

LOUDSPEAKERS

MARTIN LOGAN STATEMENT E2

# Is this the ULTIMATE?

If there was a prize for the most imposing loudspeaker ever made, the Martin Logan Statement E2 would definitely be in the running.

The sheer physical presence of the speaker system – yes, it's a system, not just a speaker – will dominate even a large room. Martin Logan's flagship model certainly looks the top-end part: and with a seven-digit price tag and a weight in excess of 800 kg, there is nothing subtle nor diminutive about the physical presence of these towering Americans.

The Statement is nominally an electrostatic loudspeaker, although it does employ conventional drive units for bass response, and twin arrays of subwoofers. However, the upper mids and treble are reproduced by electrostatic panels.

The system consists of a pair of 1.8 m high curvilinear source electrostatic transducers. Each transducer is partnered by a so-called dipolar transition tower containing eight 178 mm dipolar paper-cone midrange drivers arranged vertically, directly next to the electrostatic panel.

In addition, a separate set of eight 305 mm high-excursion woofers, individually located

and isolated in a so-called BalancedForce tower configuration, provide bottom-end punch and authority.

The transducer and the dipolar mids are located on an elaborate base which contains the Statement E2 crossover. In addition, the system also employs an Exos active crossover to link the sub-bass tower to the ESL dipolar transition tower. The crossover provides a myriad of opportunities to trim performance to best suit the listening environment.

The Statement E2 has long been regarded as one of the world's ultimate high-end loudspeaker systems – a statement product (excuse the pun) produced in small quantities as a showcase for the advanced technology and engineering capabilities at Martin Logan.

The pair reviewed here are, sadly, among the very last ever built by the company, which makes this review all the more special: they are probably the last brand-new pair still on offer, anywhere in the world, and thus represent a final opportunity to savour their very special talents.

It stands to reason that the Statement E2 deserves ancillaries of similar quality,

Audio Research has been one of the signature brands at Absolute Sound, and so I wasn't surprised to see that the digital source, pre-amp, power amps and the phono stage were all drawn from the Audio Research stable.

The set-up consisted of the Reference 3 pre-amp, an older-generation CD3 CD player (unfortunately, the new Reference CD7 was not available at the time), the PH7 phono stage, a pair of D400 Stereo power amps (Subwoofer Towers, bi-amp), and a pair of monster Reference 610T monoblock power amplifiers (bi-wire of Mid/Tw Towers). The latter, with their top-mounted multiple tube array, may look a little quaint, but provide a mammoth 600 watts of power!

The 610T is a push-pull, fully balanced vacuum tube design employing a total of 16 6550C cathode output tubes. A further two 6550Cs operate as driver tubes, controlling a bank of eight output tubes each. Other highlights include a huge, wide-bandwidth power transformer, solid-state power rectification and no less than six regulators.

Importantly, the vertical chassis of the 610T allows convection cooling, since the tubes are located on the top of the unit, making the use of cooling fans unnecessary; optional tube covers with fans are, however, available.

The Audio Research Reference 3 pre-amp is also worth a brief, closer look. It's a pure class A, all-tube, zero feedback design incorporating four 6H30 twin triodes and operating in both balanced and single-ended modes. Bandwidth has been boosted to 200 kHz, headroom is higher and distortion reduced by 40 percent compared to the Reference 2 Mk II.

It's also particularly user friendly, thanks to



a large fluorescent display (which can be dimmed), and a remote control handset that offers access to all key functions (volume, balance, source selection, bias current) and even shows the number of hours the tubes have run.

On the source side, the Clearaudio Master Reference is another product you won't see too often because of its prohibitive price tag, especially as employed here, with the Master TQ1 tangential tonearm and Goldfinger MC cartridge. Located on a proprietary, 80 kg stand appropriately dubbed Everest, this turntable is an imposing piece of equipment.

The Master Reference employs three DC motors operating a belt-drive system, while the massive 80 mm acrylic platter runs on inverted, bronze-plated hardened steel bearings. The Master TQ1 tonearm is a masterpiece, allowing perfect linear tracking of the record. The Goldfinger cartridge employs 24K gold coils, and a 14K gold body.

Recordings employed during the listening session included Diana Krall's 'The Girl In The Other Room', Nora Jones's 'Feels Like Home', the classic Dire Straits release, 'Love Over Gold', that all-time jazz classic 'Getz/Gilberto' featuring Stan Getz, Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto and some classical music by Corelli and Vivaldi.

I have to say that my expectations of the system in general, and the Statements in particular, were high. You can't help but assume excellence

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VERDICT

Loudspeakers don't come much more expensive – and complex – than this. But the return on investment is gob-smacking in terms of presence, detail and authority. High-class Audio Research ancillaries contribute significantly.

PRICE .....±R1.2-million

REVIEW SYSTEM

Clearaudio Master Reference turntable/  
Master TQ1 tangential tonearm,  
Goldfinger MC cartridge  
Audio Research PH7 phono pre-amp  
Audio Research CD-3 CD player  
Audio Research Reference 3 pre-amp  
Audio Research Reference 610T  
power amplifiers  
Audio Research D400 power amplifiers  
All cabling and interlinks by AudioQuest

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when confronted by a system as visually imposing as this one, let alone by the level of investment required to actually own one.

Even so, I was more than bowled over by the performance – and by the fact that the analogue source sounded as pure, seamless and thoroughly involving as it did. Turntables may be making a comeback, but it often takes exposure to a record deck this good to remind one that, for all its idiosyncrasies, the combination of a vinyl record and a turntable can still make real,

riveting music.

And that, perhaps, is the best description of the system. I expected everything to sound larger than life, upscaled and even slightly intimidating: after all, towering speakers and massive amplifiers would indicate a performance of equally gigantic proportions.

But the reality was quite different. Yes, the soundstage here was wide and deep, creating a landscape spacious enough to ensure ample scope for every instrument and every voice. And tonally, the system translated everything from the kind of sub-bass you feel, rather than merely hear, to that sweet, clear treble so easily lost in more compromised systems.

But instead of sounding overpowering and even confrontational, the Martin Logans sounded inviting and accessible. Part of the reason has to be the transparency of the loudspeakers which, despite their relative proximity and presence of those monster towers, was absolute.

Secondly, the system delivered its wares with total authority and utter effortlessness. Even when we turned up the volume a step or two to make the most of Dire Straits' searing guitars and deep, speaker-challenging drum beats, there was no hint that the system was even close to working up a sweat.

It sounded masterfully in control, but never in an iron-fisted, dictatorial kind of way: rather, the flow and rhythm, the melodic intent and the emotion of the music was always allowed to take centre stage.

Instruments and voices sounded eerily realistic, with the system's ability to resolve detail and timbre a particular highlight. Also, ambient information appeared to be brought to the fore more succinctly, adding to the sense of 'being there' that so often distinguishes great systems from merely good ones.

If I had expected the complexity of the speaker array, with its multiple driver arrays, mix of electrostatic and dynamic drivers, and





physically separate enclosures, all controlled by a mix of active and passive crossovers, to get in the way of a seamless delivery, then the system proved me completely wrong; as already mentioned, the delivery was transparent and cohesive, allowing the listener to be immersed in a wonderful ocean of sound.

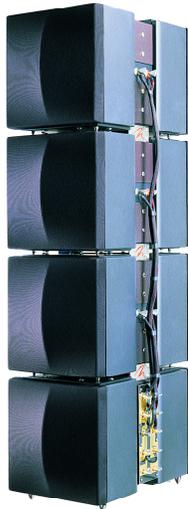
And then, there is the issue of pace, attack and dynamics – elements which many believe are not achievable in the context of electrostatics and tube-based hardware. Well, put it this way: if it's impact, headroom and sheer speed of delivery you're looking for, this system won't disappoint. But that's only one part of its appeal.

Much more important is the completeness of the system, and its ability to deliver true musical pleasure in a completely unflagging, engaging and thoroughly invigorating manner. Here is hi-fi that invites you to step in, sit down, close your eyes and be completely immersed in the music, with no sense of the electronics that make it happen.

One could argue whether the Martin Logan Statement E2 system is worth the investment. But it's a debate not about these particular speakers (or the ancillaries that accompany them) but about where the law of diminishing returns makes an investment of this magnitude difficult to warrant.

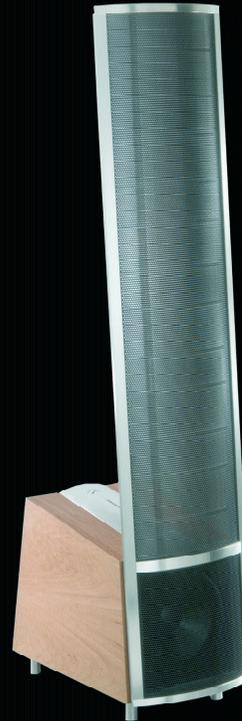
But even that argument cannot undo the fact that the Statement E2 is one of the finest loudspeaker systems ever produced. And since this pair may well be one of the very last, its special kind of musical magic takes on an even greater significance. Great? Absolutely.

**Deon Schoeman**



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