



Vivid Giya 1 Spirit

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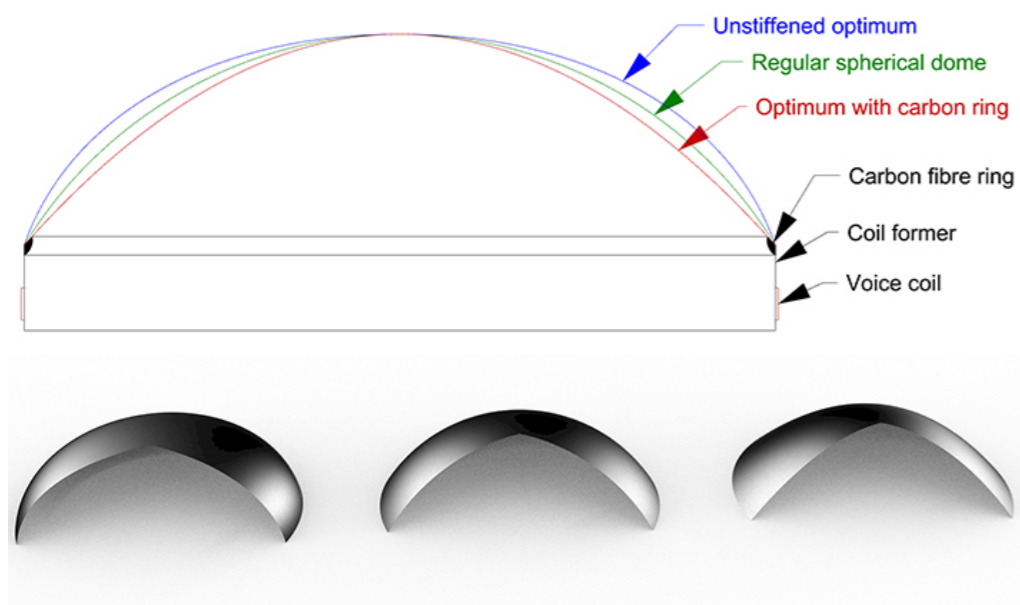
Vivid's Giya G1 Spirit is not only a dramatic looking loudspeaker, it is a radical reworking of how a loudspeaker is designed and built. It makes the majority of other speakers look like variations on a well worn theme, it makes wooden box technology look as outdated as the horse and carriage. The Vivid approach is a genuine case of form following function, this extraordinary cabinet was not created in order to make the Giya stand out, it was created to make it one of the lowest colouration loudspeakers on the planet.

The Giya G1S is the ultimate incarnation of designer Lawrence Dickie's thinking on how to build a loudspeaker, it stands at the top of the Vivid range and challenges all other companies to build a better loudspeaker. Which is quite a bold challenge especially for a small company. One way in which it distinguishes itself from the herd is in the metal dome drivers, these are not a conventional hemispherical shape but have a catenary profile which Dickie discovered has a "significantly higher" break up point than conventional domes when combined with a carbon fibre ring around the edge of the dome. He figured these things out long before other companies started doing the latter, none so far have copied the catenary dome.

This dome can be found on the tweeter and upper midrange, the lower mid is also pretty radical with a carbon fibre modified oblate spheroid central dome and almost straight sides, at a glance it looks conventional but get a bit closer and you realise that it's anything but.

The Giya G1S is not particularly large, it stands 1.6m high (5'3") which is higher than average but hardly tall by high end standards, and its presence is reduced by virtue of the way that the form tapers toward the top, from the front at least. That big curve with a circular hole in is the end of a tapered tube that absorbs energy from the large bass drivers that sit on either side of the cabinet at its widest point. These drivers are braced against one another inside the cabinet so that when they both push, they push against one another, this combined with compliant mounting to the cabinet means that very little energy gets into the cabinet. They call this reaction cancelling and also apply it to the reflex ports that look like gills on either side, making the point that when air is pushed out of a port an equal amount of air will be sucked in. Again other designers have copied reaction cancelling bass drivers but none to my knowledge have done the same with ports.

The cabinet is of course the most obvious part of the G1S both in terms of its shape and construction. For a start it weighs less than 80kg, which for a 180 litre 'box' containing five drivers is not very much; a Bowers & Wilkins 801 D4 weighs 100kg and has four drivers. The 801 D4 contains tapered tube loading on its midrange and tweeter because Dickie developed this technology whilst developing the Nautilus 'snail' speaker for that company in the '90s, he has taken that idea a lot further with Vivid. The Giya range is made in vacuum-infused glass-reinforced composite and consists of two skins with a balsa wood core, an approach that offers



high rigidity without the problems inherent in high mass designs. The main one being the inclination for mass to store energy and release it out of phase with the signal from the cones, essentially to vibrate for much longer than the signal is being produced and thus blurring subsequent signals.

This Spirit version of the G1 is distinguished by having its crossover in a separate, pretty well rectilinear box. This is connected to the underside of the loudspeaker by a thick umbilical cable and attaches to it with a bayonet type fixing. Fitting this requires that the speaker be laid



on its side or that someone who's done it before lies on the ground to do the job, the former method is much easier. The crossover box appears to be made of the same stuff as the speakers and has bi-wire terminals at one end, it effectively takes half a metre at least off of the required speaker cable length.

One reason why Vivid is able to do all this is that it makes all of its own drivers and cabinets, most of them in Durban, South Africa. This is a real rarity among small scale companies very few of whom go further than making cone drivers and almost none make their own cabinets. It gives Dickie the freedom to develop technologies that others can only dream about and the results indicate that he knows what he's doing rather better than the competition too. This short animation gives some idea of what goes into the Giya G1 and just how different it is to almost all other speakers.

Sound quality

I am used to wide dispersion loudspeakers, those that emit sound energy in a near 180 degree pattern and thus sound the same in most listening positions and are, ironically, less room dependent than more directional designs. The total absence of straight edges on the Giya S1 cabinet however means that dispersion is wider than 180 degrees and on first hearing this speaker you get a sense that the acoustic cosmos has expanded, it truly is full scale in its capabilities. The other obvious quality that is immediately apparent when turning on the big Giya is that it has an uncannily relaxed presentation, literally the closest thing to an electrostatic sound I have heard from cones and domes in too many years of reviewing.

This is the result of all the effort that has gone into the driver and cabinet design, it is the non-sound if you like of a loudspeaker that doesn't have the distortions that we take for granted in almost all of the alternatives. We have got used to a degree of edginess with dynamic driver speakers that you don't get with the better panels, it's not something you hear with acoustic music and isn't part of the signal on good recordings of that most natural of musical forms, so it shouldn't be added to the signal by a loudspeaker but it's clearly difficult to do this whilst delivering decent power and extension in the bass. Panels usually struggle to deliver powerful bass, hence the addition of subwoofers to electrostatics, so a loudspeaker that has the naturalness of a panel with the power of cones is a rare and beautiful thing.

A loudspeaker is said to be only as good as the source and amplifier in front of it but the Giya S1 dispels that notion by offering up the most transparent and revealing sound with good but relatively affordable ancillaries. It proves that the loudspeaker is usually the weakest link in the chain by making such components sound absolutely stonking with a good recording and unveiling the pros and cons of lesser productions. You really know all about the way your music was made with these speakers and the best ones sound absolutely superb, John Renbourn's Another Monday on vinyl really shines with a natural balance and lovely tone from guitar and voice. Nathan Salsburg's much more recent and similarly acoustic guitar based release Third

sounds loud and compressed by comparison, both are on vinyl but the former is an analogue recording with a better pedigree.

These speakers totally transformed an album by Michael Franks called The Art of Tea. Speakers Corner recently re-released this on vinyl and I wanted to review it but found the sound too smooth and lacking in variety on my regular speakers, with the Giya S1 however all of the nuances that had been hidden came flooding through and it was easy to enjoy the quality of the composition, the brilliance of the musicianship and even the cleverness of the song writing. It's a



sophisticated album that's for sure but you need an equally sophisticated loudspeaker to really appreciate it.

Another recent purchase that really took off with these speakers was Mari Samuelsen's self titled album on Deutsche Grammophon. This sounded so real that I almost had to ask where did these musicians come from and how have they managed to bring a different room acoustic with them. Mari as the album is called is very well recorded and on these speakers it delivers a palpable sense of 'being there' in the presence of the orchestra. I thought that the Rega P10/ Aphelion 2 turntable and cartridge was extremely good but didn't realise quite how good it is until I heard it with the Giyas. One reason is that this four way design is so seamless, by designing all the drivers in house and using the same material to build them Vivid have created a multi-way loudspeaker that has the coherence of a single driver design without the bandwidth limitations of the genre.

At the other end of the spectrum you have recordings that have been amped up to sound good on headphones and lesser speakers where the loudness is rather too obvious with this degree of exposure, and a few where there is so much bass that my Moor Amps Angel 6 cannot control such a wideband speaker in a room that is a little snug for them. Massive Attack's Man Next Door falls into this category as did a couple of other overly heavy productions, but others reveal a depth of bass that even substantial speakers have not managed to unearth in the past. As with the mid and top the bass from the Giya G1 is not sharp edged, it is as rounded and extended as the recording allows which is often very extended indeed, real dropping a heavy weight on the ground heavy and incredibly solid.

I also like the way that they make difficult music more accessible, this is a reflection of the low distortion allowing the compositions to come through in totally coherent fashion. I dabbled in some of Frank Zappa's live albums and found myself enjoying tracks that had previously been a bit too much like hardwork. These included the Evil Prince on You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore vol.4, a tune that was borderline unlistenable in the past.

Another thing that these often less than pristine recordings reveal is how sensitive the Vivids are to micro dynamics, they track variations in level between instruments and voices in a mix so much better than usual that it's uncanny. It indicates an extremely low noise floor which

is the result of a cabinet that is effectively inert and does nothing to smear the signal proper. In practice this means that you can listen to specific voices or instruments in a busy mix very easily and appreciate just what each is contributing to the overall sound. It doesn't split the sound up and present it in an analytical fashion but merely reveals the relative weighting given to the different elements which in turn gives you a better understanding of the performance. This benefits everything that is played but does increase the difference between the good and less good recordings, but there are a lot more of the former in my collection at least including tracks like Adel's Rolling in the Deep which usually gets noisy when the chorus comes in. Here you can here the extra compression/limiting that's applied but it doesn't shout at you the way it often does, and her vocal is simply astonishing. These speakers are also a heck of a lot of fun when something like Subway Station #5 by Patricia Barber comes along and the intensity of the piano playing builds up to an extreme as the piece reaches its climax.

Conclusion

I have liked every Vivid loudspeaker that has graced my system but the G1 Spirit is clearly in another league to those and most loudspeakers around. It redefines what a loudspeaker can do by eliminating so much of the distortion that is found with many of its competitors. The styling is not to all tastes but this is a fundamental part of why it is so successful at doing the job of turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one, a regular box shaped speaker will never be able to do this so well. If you really want to hear your music at its very best the Giya G1 Spirit is very hard to match.

