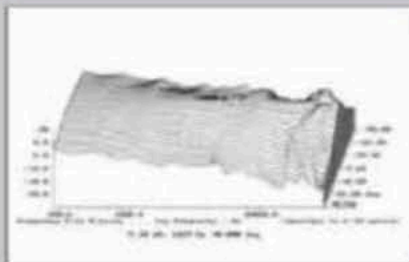


Fig.5 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90-5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5-90° off axis.

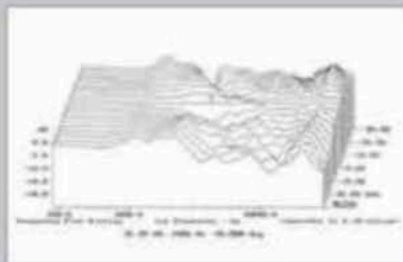


Fig.6 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 45-5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5-45° below axis.

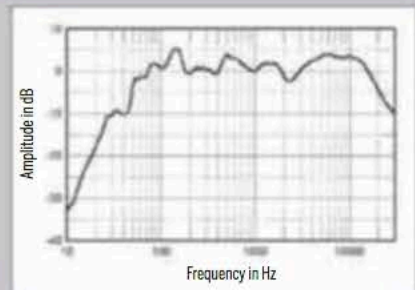


Fig.7 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, spatially averaged, 1/6-octave response in JA's listening room.

unsympathetic ancillary components, or in a room that itself emphasizes the highs. In this respect, the 805 D3 is not dissimilar to my 1978 pair of BBC LS3/5a minimonitors. But it was very noticeable when I set up the KEF LS50s, which at first sounded dull in comparison, with a more colored midrange. However, extended listening convinced me that the KEF's top octaves were more naturally balanced.

But I kept returning to the B&W's magic, uncolored, transparent midrange. With the Pass Labs amplifiers, the string orchestra in Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia* sounded gloriously natural, rich, and detailed, with a solidly gutty foundation provided by the cellos and basses. Patricia Barber's vulnerable contralto in "A Taste of Honey" sent shivers down my spine, as did Robert Plant's tortured tenor in "Since I've Been Loving You," from *How the West Was Won*. And again, there was that clarity: the Rhodes piano John Paul Jones plays in the verses of "Loving You" before he switches to Hammond for the guitar solo isn't that loud in the mix, but was audible enough through the B&Ws to make musical sense.

Summing Up

I very much enjoyed my time with the Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3. It is a superbly engineered, superb-sounding thoroughbred of a speaker. Its transparency, dynamic-range capability, and combination of low-frequency weight and control are something special. That somewhat elevated high treble will make it fussy when it comes to system and room matching, but in the right circumstances—and especially if piano recordings dominate your playlists—this might be all the speaker you'll need, at a lower price than you might think you have to pay.

To return to the question I posed at the start of this review: Is the 805 D3 the successor to my beloved Silver

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Source Linn Sondek LP12 turntable with Lingo power supply, Linn Ekos tonearm, Linn Arkiv B cartridge.

Digital Sources Aurender N10 music server; Ayre Acoustics C-5xe^{MP} universal player; dCS Rossini CD player & Rossini Clock; PS Audio PerfectWave DirectStream D/A converter with Bridge II network adaptor; Meridian Ultra-DAC; AudioQuest JitterBug, UpTone Audio ReGen USB cleaner-uppers; Mac mini running Pure Music 3, Audirvana, Twonky server; iPad Mini running PlugPlay, Aurender apps; Ayre Acoustics QA-9 USB A/D converter.

Phono Preamplifier Channel D Seta L.

Power Amplifiers MBL Corona C15, Pass Labs XA60.5 (both monoblocks).

Loudspeakers Aerial Acoustics 5T, Rogers LS3/5a, KEF LS50.

Cables Digital: AudioQuest Coffee. USB: Canare AES/EBU. Interconnect (balanced): AudioQuest Wild Blue, Cardas Clear. Speaker: Kubala-Sosna Elation!. AC: Kubala-Sosna Elation!, manufacturers' own.

Accessories Target TT-5 equipment racks; Ayre Acoustics Myrtle Blocks; ASC Tube Traps, RPG Abffusor panels; Shunyata Research Dark Field cable elevators; Audio Power Industries 116 Mk.II & PE-1 AC line conditioners (hard drive, computers). AC power comes from two dedicated 20A circuits, each just 6' from breaker box. —John Atkinson

Signature? For the answer to that question, you'll have to wait for me to retrieve those quarter-century-old speakers from my storage unit and write about the comparison in a Follow-Up. Stay tuned. ■

measurements, continued

B&W; in that respect the KEF's in-room behavior resembles that of the Aerial 5T. Both speakers sound less "brilliant" than the B&W, but I believe this is actually more neutral in-room behavior, given the increased absorptivity of the room furnishings in the high treble. The 805 D3 has a little more upper bass than the LS3/5a, but, like the KEF, its ported alignment results in a faster rolloff below the midbass.

Turning to the time domain, the Bowers & Wilkins' step response on the tweeter axis (fig.9) reveals that both drive-units are connected in positive acoustic polarity, but with the tweeter's output leading that of the woofer. In fact, the very slight discontinuity just before the 4ms mark suggests that the drive-units blend best if the listener's ears are slightly below the tweeter axis—although, as fig.5 showed, if you

sit much lower, a suckout develops in the crossover region. The cumulative spectral-decay or waterfall plot on the tweeter axis (fig.10) reveals a superb lack of delayed energy across the audioband.

The B&W 805 D3's measured performance indicates that it has a somewhat "tailored" frequency response in the treble, but in all other respects there is nothing amiss. —John Atkinson

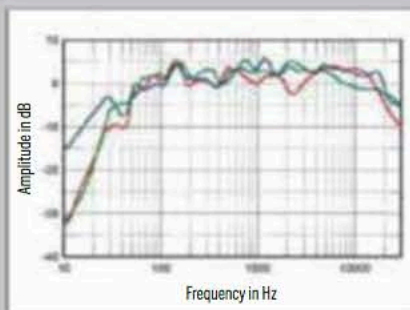


Fig.8 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, spatially averaged, $\frac{1}{6}$ -octave response in JA's listening room (red); of KEF LS50 (green); and of BBC LS3/5a (blue).

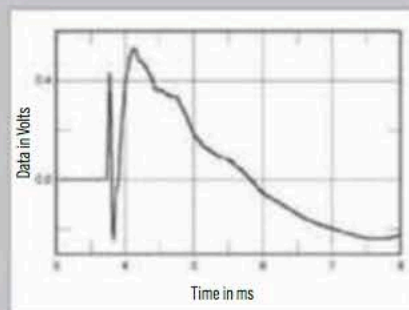


Fig.9 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, step response on tweeter axis at 50" (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

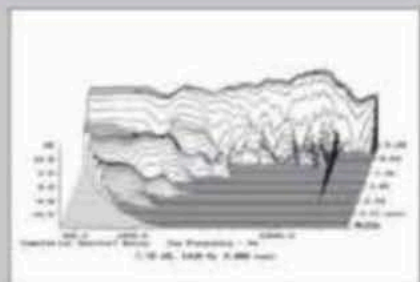


Fig.10 Bowers & Wilkins 805 D3, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50" (0.15ms risetime).