



# dynaudio

## Confidence C1 loudspeakers - A State of Awe

as reviewed by Chip Stern



Over the past few years, I couldn't help but take notice of how in review after review the Linn 1.1 inevitably invited comparisons to each and every successive roll-out of state-of-the-art CD and Universal Disc Players, the Unidisk having cemented its stature as a paradigm for no-compromise digital front end components ...a reference point by which we may explicate the musical qualities that matter most. *As good as the Linn 1.1 ...better than the Linn 1.1 ...comparable to the top-of-the-line Unidisk...*any way you slice it, whatever highly touted front end masterpiece you might care to hear, from the likes of Esoteric and Zanden, sooner or later the Linn 1.1 would be referenced as a no-compromise benchmark of resolution and musicality.

No, this is not a Linn 1.1 review ...but I commence on a typically tangential note, because in like manner, I fully expect the Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors to so resonate in the hearts and minds audiophiles drawn to the literal truth of a musical experience...a line in the sand, an absolute reference point for audio verity. At first blush, some listeners might be taken aback by the notion of a \$6500 price tag for these diminutive loudspeakers and their lovely integral stands, but hell's bells, the much esteemed B&W Silver Signature mini-monitors went for around \$8500 and no one batted an eye.

Still, fixating on price alone without taking into account the C1's extraordinary levels of absolute audio verity, is precisely the kind of hasty, misguided, superficial judgment one might expect to hear repeated over and over by embittered, smell-your-own-farts wannabees on audiophile chat rooms—not what one would expect from true musical pilgrims wandering in the high end wilderness looking for an absolute reference standard you can bet the farm on. Because when you adjudge the uncompromising levels of resolution, linearity, frequency extension, image specificity, depth of field and soundstaging breadth that the Confidence C1 so effortlessly delivers against the performance attributes of stand-mounted and floor-standing loudspeakers costing considerably more, and when you factor in the state of the art quality of Dynaudio's proprietary transducers, internal components and overall construction, there is no question but that this is a world class loudspeaker by any standard, and as such, *might actually be seriously undervalued in terms of their potential for absolute performance levels.*

And while the basic laws of physics would seem to mitigate against them extending down into the nether regions of deep bass where organ pedals pop, hip hoppers bop (and your neighbors call the cops), *the Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors represent a paradigm of aural purity and absolute musicality that is breathtaking...every time I sit down to listen to these loudspeakers, I find myself in a state of awe—the experience of an actual musical event is simply spellbinding.*

But Chip, they're so ...tiny. Yes, and short people have no reason to live. Haven't aspiring audiophiles been jived enough by the faux promises of big box after humongous big box to realize that it ain't the dog in the fight, it's the fight in the dog? Alas, more often than not audiophiles echo the big eyes-small ears predilections of those chain store-customers they feel so superior to, assuming without much critical analysis that bigger is invariably better and that large floor-standing speakers are the way to go if your priorities are a bigger sound—meaning bigger bass, higher sound pressure levels and a larger, more realistically scaled depictions of acoustic space.

No pilgrims, we are not dismissing big, floor-standing, full frequency loudspeakers nor the men who love (and design) them; long-time readers should be aware that there are many such designs that I covet and admire. All things being equal, the real issue is neither one of size nor complexity—nor price—but of musical veracity. High quality mini-monitors may indeed offer a more coherent sound, with better soundstaging and spatial cues, but having said that, there are numerous full-range, floor-standing loudspeakers that image like a champ. By the same token, mini-monitors are generally not going to pressurize a room as fully or effectively as a big floor-stander or provide as much bass, but then as exceptions invariably prove the rule, that still depends on the speaker and your room—smaller speakers may indeed offer more profoundly focused, tuneful, believable bass. More significantly, with multi-driver loudspeakers, the difficulties designers face in trying to integrate transducers into a coherent, organic system increase logarithmically; controlling cabinet resonances and colorations becomes more challenging; and with larger, front mounted drivers and bigger baffles, diffractions become a bigger issue, and that can adversely impact imaging.

The conclusions one may draw? That one should evaluate speakers on a case by case basis, purely on their own merits and performance parameters, their potential for positive and negative interactions with one's listening room, and based on one's listening tastes and expectations.

Having said all that, big things often do come in small packages, and straight out of the box, the Dynaudio Confidence C1 loudspeakers cut a dashing, enigmatic figure for a mini monitor, what with their "upside down" alignment of the woofer and tweeter, extended external baffle panel, its deep yet slender cabinet ported cabinet and curious lantern like shape—suggesting as it does a post-modern depiction of a circa-1890s London street lamp under which Jack the Ripper himself might wait furtively, the better to slash and berate self-important audio critics.

Once again, there are many listeners for whom the ultimate truth and musicality of a loudspeaker is not so much a factor of how many transducers you can stuff in a single cabinet, nor an argument about the propensity of a 400 pound floor-standing monolith to provide bass extension well down into the bottom octave and below (all the way into their downstairs neighbors' living room). No, for those listeners who prize clarity, linearity, coherence and

spatial realism above all other qualities in a really great loudspeaker, while they might indeed enjoy the sensuous, visceral lap dance a big floor-standing speaker is capable of delivering, the honest, forthright purity and sonic virtues of a good two-way offer the promise of more compelling long term commitment, and just as often as not, may turn out to be the girl that you marry.

Again, just to run this idea up the flagpole one more time, we're not dismissing the virtues of a well-designed, full-range, multi-driver floor-standing loudspeaker, cost be damned, and many designers I respect have made a compelling argument for the limitations of the humble two-way. I'm not here to dispute that.

However, my initial curiosity about the Dynaudio Confidence C1 loudspeakers derives in part from practical considerations: such as integrating loudspeakers into a relatively modest acoustic environment, such as the 20' X 14' X 10' room which functions as the reference listening space in my post-World War I-era Upper Manhattan apartment. In addition, my initial forays into high end audio were inspired by the sonic shock I experienced when returning to New York City from Ocean Way Studios in Hollywood back in the spring of 1994 with some cassette roughs of the un-mastered tracks we'd just recorded for my production of Ginger Baker's first jazz recording, *Going Back Home* (Atlantic). It seemed as though every loudspeaker system I auditioned my recordings on represented a radical re-mix. From my admittedly limited experiences of the recording studio, I found that engineers and musicians often depended on the straightforward quality and sonic directness of two-driver mini-monitors for their most critical tracking and playback purposes. I guess my audio pilgrimage was



inspired by my desire to find a loudspeaker that I could bet the ranch on, one that *functioned as a true honest broker*—delivering the unvarnished truth of the music as I had initially experienced it in the studio, without imposing its own perspective ...*a true mastering quality loudspeaker*. "Just the facts, 'maam, just the facts," was how Jack Webb's Sgt. Joe Friday used to consul witnesses on the '50s television classic, *Dragnet*, and represented what I was in search of. For years I assumed this was a quixotic quest—until I encountered the Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors.

### **Handsome Is As Handsome Does**

As I've already suggested, the Confidence C1 projects an elegantly simple, post-modern vision of the mini-monitor with its sleek, buttoned down appointments, slender cabinet and gently tapered external baffle—in which form follows function, as it gradually narrows from top to bottom (thus suggesting a Victorian lantern to this scribe), mirroring the circumference of its top mounted bass/midrange driver and bottom mounted tweeter.

Nor do such details represent superfluous design conceits, but rather reflect a thoroughgoing attention to sonic purity and the desire to create as simple a loudspeaker design as possible, thus establishing as direct a connection as possible to the listener.

"The cabinet features a forward mounted high-density baffle that offers extremely low-resonance and decouples the drivers from the main cabinet itself," according to Mike Manousselis, Vice-President of Sales & Marketing for Dynaudio North America. "The baffle itself employs a sandwich-style of construction with separate 40 mm and 16 mm thick MDF layers, which are then fused and bonded to the main cabinet body."

*What then is the reasoning behind the lantern-like shape of the baffle, the narrow yet deeply ported configuration of the main speaker cabinet, and the positioning of the tweeter below the mid/woofer?*

"Well," Manousselis explains, "by using the external baffle, it affords us the opportunity to employ a larger mid/woofer than such a narrow cabinet would otherwise be able to accommodate. We typically refer to our 17cm diameter mid/woofers as a 6.5 inch designs and the 28 mm diameter tweeters as 1.1 inch designs, but I guess that all depends upon how one

rounds up to the nearest increments of inches—the metric measurements are exact though. Likewise, the manner in which we taper the baffle allows us to minimize those extraneous reflections and distortions that larger baffles introduce into the sonic equation, which as you are aware, can have a deleterious effect on imaging. Furthermore, a solid aluminum module is integrated directly into the baffle, which in turn is where the tweeter is mounted—to further isolate it from those potential colorations and vibrations that would ordinarily be introduced into the sonic equation by such close proximity to the mid/woofer.

"The cabinet design allows the speaker to be as narrow as possible at the point where we position the tweeter which significantly decreases high frequency diffraction. The use of a separate baffle, with its uniquely tapered shape, allows for the cabinet to be effectively wider at the point where the mid/woofer is positioned without adversely effecting the tweeter's diffractive properties. The inverted driver array is a technique Dynaudio has effectively employed in designs utilizing its most advanced transducers. The inverted array essentially offers a physical correction for the time arrival of higher frequencies by placing the tweeter at a path further from the ear. The secondary benefit is that low frequencies do not suffer the effects of early reflections and room induced colorations that such close proximity to the floor boundary would induce. We found that we were able to achieve a much cleaner, more natural bass response as the woofer was raised off of the floor."

Such sonic reasoning aside, one thing you can depend upon in Dynaudio loudspeaker designs, and which really distinguishes the Confidence C1 from other speakers in the mini-monitor category, is the level of quality which goes into Dynaudio's proprietary transducers and internal components—drivers of such advanced performance quality, one could make a compelling argument that the speaker's retail list price, while indeed daunting for mere mortals, is actually pretty damn reasonable considering what it delivers in terms of sheer musicality. Not surprisingly, Manousselis readily agrees.

"While the Confidence C1 are priced at \$6500 per pair, no one in the know would ever think of it as expensive. But that's because we're intimately familiar with exactly what goes into this model. The materials and construction of the cabinet represent a small part of this design, and probably have less influence on the price than the drivers. That would mostly be a factor of the ultra-refined Esotar<sup>2</sup> tweeter and the advanced, dispersion-optimized MSP mid/woofer which uses a 3 inch aluminum voice coil on a Kapton former mated to a high efficiency magnet system. In the end, the price is solely a factor of the loudspeaker's performance capabilities and the materials cost of the premium drivers.

"The C1 was further evolved from the C2 and C4 models, with cabinet and driver technologies directly taken from the development of the Confidence line. But the C1 was engineered from a blank slate and the driver parameters were optimized for synergistic performance. The Esotar<sup>2</sup> tweeter features a new, extremely efficient magnetic material, which together with the light weight aluminum voice coil, yields an ultra-dynamic impulse response and offers extremely high power handling capabilities. A new type of material is utilized for the soft dome, which also uses a special new coating that provides a smooth frequency roll-off without peaks or dips, even up to the highest notes. The tweeter also features a damping chamber integrated onto the rear of its body, to absorb any back wave energy. The impulse response is ten times greater than that of the previous Esotar tweeter, while its physical dimensions have been made much more compact in part to a new, higher density neodymium.

"The mid/woofer utilizes Dynaudio's characteristic MSP (magnesium silicate polymer) geometrically optimized cone diaphragms, mated to 75 mm (3-inch) aluminum voice coils on a Kapton former, powered by highly efficient neodymium magnets, mounted into a stiff, low-resonance, low-mass aluminum basket. The speakers, despite their conservative 85dB sensitivity rating, have an extremely high input peak-power handling capacity, which enables them to generate very substantial peak output levels.

*Given their level of transducer sophistication, and Dynaudio's dedication to minimizing distortions and creating something akin to perfect piston response, might one assume that the simplicity of your crossover network only adds to the purity and coherence of an optimized two-way system?*

"As with all Dynaudio loudspeaker designs, the drivers are designed to the highest level of refinement to operate perfectly synergistically," Manousselis states proudly. "This enables the effective use of a simpler, first order, 6dB/per octave crossover. In the process of optimizing the synergy between transducers and the crossover network, we saw no particular advantage to bi-wiring, as it wouldn't offer any further improvement to the sonic performance of the system. The components were selected based on both scientific measurements and listening tests. The Confidence models incorporate a separate chamber for the crossover network, which features a glass-fiber reinforced circuit board with extra thick copper traces, low loss dielectric capacitors and zero compression resistors, all hand selected and matched to the tightest tolerances. The first order slope also allows for a correct phase response and extremely controlled dynamics.

"And while the 4 ohm impedance may seem to be less amplifier friendly on paper, the impedance curve is exceptionally linear, and this means that the amp sees a relatively easy to drive 4 ohm load. There are numerous very difficult to drive 8 ohm speakers out there. This is not a problem with the C1, because as mentioned previously, these speakers have an extremely high input peak power handling capacity.

### System Synergy & Set-Up

I really spread the prayer rug out and took my time in evaluating these babies, in part because I loved them and didn't want them to go bye-bye, and because I felt a responsibility to readers to give them extensive break-in time and to see how my earliest enthusiasm stood up to a vast array of listening tests over an extended period of time. I wanted to see if I could discover a kink in their armor. Not only didn't I find any real weaknesses, but I rarely if ever found myself wanting a sub-woofer. The bass on the Confidence C1 is that good, and while more energy below 30 Hz wouldn't be unwelcome, in truth it is as superfluous as tits on a whale.

I was also caught short for a while in terms of amplifiers with enough muscle to really make the C1's sit up and sing to their fullest possible potential.

After an extended conjugal visit, I returned the 500 watt McCormack DNA-500 with a tinge of regret, and while more modestly endowed integrated amps such as the now-departed 70 watt solid state Sim Audio i-5 (since superseded by the Sim Audio i-5.3), the 70 watt Linn Classik and the 28 watt vacuum tubed Mesa Tigris worked surprisingly well during initial burn-in on a short wall/secondary system set-up in my computer room, I knew I needed another level of power to really apprehend what these loudspeakers were capable of.

It was when the Rogue M150 monoblocks finally arrived (for a future review in *Positive Feedback OnLine*) that I finally felt like I could bet the ranch on what I was hearing from top to bottom in my signal chain. These monoblocks—which derive more from the circuit topology



and technical advances of the imposing two hundred pound Rogue Zeus than from the M120 monoblocks which they superseded—are KT88 based tube amps with an uncommon amount of elegance and sheer drive, putting out an honest 100 watts (and then some) in triode and 150 watts in Ultralinear. Without jumping the gun (too much) on our upcoming *Positive Feedback* review, let me just say again that these amps are an eight-balled

motherfucker, and that running them in triode mode was more than sufficient to bring the Confidence C1 alive and swinging with terrific timing and a true to life tonality. In fact, I was rather surprised how effortless it was to drive these speakers in triode, and the Ultralinear option was mainly deployed when I wanted to really bring the dynamics of non-acoustic, heap big studio productions more to the fore. The Rogues were remarkably clear and articulate and

never screamed, "Look at me, I'm a tube amp..." (nor did they evince any of the sonic faux pas of standard issue solid state). Rogue Audio [www.rogueaudio.com](http://www.rogueaudio.com)

Of course, part of that cleanliness and dynamic drive of my system is attributable to the totally tweaked up-freaked out nature of the *Gastrointestinals* (Power) and *Neurologicals* (Cabling) I employ, which might indeed represent overkill to some of you, but for me, function as components in their own right, and by allowing me to hear all of my components at their peak performance levels, provide a gaudy but level playing field for me to listen analytically by proxy on the readers' behalf (during conjugal visits with gear most of you do not have access to, let alone extended audition time)...as well as for my own intimate immersions into sound and silence. To that end, I have a pair of dedicated 20 amp lines, one of which handles my computer and air conditioner, while the other handle my audio system in the adjoining room, which I access by virtue of a 25-foot JPS Labs Kaptovator Outlet Center terminating in three hospital quality outlets behind my amp stand and loudspeakers. There on a table behind the soundstage I have a stack comprised of a 20 amp Equi=Tech 2Q with 1000 watts continuous current capability, plugged into the Kaptovator Outlet Center with a "sell your only daughter into white slavery-priced" JPS Labs Aluminata AC Cord—absolutely the finest high current-power device I've ever heard...it's sonic impact on every macro and micro level is astonishing. Both of the Rogue M150's are thus plugged into the Equi=Tech 2Q with...*tad-dah*, their own Aluminata AC cords. Then there is a Monster AVS 2000 Signature Automatic Voltage Stabilizer plugged into another outlet from the Kaptovator/20 amp line, while an Equi=Tech Q650 is plugged into the AVS 2000 with it's own dedicated Kaptovator AC cord; from the Q650 I run two Kaptovator AC Outlet Centers to my front end racks around the bend on the short wall, one for digital, and one for analog components. JPS Labs [www.jps-labs.com](http://www.jps-labs.com)



There on the rack I run a superb set of front end components with which I also have total confidence. At the heart of the system is the VTL 5.5 Line Stage Preamplifier, which sonically and ergonomically is as good a value in a tubed pre-amp as you are ever likely to hear. It's my old standby (I also employ a Rogue Audio Magnum 99, excellent, too, in its own way), and while the 5.5 doesn't wear its tube-i-ness on its shirtsleeve, it offers all of the detail, harmonic richness, depth of field, and midrange layering one would expect from a great tube pre-amp, but it does so without the



sappy bloom or muted top end that makes some pre-amps sound more My-Fi than Hi-Fi. The 5.5 maintains steely control of the bass, throws a divine soundstage, and optimizes levels of detail in every related component that contributes to a blissfully relaxed, naturalistic sense of live ambience and spatial cues.

Having lent this pre-amp out to some better-heeled audiophiles than myself, I can report back that it took on pre-amps costing five times as much without breaking a sweat, save in the imagination of said audiophile, who realized that my interminable lectures about audio performance value were not the product of price-point envy. Standing above it in the audio rack, toggle switches offer easy access to various functions, such as the mute and phase switches, and the 5.5 also features a useful Balance control (that is out of the circuit in the center detent position).

However, as good as the VTL 5.5 has always been, during the course of this review process, I received some tweaks which positively transformed it into an even more remarkable pre-amp, so much so it was practically a new component.

An Acoustic Zen Gargantua II and a long run of the new JPS Labs Superconductor 3 interconnects initially fleshed out the signal chain, while in lieu of the arrival of the new Superconductor 3 speaker cables and interconnects, I employed a single run of the 5AWG Superconductor 2 speaker cables (notable for their linearity, timbral accuracy, solid bass extension, and a wealth of natural midrange detail and smooth top end extension), and a set of Superconductor 2 in between the pre-amp and the Linn 1.1.

Because the VTL 5.5 offers the option of fully balanced output, and the Rogue M150 can run in single-ended or balanced mode, I was looking forward to the arrival of a long run of the balanced JPS Labs Superconductor 3 interconnects, as I suspected they might provide a significant enhancement in resolution. Well, the difference in the performance of the VTL/Rogue pre/amp combo was like night and day. The frequency extension, texture and immediacy of the pre-amp was more pronounced; everything seemed bigger, quieter and more expansive; the bass response, rhythm and pacing, image specificity and inner detail were greatly enhanced—which makes the VTL even more of a price/performance knockout at \$3500. VTL [www.vtl.com](http://www.vtl.com)

As for the differences between the Superconductor 3 speaker cables and interconnects, and their tumescent descendants? Well, JPS has eliminated the solid shield of the Superconductor 2 which made them fairly stiff and difficult to dress, and in its place the Superconductor 3 are far more ductile and easy to work with in tight places (where the Super 2 could literally lift a component off of the shelf). What made people put up with the anomalies of the Superconductor 2 was the fantastic bass response and clarity conveyed by JPS Labs proprietary Alumiloy conductors (an alloy of Aluminum and Copper with traces of other metals); some people seemed to feel there might even be a little too much bass (sounds like a system matching issue). The mid were clear and nicely layered, and it had a very smooth top end. They were quick and clear and tight and linear and stayed out of the way. The new Superconductor 3 have little audible signature, with even more immediacy and linearity than



the Super 2 ...they are, if anything, even smoother and quieter from top to bottom than the Super 2, with tighter, quicker more focused bass, more midrange layering and depth of field, and a top end with no audible artifacts that just seems to go up, up and away into the supersonic regions with no perfectible ceiling to the sound. However the most noticeable difference is in the

soundstaging...year ago, for all their linearity, punch and clarity, JPS cables and interconnects used to have greater soundstage width, but a fairly shallow front to back soundstage. Now, there is infinitely more depth and spatial dimensionality, without compromising the transient speed and top to bottom neutrality.

As if that wasn't enough, Robert Lee of Acoustic Zen, who is very busy making Adagio loudspeakers these days, was nice enough to send me a sample of his new top of the line

power cord, the Acoustic Zen Absolute, which employs a proprietary combination of zero crystal silver and copper. I'd been using the Acoustic Zen Gargantua AC cord on the VTL pre-amp and Linn disc player, but when I put the new Absolute AC cord on the pre-amp, running in fully balanced operation, I was startled to hear even greater bass, detail and transparency in an even more expansive soundstage. The Acoustic Zen Absolute may just be the best front end AC cord I've ever heard—uncanny resolution...and you could hear every positive change in cables and AC cords upstream in the Confidence C1 mini-monitors, so revealing and neutral are their performance parameters. That however is a double-edged sword, as the C1's could just as well tell you way more than you ever wanted to know about some of the lean cuisine upstream in your signal chain. These speakers operate at an absolute level of reproduction, and as we've stated numerous times, complement the very best gear by getting out of the way and letting them do their job. Acoustic Zen [www.acousticzen.com](http://www.acousticzen.com)

Which brings us to the centerpiece of our signal chain, the Linn Unidisk 1.1 Universal Player—one of the finest audio achievements of the past 25 years. The queen bee of the Unidisk family of universal players, the Linn 1.1 brings digital performance in every disc format as tantalizingly close to that of fine analog as I might ever hope to hear. With discrete signal paths for Redbook CD, SACD and DVD formats, the Linn's extraordinary timbral accuracy, resolution of low level acoustic cues and ambient information, its extraordinary bass extension, midrange detail and natural portrayal of high frequency information (which thus translates into a skin-tingling sense of physical immediacy, acoustic intimacy and endless vistas of black, transparent space), knows few peers. The Linn represents an absolute standard of front end resolution, a component I feel that I can bet the ranch on every time—awe inspiring yet supremely musical in a manner that never calls attention to itself. Oh, sure, there is plenty of buzz, and well-deserved at that, about a number of super ultra-high end digital front ends. *But dig, they all reference the Linn Unidisk 1.1 as a means towards establishing their own audio pedigree, and what does that tell us class?* Thus people tell me that the new Esoteric offers a more profound, subjectively pleasing depiction of midrange details *than the Linn 1.1*. Okay. And of course, the renowned Zanden makes the *Linn 1.1* sound boxy by comparison (at only four times the price). Hey, even Linn plays the game. Every dealer, user and rep I've ever spoken to gets a glazed-over look in their eyes when speaking of the legendary Linn CD-12; they all agree that it sounds better on CD playback than the Linn 1.1, and that while the Linn 1.1 comes close, very close, the CD-12 is the standard against which all other comers must be judged. However, the Linn 1.1 must have come pretty damn close, because much to everybody's chagrin, the CD-12 was discontinued, and while the jungle drums tell Bwana Chip that some pretty heavy R&D is reportedly in motion (and that an all-singing/all-dancing successor to the CD-12 may well manifest itself before natives of the planet Krypton and other audiophiles of the future), the Linn 1.1 remains the standard against which all other digital front ends are judged. An Acoustic Zen Gargantua II and a one meter run of JPS Labs new Superconductor 3 interconnects fleshed out the signal chain. LINN [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk)

So exalted in fact is the Linn1.1's playback—there is so much more *THERE*, there—that I found myself turning to other digital and analog sources during the audition process, just to discount the overwhelming, indisputable authority of the Linn: these included the tubed Njoe Tjoeb 4000, the California Audio Labs CL-20, a Marantz PMD430 Stereo Cassette Recorder (employing Monster Cable Sigma Retro Gold Interconnects) and an Audio-Technica AT822 OnePoint® X/Y Stereo DAT Microphone (with JPS Labs Superconductor FX Microphone Cable), and a Rega Research P25 Turntable (superseded by the Rega Research P5) outfitted with a Rega Research RB600 Tonearm (superseded by the Rega RB700) and the superb low output Grado Statement Master, tweaked with a Ringmat 330 through a Rogue Stealth Phono Pre-Amp (employing a JPS Labs Analog AC and Monster Cable Sigma Retro Gold Interconnects), atop a Signal Guard Isolation Stand. I also referenced a set of superb headphones (with the Mesa Tigris), the accurate, non-fatiguing Grado RS1, as well as amp and component stands from PolyCrystal, EchoBusters diffusive and absorptive panels, and a triptych of Argent Room Lens (a truly unique way of dealing with bass nodes and of fine tuning your soundstage).

As presently constituted, and as completed by the Dynaudio Confidence C1 loudspeakers, this system allows me to look deep into the nature of individual pieces of gear, without

compromises, without employing one piece of gear to make up for the failings of another. And while no one component or system may be said to be perfect, this is a system—as it currently stands—that allows me to delve deep into music in a way where the gear drops away, and all that remains is a sense of joy in our aural oasis, as we visit yet another new concert hall, a new club. You dig? And not surprisingly, it allows me to make pretty informed judgments about loudspeakers. As a result, during that interval in which I put on my geek hat and listen to the equipment for its own sake, I am able to provide a level playing field for loudspeakers, and thus act as a reasonably informed proxy for those searchers after musical truth and immersion heretofore denied an in-depth audition.

### **Listening Evaluations [The Money Shot]**

So why then do I place such a premium on the sonic verisimilitude of the Dynaudio Confidence C1?

The Dynaudio Confidence C1 are such exemplary loudspeakers on so many levels, I hardly know where to begin. I mean, they simply sounded marvelous on everything I tossed their way, and the more I heard the more I wanted to hear, in the way that truly great audio components force you to reassess every one of your favorite recordings, as if hearing them for the first time.

God, every time I sat down before these diminutive doors of perception it was as if experiencing music for the first time, on a more profound, layered level of texture and shading, dynamic nuance and timbral grace.

Such is the joy I felt in listening to master pianist Glenn Gould's elegiac swan song, *A State Of Wonder* (Sony Classical/Legacy S3K 87703) on New Year's Day, 2007, when I finally got around to my final round of reference recordings for a conclusive listening session. The more I think of it, the less I feel compelled to say about my personal stash of listening experiences, save that most of the reproductive qualities I cherish in these loudspeakers are to be found in great abundance throughout Gould's reflective final performances of Bach's Goldberg Variations.

I mean if speakers do piano right, fuck all is there to say after that, right? Obviously the glory of these loudspeakers is their midrange, and in listening to the giddy percussive jauntiness of Gould's acrobatic two-handed crossing patterns on Variation 14 and the aquatic textural liquidity of Variation 15 (Canon in the Fifth), I was spellbound by the immediacy of music and my sense of the piano's physical dimensions. "How beautifully integrated the drivers are in this system, and how seamless the transition to the tweeter (at a crossover point of 1800 Hz)," I thought. Nor did I find the sound so narrowly defined at the sweet spot as to make my off-axis, adjacent room listening experiences less than realistic and involving, which again, goes right to the point about these speakers' greatness. You know how in the PhotoShop program there are all these layers of images you can overlay while maintaining and manipulating depth of field and perspective? Well, listening to the Confidence C1 in tandem with the JPS Labs, Acoustic Zen, VTL 5.5, Rogue M150, Linn 1.1 and Rega 25, I had a pretty refined signal chain to work with; no weak links; with plenty of low level resolution and power. I was hearing all of these layers of textural and rhythmic detail, ambience and silence, attack and decay, reproduced with such micro-dynamic timing and timbre that the speakers seemed to strap me to Glenn's back in some spiritual papoose, braced for the ride. The degree to which this brought out the connections and distinctions between the instrument itself and its acoustic space was breathtaking, with and added acoustic leaf peeking through the pages of detail, in the person of Gould himself, humming along passionately.

The speakers were neither forward nor were they bright, but when the music rose to the occasion they sang crisply and quickly; there was enormous space behind the speakers, and notes that were meant to step forward to the front of the stage leapt vividly to the fore, then had the good graces to step back into the chorus when their dance was done. As a listener I felt as though I were at the apex of a capacious three-dimensional pyramid; spatial soundstage vistas and expansive horizons were astonishingly tactile, inside and outside, fore and aft, front and center; images seemed almost backlit, so stable and detailed, without glare or bloat, smearing or compression...I mean, I could literally see the stool, piano and sound board before me, and could experience the vastness of the piano's soundboard and physical

dimensions, much as the pianist might. The depiction of high frequencies was almost surreal, so transparently extended is that Esotar tweeter; complex harmonics and overtones came out airy and transparent, yet firmly defined, save that they weren't etched or edgy, sibilant or shiny. As for the bass, a foundation of speed and transient pop ...a speaker working effortlessly with an amp. So when Gould chooses to really pop a bass note, it sings, and notes in the line don't blur into one another ...I was feeling all the nuances of Gould's touch and his immense rhythmic command. Likewise, when he lingers on chords and let's them sustain, I could hear all the different levels of decay and pedal work, and when he chose to essay the inner voicings and poetic Uber-Harmonic implications of Bach's multi-tiered cathedrals of chords, the manner in which the Dynaudio's tracked Gould's rhythmic points of emphasis, was as spectral and textured as wind-chimes and fireflies on a summer's night.

A totally believable experience of a live piano ...better than live, if you ask me, a point Gould strained to make plain after abandoning what he felt were the compromised acoustics of the concert hall experience, for the democratic perfection and un-veiled intimacy of the recording studio—where he succeeded in making his perspective the same for all listeners. This is piano as one knows a piano actually sounds... as Gould came to know it through his artistic, sensitive accommodations with recording studio technology; as profound an experience for the bloke in the top row of the balcony as the top hat and tails ...down front—thousand dollar seats for everyone! And you cannot generally get that live ...LIVE, save for a few happy accidents replete with free cab rides and plates of comped sushi.

*This is what the audiophile experience is all about—complete immersion in the dynamic arc and textural over-leafs of Gould's performance, without compression or fatigue.*

### **Damn, Chip, play another one**

Well, they do piano okay, but how about vocals. Did you even have to ask? I listened to a lot but chose to zero in on side one of my venerable LP of Joni Mitchell's *Blue* (Reprise MS 2038). The track "Little Green" tells the story of a young artist giving up her baby for adoption, and the spare mix of Joni's sparkling flat top arpeggios and her angelic young voice with it's sing song recitative, purring lower register and vaulting highs, are portrayed with true to life presence and unsettling intimacy. By which I mean to say, that when Joni's voice comes forward in this simple mix, no one is moving her on to a stool in front of the stage, in front of the guitarist; she is talking to you, she is making a point of emphasis, she is projecting and you hear it as such because her voice is neither mega-phoned nor unnaturally italicized by an overly accommodating loudspeaker. Nor is there anything dry or analytical about the midrange—the depiction of tonal color employed on every note, with that splendid, wide-ranging soprano, is lush and mesmerizing. The Confidence C1 allow her guitar to shimmer, her voice to soar, and when she executes a lovely sustained diminuendo on the word "...sorrow..." you can hear how Joni gets a little closer to the microphone and allows the tail-end of her transient to fade into a dark blue horizon of silence just behind the guitar. Good source. Good speaker. Good signal chain. Goodnight, Irene...

For contrast, I put on Emmylou Harris's *Red Dirt Girl* (Nonesuch 79616-2) to hear how the Dynaudios would flesh out a far more processed voice, perfectly balanced in a textured, thorny, ambient electric mix—Emmylou's vocal instrument is seemingly compressed, gated, EQd and God-knows-what else to suggest something akin to an electric guitar. Yet in opening with "The Pearl" she is never overwhelmed by her densely webbed surroundings, a pallet of watercolors and neon distortions. You hear the producer's mix, not the speaker's.

Then, much as I have tested their mettle again and again, I reached for the big boys of wham, bam and thank you 'maam: my original LP issue of the Rolling Stones' *Tattoo You* (Rolling Stones Records COC 16052); some selectable delectables from the buffet table of funk, blues and soul that is Iron Chef James Brown on his 4-CD collection, *Star Time* (Polydor); and Miles Davis' 6-CD documentation of the Jarrett-Henderson-DeJohnette-Bartz quintet over four nights with percussionist Airto joining them on the second night, and guitarist John McLaughlin for their final two sets that Saturday—*The Cellar Door Sessions 1970* (Columbia/Legacy CBX 93814).



Photo credit: Deborah Feingold

On their signature anthem from the golden days of analog, "Start Me Up," Wyman's bass is beautifully centered, punchy and illuminated in the mix, while the C1's perfectly convey the rocking snap, swinging body and elemental timing of Watts' drums. With the Rogue M150 amps in triode, *The Weavers Looms Guild of Electric Guitars* that is Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards benefit from the uncompressed high frequency accuracy of the C1's, bringing back the Chess Studio's styled top end alive and bleeding in all their jangling attacks and lingering webs of distortions. The Dynaudio's tracked the tone and leading edge of Wyman's transient's perfectly, and like Joni Mitchell's voice, when he projected his bass with more emphasis, the dynamic arc of the phrase, the extra punch, was palpable and real...and acoustically balanced with the mix.

But probably not voiced with the copious bottom folks with cheap floor-standers get when they shove their speakers into the nearest corners ...more of a bass balance to the mix. I exaggerate, but heft on the bottom? How many dance clubs have you been to. No problem ...Chip to Scotty ...more power! Switching the Rogues from 100 watts triode to 150 watts Ultralinear conveyed less of a pure acoustic balance (though triode has more than enough punch for *moi*), and more of an amplified sound system's perspective; running the tubes in Ultralinear widened the soundstage, and made Wyman's bass more commodious and forward in the mix.

The lesson to be learned here is be sure to invest in good power, and plenty of it; the Rogue M150 Monoblocks represent damn good power indeed, at any price, let alone \$3999. You want even more clean, punchy, uncolored bass from these babies, it's there ...more power will bring it out in spades, and any fine solid state muscle amp by the likes of Balanced Audio Technology, McCormack, Linn, Simaudio or other fine companies should do the trick.

Take it from me, the excursion and power handling of the bass/midrange driver, the sensitivity and headroom of the tweeter, are prodigious. Even in triode operation, the opening crescendo of "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag" was enough to set me on my ass cowering in fear at the prospects for late night retribution on the part of my neighbors...come to think of it, for all of Dynaudio's purported reputation (*everyone's repeating it around the club*) as a poor match for tube amps, it's hard to imagine a more effortless match than the one I achieved between the Confidence C1, the Rogues and the VTL (running with its fully balanced output). And in triode or Ultralinear, the immensity of Michael Henderson's Fender Jazz Bass on *The Cellar Door Sessions* is in no way compromised or compressed, yet Miles' vocalized trumpet soars and sings and shouts unfettered, while the Confidence C1's are further able to flesh out all the background layers, dirty nuances, timbral distortions and bell like cadences of Keith Jarrett's eerie, sardonic blend of the Fender Rhodes Electric Piano and a Fender Combo Organ.

And finally, as I ran low on effusive metaphors, and my word count topped out above the Dow Jones Industrials' average, I briefly referenced four final discs so as to reassure myself and my readers as to the versatility and musicality of these loudspeakers. In auditioning the opening movement of Benjamin Zander's pure DSD masters of Mahler's Third (Telarc 3ACD-60599) I experienced the astonishing dynamic range of this recording, without any sense of longing for that mythical bottom octave; nor did I experience any sense of diminution in the concert hall's absolute breadth and scale, as some critics of two-way mini-monitors suggest must be the case. Then in performing on mandolin and clarinet respectively, I enjoyed the unbelievably vivid live acoustic of Andy Statman's *East Flatbush Blues* (Sheffa Records, Horn-3001) and *Awakening From Above* (Sheffa Records, Horn-3002). The former is Statman's evocation of the Bill Monroe, folk, blues and third world traditions in a bravura trio outing, his mandolin flurries and lovely phrasing suggesting at times such swinging plectrumists as Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian, while his freely inflected harmonies and altered chords at times put me in mind of jazz shaman such as Ahmad Jamal and Sonny Rollins. Bassist Jim Whitney and drummer Larry Eagle get glorious sounds from their instruments, and from the tiniest bell-like details and hand drumming textures of the latter, to the resounding attack and bottomless woody tone of the former, this is as good a jazz-style acoustic recording as you'll hear this side of ECM Records...immense physical presence and immediacy. Just listen to the same trio on the liturgical music of *Awakening From Above*; I experienced a metaphysical bar mitzvah of epic proportions, as the Dynaudio's flawless midrange resolution suited Statman's warmly inflected clarinet tone, Talmudic grace notes and cantorish chants to a T, as he wafted passionately over Whitney's big bowed double bass and Eagle's gong-like frame drum accents in a nostalgic, vocalized reverie. Great music...great resolution ...Mazel tov.

Time to sleep, perchance to *kvell*, yet I return anew to a more distant piano perspective on a more modern recording, in a much larger more reverberant acoustic space to confirm my deep feelings about the truth of the Dynaudio Confidence C1 mini-monitors. On Jean-Yves Thibaudet's passionately inflected recital, *The Magic Of Satie* (Decca 289 470 290-2), his piano seems to float blissfully in the tranquil ambience of a Claude Monet lily pad pool, as Thibaudet remains deeply immersed in the deceptive serenity of the composer's sudden, startling shifts from quietude and flotation to chorale-like hosannas. That these loudspeakers are able to so portray those long sustained bass tones, allowing them to melt languidly into a reverberant mist of inky silence, even as they track sudden, startling dynamic shifts with such vivid immediacy and supple ease, is testament to the overwhelming sense of involvement and wonder I feel every time I sit down for a listen.

### **Caveats & Conclusions**

And so, having deployed vast fusillades of metaphorical ordinance on behalf of the Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors, we now arrive at the point in the proceedings wherein I must doff my advocate's hat and put on the powdered wig of a prosecuting attorney in the attempt to fairly portray some caveats and reservations on behalf of those who might not share my enthusiasm or who possess different priorities.

Some people find their appearance off-putting. Okay, that's some pretty weak cheese, but we are grasping for straws here. I find their appearance original and distinctive, but my esteemed colleague, John Potis of 6Moons, finds them singularly unattractive. Well, to each his own, but as we have already established, the design considerations which influenced Dynaudio's use of a deep, slender cabinet and an upside-down woofer/tweeter arrangement on a rigid external baffle, are based on sound acoustic principles. Hardly a deal-breaker, but some readers may beg to differ. I think they look quite cool and find the contrast between a cherry veneered cabinet and the black baffle quite striking. Still, handsome is as handsome does, a look accentuated by the practical and aesthetic nature of their integral stands—still, to each their own. (In passing, it occurs to me that while it might further jack up the price, some sort of matching or contrasting wood veneer on the external baffle, like that lovely burl'd birch Dynaudio employed on the Special 25's, might add a touch of elegance. However, many listeners might find an all-ebony cabinet/baffle a more subtle look.)

Likewise, those looking to fully pressurize a room might find the Confidence C1 a tad on the dry side compared to a superb floor-standing design such as the Acoustic Zen Adagios (which

I analyzed with genuine passion some months back for *6Moons*). Mind you, as a listener with Vlad the Impaler tendencies, who can never seem to get things quite loud enough to approximate live club or concert hall levels, I was frankly shocked by how effortlessly I could drive the Confidence C1 without strain or fatigue. Time and time again, as I tossed new challenges their way regarding low-end extension relative to my fave floor-standing jobbers, these diminutive Dynaudio mini-monitors delivered the goods and I found myself wanting for nothing ...I could play music just as loud as I cared to without glare or breakup, and inevitably the bass performance was exemplary and more than satisfying—tight, tuneful, focused bass with plenty of transient snap, believable dynamic impact, and no discernible overhang or colorations. Just as flat and linear as can be from top to bottom, with a gloriously capacious midrange and an exceptionally smooth, detailed, transparent top end. The bass performance of the Confidence C1 sets the table for everything on top, just as clear and clean and open as you like.

Mind you, if I were to offer prospective buyers one overriding caveat, it is this—don't skimp on quality power. This latest generation of Dynaudio loudspeakers are quite a bit more sensitive and easier to drive than past iterations. In fact, while Dynaudio has long had a reputation for power-hungry performance, I happily drove the Confidence C1 for many months in my secondary system adjacent to the main room, and close to the rear wall, with a Linn Classik, putting out roughly 75 watts per channel into a 4 ohm load. Clarity, resolution and imaging were indeed first rate.

However, there is no tap-dancing around the fact that these are no-compromise high end loudspeakers, revealing as all get out, and as such *they not only complement top end components, they demand them*. Jive them with some less than exemplary cables or front end components, and they will respond by undressing all gear downstream. Sure, you can mate the Confidence C1 to more humble gear, but as such, like Chris Rock suggests (in his comic rant against women who profess the belief that they don't need a man and that single-parent/fatherless homes are cool), "You can drive a car with your feet, but that don't mean it's to be done."

Uh, might there be a point in there somewhere, Chip? Yes indeed—invest in good power. No, make that great power. You'll be glad you did. The Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors really open up spatially and reach their full potential for low-end extension when mated with a high-quality amp with plenty of dynamic headroom and sufficient reserves of power to handle massive dynamic shifts and big, knee-buckling, power-sucking transients. You need to factor this into your system budget equation. Again, don't be deceived by the size of these loudspeakers...give them some serious power, and they will respond with a huge, expansive, ultra-high resolution soundstage and levels of snap, crackle and pop you thought only big speakers could deliver.

Finally, readers who follow my adventures on the 6Moons web site might be wondering how I could profess such undying enthusiasm for the Dynaudio Confidence C1, when just months ago I seemingly swore on a stack of Bibles that the Acoustic Zen Adagios were the bees' knees. Will the real Chip Stern please stand up?

Such is the nature of the reviewer's art. We get up close and personal with a piece of gear for several months, try to develop a balanced view of its relative merits and shortcomings, articulate our enthusiasm, and just as we are beginning to settle in with them, it's time to pack 'em up, ship 'em out and move on... potentially to something even more exciting—comes with the territory. Anyone recall the Hallelujah Chorus emanating from Rabbi Michael Fremer's tabernacle concerning the fantastic Manley Steelhead phono preamp in *Stereophile*? He had seemingly discovered the Holy Grail of analog front end components, a true and abiding love. However months latter Michael was swinging chorus after chorus of "I've Found A New Baby," in this case a phono stage from Boulder costing four times as much, that manifested itself before the Vinyl Rabbi as a burning bush of analog verisimilitude. Apples and oranges? Hamburger and steak? More like, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." Nothing wrong with the Manley, to put it mildly, yet along comes the Boulder sashaying down the street, and our chronicler is captivated, helpless in the throes of a bold new passion. With such serendipity only a UPS truck away, the reviewer's responsibility to delineate the

relative merits and tradeoffs of two exemplary designs is vital, as if to explain how you get what you pay for. Thereafter, only the reader can decide which relative merits and tradeoffs are most important to them, and which are they willing to pay for.

Well, so which loudspeaker does Chip love more? Cone on, man, that's like asking a parent to choose their favorite children. At \$4300 for the Adagios, and \$6500 for the Confidence C1, these superb loudspeakers represent very different performance paradigms and design priorities. Both are high-performance, high-resolution loudspeakers, the former a floor-standing design, the later a mini-monitor; the Acoustic Zens represent an unprecedented level of musical value for money, while the Dynaudios were conceived as a cost-is-no-object statement speaker. Both have breathtakingly low levels of distortion, but the Adagios are better suited to fully pressurize a room with more humble power amps, while the Confidence C1 demand big-balled, high quality amplification. Both offer exceptionally smooth, extended top end performance, but with their higher crossover point and ribbon tweeter, the Adagio's perspective might appeal to some listeners as mellower and more laid back, while for some listeners (and this is an age old audiophile debate), the Dynaudios might prove more detailed than they are accustomed to ...as such, we might extrapolate that the Adagios are more forgiving and better suited to a wider range of front end components and amplification, while the Confidence C1 represent the last word in revealing and will accept naught but the best downstream components and amplification. Some listeners will naturally gravitate towards the full-bodied, room-filling low-end extension of the Adagios—with their ultra-low distortion, underhung drivers—while others will be captivated by the expansive dimensionality of the Confidence C1, with their nonpareil, no-compromise transducers.

It actually might be more germane to compare the Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors directly with their spiritual antecedents, another exceptional mini-monitor, the Dynaudio Special 25. Whereas the Special 25 began as a limited edition 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary mini-monitor culled together from existing technologies and transducers, the Confidence C1 was designed from the ground up to be a state-of-the-art speaker, with advanced new transducers and internal components, and as we've already delineated, a fresh approach to cabinet design. Having lived for sometime with both loudspeakers, and having had a chance to A/B them directly at the Innovative Audio showroom in Manhattan, the similarities and differences are intriguing ...in fact, some people might actually prefer the Special 25, which still represents a very musical speaker. The Special 25 are rated as going down to around 35Hz (+/- 3dB, with a resonance frequency of 39Hz), while the Confidence C1 are rated as extending down to around 45 Hz (+/- 2dB, with a resonance frequency of 44Hz) I found the measurements to be relatively conservative as both speakers evince significant bass energy down into the 28-30 Hz range. Yet while there is little difference between the bass response at average listening levels, the Special 25 have more "apparent bass," and portray a decidedly fuller, plumper low end perspective. The bottom end is more pronounced and there is more weight to the sound, a slightly heavier overall balance. However, while the Confidence C1's bass lacks the belly and warmth of the Special 25, to these ears, it is appreciably quicker, cleaner, punchier and more refined, with a tauter more focused transient response. As a result, the C1's low end foundation is flatter and more natural, providing a more linear top-to-bottom perspective. Thus the Special 25 have a far more forward presentation, while the Confidence C1 offers a far flatter, more neutral soundstage, and even greater midrange depth and layering, though the Special 25 is no slouch in this department. However, neutrality notwithstanding, the Confidence C1 is not only more linear and realistic from top-to-bottom, it is far smoother more detailed and transparent without the pronounced brightness which tends to color the Special 25's performance and give it a slightly more forward, aggressive edge.

For these reasons, there are some listeners who would find the Special 25 more to their tastes, a more exciting speaker, with a more pleasing physical presence and immediacy.

However to me, satisfying as they are, they can't hold a candle to the purity and refinement, the dimensionality and realism of the Confidence C1, which have plenty of bass energy and immediacy for this pilgrim, thank you very much—with a breath-like transparency and airiness to the top end and an elemental liquidity to the midrange that is intoxicating. The Confidence C1 allow for a total immersion in the experience, getting completely out of the way and letting the music shine through with an immense soundstage and no discernible sonic artifacts. Better

yet, as I have repeatedly stated, the C1's ambient retrieval and holographic qualities border on the surreal. Like, wow!

Nor am I alone in my opinion that The Dynaudio Confidence C1 may very well be the best sounding mini-monitor ever. Several readers checked in with me over the past several months to *kvell* about their C1's while wondering how soon I might be expected to weigh in with my own gusto dunk benediction for the congregation.

So what is my final take? The Dynaudio Confidence C1 are surely the best mini-monitors I have ever heard, and can stand proudly next to any loudspeaker of the past decade in terms of absolute musicality, resolution and realism.

Okay, while they do so many things in such an effortless manner, surely the Confidence C1 can't do everything—there must be some people I wouldn't recommend them to. Well, first off, while there is ample bass energy right down to the bottom octave of an acoustic piano, these speakers won't give you a lap dance. The quality of the bass is remarkably tight and tuneful, with no lugubrious colorations of overhang; most surprisingly, time and time again, with ample amplification, the Confidence C1 delivered the leading edge of transients with real conviction...and I never found myself wanting for bass. Nor did I ever find their sense of scale significantly reduced or constricted compared to bigger full range speakers—the Dynaudio Confidence C1 soundstage like a motherfucker.

Still, while I was more than pleased with how the Confidence C1 pressurized my 14' X 20' X 10' room, if you have a larger room, or crave not simply the leading edge of transients but the beauty of the booty, the physical weight and chakra rattling impact of sub-sonic bass, well, you'll need a really high-fidelity subwoofer (such as one of the advanced new Thiel SmartSub models) and I would suggest that you audition more expensive floor-standing speakers (if you want to maintain comparable levels of clarity, resolution and imaging, let alone BIG FUCKING BASS, without untoward colorations). So, no, a pair of C1 will not pressurize a room like a pair of really well-engineered, no-compromise floor-stranding beauties.

Still, all things begin equal, when you factor in the unassailable top-to-bottom-quality of Dynaudio's transducers and internal components, the elegant simplicity and sonic purity of their overall design, you are left with a loudspeaker which neither adds nor detracts from the essential truth of the recording, getting out of the way and allowing for a direct emotional connection to the music that is so sweet and fulsome, so neutral and natural, so harmonically realistic and dynamically convincing, that it is hard to believe you aren't there—you aren't just listening to the music, but experiencing a palpable presence of the performers and how interacted with each other and the acoustic space in an organic sense.

People often talk glowingly of how a certain speaker disappears, yet in truth *when you are listening to the Dynaudio Confidence C1 the room itself disappears*, so utterly believable is its depiction of acoustic cues, so commanding and comprehensive its capacity for ambient retrieval and soundstaging, so incredibly precise and illuminating its image specificity.

Give them quality power, no BS high-rez front end components, and they can function as the revered, believable foundation for any price-performance high end sound system, desert island fantasy rig—let alone the critical near-field demands of state-of-the-art mastering suites—and they will sit up like the proud puppies they are, wag their tags enthusiastically, tuck you in at night and drive you to work. Better yet, at modest volume levels the sound was sublime, in fact I cannot recall a loudspeaker which sounded so full and true with so little gain in the circuit.

Give them quality *neurologicals* (speaker cabling and interconnects) and *gastrointestinals* (AC cords and power conditioning) and they will reward you a thousand times over with a huge, expansive soundstage, convincing frequency extension, midrange nirvana, vast expanses of clear, transparent space, and heretofore unimaginable layers of detail...as non-fatiguing and involving an experience of music as you've ever heard.

So, if like me, you place a premium on the elegant purity, coherence and direct emotional connection of a simple two-way with a first-order crossover, and if you would gladly sacrifice the boom-boom-boom and instant gratification of the stripper's milieu, for the emotional honesty, long-term commitment and emotional subtlety of a smart, funny, engaging woman

*(mixing metaphors like a drunken sailor, can Chip possibly make it to the end with his manhood and sanity intact ...Editor), then the Dynaudio Confidence C1 could prove to be a truly ideal life partner, till death do you part (or the next sweet thing comes along).*

Still, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better loudspeaker at any price, even among the Confidence C1's bigger siblings, the floor-standing Confidence C2 and C4.

***The Dynaudio Confidence C1 Mini-Monitors are as close to perfection as loudspeakers get. Chip Stern***



## **CHIP STERN'S SYSTEM**

### **LOUDSPEAKERS**

Acoustic Zen Adagio, Joseph Audio RM25si Signature Mk2 & RM7si Signature Mk2, Meadowlark Swallows, Epos ELS-3, Alon/Nola Li'l Rascals, Linn Tukan.

### **ELECTRONICS**

VTL 5.5 vacuum tube preamp, Rogue Audio Stealth phono preamp, Manley Massive Passive Vacuum Tube Parametric Equalizer, Rogue Audio Magnum 99 vacuum tube preamp, Mesa Tigris, Linn Classik, Rogue Audio M150 Vacuum Tube Monoblocks.

### **SOURCES**

Linn Unidisk 1.1 universal disc player, Upscale Audio Ah! Njoe Tjoeb 4000 vacuum tube CD player (in 24/192 Super Tjoeb configuration), California Audio Labs CL-20 DVD-CD Player, McCormack UDP1 Deluxe universal disc player, Rega Planar 25 turntable with Rega RB600 tone-arm and Grado Statement Master cartridge, Marantz PMD430 portable cassette player/recorder w. Audio-Technica AT822 one-point stereo mic and JPS Labs Superconductor FX mic cable.

### **CABLES**

Acoustic Zen Silver Reference II interconnects, Audioquest Panther interconnects and CV-6 speaker cables, Monster Cable Sigma Retro Gold interconnects and speaker cables, JPS Labs Superconductor 2 interconnects and speaker cable, JPS Labs Superconductor 3 interconnects and speaker cables, JPS Labs Aluminata, Kaptovator, Digital and Analog AC, Acoustic Zen Gargantua II and Absolute AC.

### **ACCESSORIES**

Two PolyCrystal equipment racks, a PolyCrystal amp stand and PolyCrystal speaker stands. Power line conditioning: Equi=Tech Q650 and 2Q Balanced Power Isolation Transformers, Monster Cable AVS 2000 Automatic Voltage Stabilizer. JPS Labs Kaptovator outlet centers, Mondial Magic-Splitter, NEC CT-2070S monitor, Ringmat 330 and Signal Guard II isolation stand (turntable), Shakti Stones (electromagnetic stabilizers), PolyCrystal cones, Argent Room Lens, Echo Busters Bass Busters and absorptive and diffusive panels, Grado RS-1 Stereo Headphones

***POSITIVE FEEDBACK ONLINE (ISSUE 29, enero/febrero 2007)***