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ISSUE 144

Thiel's **TERRIFIC** **NEW CS2.4**

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Thiel CS2.4 Loudspeaker

Neil Gader

Query: How do you make a seventy-pound floorstanding loudspeaker disappear? Well, you could hire some muscle and haul it out of the room. Or, you could consider Thiel Audio's CS2.4. It has the uncanny ability to generate a w-i-d-e soundstage with impeccable imaging and then, faster than a Buddy Rich rim shot, vanish into thin air.

The Thiel CS2.4 is indeed fast. *Fastidious* also describes every aspect of this loudspeaker. From the precision tolerances and finish of the cabinetry and transducers to the superb quality of the packing materials, it exhibits a near-obsessive attention to detail.

Like the CS2.3 it replaces, the CS2.4 is a three-way bass-reflex system that benefits from some evolutionary changes. Thiel designs and builds its metal-diaphragm transducers. The 1" dome-tweeter and 3.5" midrange are coincident-array designs—a driver-within-a-driver setup, sometimes called “coaxial.” The drivers share a single voice coil and mechanical crossover but—in the CS2.4—use a neodymium magnet for improved sensitivity. Additionally the venting has been improved, increasing thermal efficiency, reducing resonances, and making the transducer an easier load to drive. The 8" inverted-dome woofer boasts improved sensitivity, and the all new 7.5" x 11" passive radiator adds 2dB more output. First-order crossovers are employed throughout, with crossover points of 1kHz and 4kHz. The highly rigid cabinet uses 1"-thick walls and a massive 3" front baffle. The baffle is also marginally thicker than before, and the radius has been modified to further reduce diffraction effects. In classic Thiel fashion the front baffle is sloped backward for correct time alignment between the woofer and the tweeter/midrange.



Thiel's optional “Outriggers” were supplied for added stability in my carpeted listening room. They are 17"-long flat aluminum brackets that are secured in the existing footer holes in the base of the CS2.4. The ends of the Outriggers angle outward beyond the edges of the base, widening the footprint of the speaker; they are pre-drilled to accept the sharp footers that come with each pair of CS 2.4's.

Note: Thiel's set-up parameters need to be respected. Its instruction manual states that eight feet is the minimum distance the listener should be seated from the speakers to permit the drivers to fully integrate—a recommendation entirely consistent with first-order designs. Thus seating height and distance is a significant variable in mini-

mizing lobing effects and creating a coherent sound. I preferred to be slightly lower in my seat at the minimum distance my small listening room limited me to. This created a richer, more textured sound particularly with low-bari-tone vocalists like Tom Waits [*Mule Variations*; Epitaph].

The character of the CS2.4 was bright, bold, and expressive, not warmly romantic yet not coldly clinical either. Although not a “hot cocoa by the hearth” kind of speaker, the CS2.4 surprised me with a full-throated openness and expansiveness that I've found lacking in some other Thiel designs. The treble had a “right now” immediacy and clarity that bordered on an electrostat. Following Audra McDonald's *a cappella*

introduction in “Lay Down Your Head,” [*How Glory Goes*; Nonesuch], the entrance of the harp and string quartet was breathtaking in the intricacy of the softest details and the clarity of the space they occupied. Clearly the CS2.4 is a speaker that elucidates the minutiae of music with a resolving power on a par with any speaker in this price range.

There is a sophistication to this Thiel’s sound that is a balanced mixture of extension, micro- and macro-dynamics, speed, and transparency. A recording that shows these sonic attributes was Nickel Creek’s self-titled debut album [Sugar Hill, SACD]. Nickel Creek is an acoustic trio with a fresh folk/country/pop fusion style; its blazing instrumentals incorporate bluegrass banjo, violin, mandolin, guitar, and acoustic bass. During each track the mandolin, tiny-bodied and highly percussive, and the bluegrass banjo possessed all the crisp articulation and speed of the real things. Characteristic of the mandolin, the clatter of the flat-pick off the strings almost matched the volume of the string note being struck. The banjo had a forward sound, accurately pushy in its aggressiveness. The guitar, larger and warmer, seemed a little thin in body resonance, however. Sara Watkins’s soaring violin imparted rich energy from its soundboard, but as it neared its upper-octave limits it grew a bit constricted. Images were reproduced with locked-tight stability and pristine edge definition. On a reference piano recording like *Live At Bernie’s* [Groove Note, SACD], the Thiels wrapped themselves around the warmish tonality of Bill Cunliffe’s grand conveying the lush soundboard and Cunliffe’s gentle modulation of the sustain pedal. My one reservation was the coolness the Thiel displayed in the top octaves—a faint hardness depriving the keyboard’s hammers of some of their felt cushion, and attenuating the more delicate interplay of harmonics.


Bass extension was taut and plumbed confidently into the low 30Hz region, offering as much bass as most of us desire (unless your last name is Richter). If there was any overhang or bloating attributable to the passive radiator, it was subtle, indeed—low- and

mid-bass notes were tuneful and quick, with natural bloom. Loudspeakers often “thicken” and congeal the lower octaves of a piano, but the CS2.4 never lost sight of individual notes or fast-tempo chord patterns. During “Wrapped Around Your Finger” [*Synchronicity*; A&M, SACD] the marriage of Sting’s melodic bass line steered cleanly free of Stewart Copeland’s inventive kick drum rhythms, the textural quality of each unfudged by the other. And during “Murder By Numbers,” I could hear the complete kick drum—from the foot pedal impacting the skin from behind to the depth charge assault out the front. Speaking of murder, there was Copeland’s ripping snare drum being murdered beat by beat, each thwack conveying its own transient signature.

It’s a tribute to Thiel’s cabinet rigidity and baffle design that this relatively large speaker is able to soundstage and image as tightly as a mini-monitor. Orchestral soundstage reproduction was as wide and as deep as I’ve encountered in my listening room. And the CS2.4 achieved these results honestly without recessing the tonal balance or sucking out the upper mids. The speaker also delights in properly scaling orchestral images, especially cello and bass sections and the immediate ambient envelope around them; the quality of the midbass plays a large role in recreating the hall acoustic. This was where the CS2.4 was at its most satisfying: not merely imaging in the sterile vacuum of a recording studio but suggesting the reverberant “life” of the ambient space surrounding the direct sound of a player’s instrument.

If there’s a single speed bump that listeners should note prior to dashing off a check, it’s a trait in the lower treble region that some will find persuasive and others bothersome. On a naturalistic recording of solo violin like Arturo Delmoni’s *Bach, Kreisler, Ysaye* [Water Lily Records], it can be heard as a silvery additive—a narrow spot-light illuminating the fiddle’s upper harmonics. A vocal example of this trait can be heard with former Police frontman Sting. He has an upper register that sounds slightly hoarse, like air rushing past an alto

saxophone reed. On a song like the aforementioned “Murder By Numbers,” where he gives his upper range a workout, the Thiels make it easier to key on this throaty detail, at times almost to the point of distraction. The retrieval of this embroidered harmonic and transient information is interesting in and of itself, but more than what one would likely hear in an unamplified venue. Like a little extra vanilla icing on a chocolate cake it doesn’t upend the overall balance of the speaker. But it’s there.

For the past quarter century Thiel Audio’s high-end credentials have become near legendary. The CS2.4 is such a sonically satisfying loudspeaker, nearly faultless in so many parameters, that I almost feel a little greedy for wishing for less—as in a bit less treble energy. But that’s the very personal nature of the pursuit of the absolute sound. Near perfection is always elusive, perfection itself an unattainable grail. On a quest for a loudspeaker? Any audiophile worthy of the name needs to hear the CS2.4. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Three-way, reflex type
 Drivers: 1" dome tweeter/3.5" coincident mid-range, 8" woofer, 7.5" x 11" passive radiator
 Frequency Response: 36Hz–25kHz ±2dB
 Sensitivity: 87dB
 Impedance: 4 ohms (3 ohms minimum)
 Dimensions: 11" x 14" x 41.5"
 Weight: 70 lbs.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Sota Cosmos Series III turntable; SME V pick-up arm; Shure V15xMR cartridge; Sony C222ES SACD multichannel, Sony DVP-9000ES; Plinius 8200 Mk2 integrated amp; Placette Volume Control preamp; Nordost Valhalla and Blue Heaven cabling; Kimber Kable BiFocal XL, Wireworld Equinox III, Wireworld Silver Electra & Kimber Palladian power cords; Richard Gray line conditioners

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

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Price: \$3900 (Optional outriggers: \$250)

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