

I want to share my experience I was lucky enough to have on Saturday morning.

I have been following several threads on DIYaudio over the last few months and this one has really had my attention from the beginning.

I am your typical audiophile who is constantly buying and selling gear trying to improve the sound of the system. I have reached the point where I actually think things through before buying and selling something so I have a goal of what I am searching for.

My current system is Emerald Physics CS2 speakers combined with a highly modified Behringer DCX 2496 with the low frequencies driven by Odyssey Audio Stratos Monoblocks (SE boards & upgrades). I have settled on a DIY First Watt F3 amp for the high frequencies. These speakers do more things right than wrong and I have fallen for many of their excellent qualities.

I live in driving distance of Dr. Geddes and he was kind enough to allow me the opportunity to hear his Summa speakers and to ask questions about the kit that he has put together.

First things first. Dr. Geddes was really friendly to have me over without knowing me and to answer my questions. He was also kind enough to let me play several cds that I am very familiar with so I could have a better grasp of the sound I was hearing.

The sound of the Summa speakers was extremely pure. At first I thought I was not hearing all the bass I should be. I found out very soon this was not the case. Dr. Geddes believes in using multiple subs to get the bass right in a room. I have never heard of this approach before and as the morning went on I realized how realistic it sounded. The Summas have a realistic sound that I have not heard in any speaker system before. We listened to different types of music on the system and I was very impressed with what I heard.

Dr. Geddes also played a few concert dvds and the DTS soundtrack to them. This is where the sound levels went up. I could not believe how open the sound was. We were listening at near concert levels and it was as close to being at a concert as I have ever heard. The dynamics were astounding and there was no compression. I also experienced zero listener fatigue which is absolutely crucial for me.

Contrasting the sound I heard in his room to what I have become used to with my system led me to several observations. I believe the CS2 is a very competent design and an excellent sounding speaker system especially when you factor in cost. I don't think that I will ever be able to attain the midrange I am looking for with my current speakers. I think that using an extremely well designed two way speaker with very high quality drivers paired with multiple subwoofers placed properly will be the way to the sound I am searching for. The bass and dynamics in his room were the most realistic I have heard. It didn't sound like a stereo system it sounded live. I was completely stunned to find out the modest electronics that were used in this system. I am not saying they weren't good, they obviously are based on the sound I heard. I just expected the electronics to cost thousands more to achieve the sound quality that I heard.

I also had a chance to see the prototype of the kit that is being offered. To say that I am interested and intrigued would be an understatement.

I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to hear the Summa and that I have a better understanding of the design and how excellent it actually sounds.

I have extremely high hopes for the kit that is being offered. I will continue to follow this thread and may very well take on the project.

Nicholas Goode

April 2008

Hi fellas,

Wife and kids were out the door visiting friends down south so I called up Earl and asked if I could audition his speakers yesterday. For what its worth, here are some speakers I have heard and respect:

Linkwitz Orions+ +, right at Siegfried's house near San Francisco
NaO II dipoles designed by John Kreskovsky
GR Research OB5's and OB7's

Earl was an excellent host, brought me down to his well treated home theatre room (about 15 feet wide and 30 feet deep with a 10 ft ceiling) where the Summa 15's were in the corners behind curtains and turned in 45 degrees to avoid the side walls. There were also 3 subwoofers setup in the room (all bandpass design!). The Summa's are about 98dB/2.83V/m efficient in full space. His electronics are extremely simple and plain by audiophile standards. A PC and Toshiba CD player as sources, a Pioneer Digital Receiver (100 watts/channel), zip cord wire and zip cord interconnects. Nothing amazing here at all.

First CD we played were various tracks from Bela Fleck & Flecktones, a Live CD.

Wow! We were playing at peaks of 100 dB from my listening position (roughly centered about 10 feet away from the speakers). No compression. Tight clean bass. Performers were in the room. Imaging was very stable over a horizontal axis of an entire sofa. Music appeared from a complete black void.

The most open midrange I have ever heard. This includes the dipole systems I have listed above. There was no real part of the frequency response that was drawing attention, although I was continuously amazed by how clean the bass was and how delineated it was. Treble was just there, never drawing attention to itself but never lacking either.

Image body, intensity were all there. Small instruments sounded small. Close miked, sounded close miked.

Neutral is a great way to describe it. Next we listened to some cuts from Diana Krall. Her voice was so compelling that she really sounded she was right up there on stage, playing for you. A personal treat if you will.

Next, Geddes played a cut from a DVD from Phantom of the Opera. Dynamics in spades. Everything was released unshackled. And just when you thought the music may lose control, it doesn't. How quickly the Summas start and stop is uncanny. I believe this is as much a product of speaker design as it is the room. The final cut was my favorite. Eagles DVD Live! The guitar solos were electrifying, even soul searching.

I am beginning to understand why some audiophiles say they listen at 80 or 85dB. I think its because of compression. When I auditioned the Orions and NaO II's, I was a little hesitant to crank it up. With the Summas, the music just gets louder but never, ever loses control.

In any case I suggest anybody within a spitting distance of Michigan to call up Earl and give these an audition. Even if you own fancy schmancy loudspeakers, I mean TAD 3 ways, Avante Garde, etc...give it a listen. It will challenge every audiophile belief you have had. Earl was kind enough to let me have one of his books, "Premium Home Theater." I have been leafing through the book and found one paragraph regarding 'subjectivism' that I found quite eye opening (page 249):

"When dealing with subjectively oriented AV issues, I prefer to deal with the science (facts), whenever possible, and not Audio Tarot. My wife coined this wonderful phrase after she first came into contact with the audio community that I work in. She has a background in experimental psychology and knows how easily subjective opinions can be swayed by external factors. She noted that a large amount of audio folklore is accepted by its practitioners purely on faith, i.e. there is no way to either prove or disprove these beliefs. Basically, audio, in these aspects, is a religion. Mankind has always had trouble reconciling facts with their fundamental belief system when the two come into conflict (to wit Galileo). The facts are often suppressed in order to perpetuate the established belief system. The practitioners of Audio Tarot will always prefer to suppress those facts that contradict their established beliefs."

Trust me just like many of you, I am part of the (gulp) Audio Tarot as well. Will I give up some of my fancy schmancy equipment? Probably not terribly soon. But boy was this system an awakening.

What did it teach me? The speaker/room equation is the achilles heal to audiophile aural enlightenment. Until you've solved that issue, you (I mean me) will be in this perpetual audiophile merry-go-round of exchanging equipment, spending thousands of dollars, etc...

Fix that problem first. For if a loudspeaker/room with Pioneer electronics can blast me into an eargasmic orbit, what more do I want? Better question is what more can I have? Will better electronics make a better listening experience? Perhaps. However, the Summa 15's really take you 90% there, so I'm not surprised that a simple receiver can take you so far ahead of everybody else.

Anand Raman
May 2008

This past weekend, a friend and myself took a trip up to the Detroit area to audition the Summa's at the Geddes household. I have been on many audio trips and have learned to prepare myself for any situation that I might encounter. Most of this 'preparation' has been developed through the listening to poor systems in even worse environments. I have come to the point where listening to systems wedged into corners with a with a big screen TV and bookshelves closely flanking each side is not appealing. I am looking for a truly great system in which all variables have been considered and addressed.

I am currently a Linkwitz Orion++ owner. I have had them setup in three different environments with varying degrees of success. They have sounded the best in the current room which has them 6ft from the front wall. I made the decision years ago to purchase the Orion plans because of the science and history of SL's work. I have been reasonably happy with my decision over the years but have always been looking for the ultimate. I have told many listeners at my place that the Orion's don't do anything wrong. With that said, I have never felt that they do everything right. So, for me the search has half-heartedly continued.

My ideal system would have to do a couple important things well. Music is my main priority but I would also like a system to do double duties for movies on occasion. My feeling has always been that if it can do music well then HT should be a breeze. Until this past weekend, I have not been able to find an affordable solution to conclude this seemingly impossible search. I am not the type of person that likes to mess with the details; cables, amps, IC's, DAC's....we all know the typical list which many people go through. Money, patience, time and science have all been standing in the way of 'tweaking' every little last detail. The system through which the Summa's are played would greatly downsize the majority of audio guys. The power, digital conversion of audio and volume control are all done by a Pioneer receiver. At the end of the session I was astonished, amazed and very glad that this was the case.

With all of these caveats listed I want to say that I am not a flavor of the week cheerleader. I like to make a sound investment based on science more than subjectivism. My many listening sessions in others environments has really given me an uneasy feeling as to others perceptions and reported findings. So, I was more than excited to arrive at situation which is based on more science than I can even start to understand. A sense of ease came over me while making the 6 hour drive as there has been more studies and research done to achieve this design and room than I can even begin to refute with my own thoughts. I will focus this review on the system as a whole. This system is very attainable for the average home owner. Almost everything needed to achieve comparable results is listed in the HT book written by Geddes and Lee. I highly recommend getting this read as it contains a lot of outstanding information that will help anyone down a path of audio or video enlightenment. The HT room built has very little visible acoustics absorbers in place. The main focus is on low frequency attenuation but this achievement is not visible. The room, though well built, is not beyond what a good home builder might be able to with some time and effort.

The Summa's are the best overall system that I have heard. The first thing that jumped out to me was the high end. It was different, the likes of which I had never heard before. There was more air, detail and naturalness than I had ever heard before. The music coming out

was just completely effortless. The best description that I can think of is well, right. Being very used to the Orion's I was interested to hear the bass from the Summa setup as open baffle bass is supposed to be some of the very best, period. Well, I would replace that period with a semicolon. There was no region that jumped out over another. The impact that everyone likes was there in spades yet was never overpowering the music. Again, the descriptor that I would use is just, right.

The one region with which I was most concerned was the midrange. Come on, a 15" playing midrange?? The last few years I have scoured over all the driver tests in which keeping a driver as pistonic as possible throughout its pass band has been crucial. Now I am supposed to believe that a 15" driver can produce good much less great mids that would rival my Orion's or Accuton systems which I have heard? Well.....Geddes and Lee's views on distortion tests do not mimic all the latest rage but they do plenty of distortion tests and whatever they are doing works. I felt nothing was missing from the midrange at all. I was expecting lack of detail, nope, naturalness, nope, breakup at higher volumes, nope. That completely blew my major concern out of the water. Again, the best description that can describe it is, right.

After the start of the first song I could tell that I would like everything. The imaging was great. Placement and positioning was outstanding. I could tell more about the recordings than that of any other system I have heard before. The typical things of hearing items and instruments in the recordings which I didn't know were there certainly applied on a couple different occasions. The musical selections which I listened to ranged from classical to vocal to rock. All were produced with equal correctness. If you want a reference for accurate recording reproduction then read on.

The only thing which I felt was not absolute top of the heap was the depth of image. The speakers were relatively close to the front wall. The image had depth and layering as good anything I have heard before but it was just compressed together closer than my Orion setup (6ft from front wall) or Avalon Sentinel (12ft from front wall). From my own experiences with speaker placement I have found that depth of image is only as great as the amount the speakers are pulled out into a room. In most listening environments, placing the speakers 3ft from the front wall is about average. I will only make the assumption that if the Summa's are pulled further out into the room then the depth will improve accordingly.

Two other items were highly interesting to me. When setting in the sweet spot everything was glorious. Moving to the seats either left or right of center offered very little image shift. There was a change in imaging but nothing collapsed. There was still a very good center image, a better one than I have ever heard. I attribute this to the controlled directivity of the Summa's. The great bass is one offered through design. Multiple subs are used in a three dimensional space. While other designs (OB) have attempted to say that fewer room modes are excited in reality it is better to excite as many as possible and to an even extent. Good bass is all about room pressurization. Pressurizing these modes in as even a fashion as possible is the best way to get good bass. Because of the nature of low frequencies, multiple sources spread throughout the room with emphasis placed on the suckout portions

of the listening environment is the way to go. Do some research or better yet hear it for yourself and I bet you will be a believer.

If you doubt the ideas behind this design then I highly recommend you read the Summa design paper then spend the money to order the HT book offered on the GedLee website. This guy knows his stuff and reading some of his works will prove just that. He is a trained professional who has dedicated his life to this craft. The Geddes/Lee combination is one of a gift to us all. Having two doctors with ones emphasis being on the production of sound and the other being on the receiving of sound makes for a great marriage, pun or no-pun.

Joel Wasser

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