

EQUIPMENT REPORT



Spondor D7 Loudspeaker

British Refinement

Neil Gader

Everyone hates to admit it, but first impressions count. So, call me superficial, but I became an admirer of the Spondor D7 straight out of the box. Here was a neo-classic 48" tower that was superbly finished and elegantly accented with a black lacquered plinth, and wild, dark bands of grain coursing through the black walnut matte finish. It gave this otherwise sedate-appearing floorstander a sense of presence and potency that later seemed to exemplify the speaker's sonic temperament and spirit.

The D7 is a three-transducer floorstander in a bass-reflex box. The 7" mid/bass drive unit uses a newly minted polymer cone, while the 7" low-frequency drive unit sports a bonded Kevlar composite cone. These drivers feature cast magnesium alloy chassis, high-efficiency motor systems, optimized damping and thermal dissipation, plus a new, highly stable polymer surround that reduces break-in time. Configured as a 2.5-way, the woofer rolls off acoustically around 900Hz while the mid/bass driver extends out

to a relatively high 3.2kHz before it hands off to the tweeter.

The technology behind Spondor's LPZ tweeter is interesting. The LPZ (or Linear Pressure Zone) is a 22mm soft-dome with a wide "roll" surround that effectively extends the radiating area to about 27mm. In Spondor's view, this offers the best of two worlds: extended bandwidth response and uncompressed, low-distortion output. However, forward of the tweeter dome is a stainless-steel front plate with a "phase correcting" microfoil that forms a damped acoustic chamber directly in front of the tweeter's lightweight, woven-polyamide diaphragm. The microfoil (which kind of resembles the world's tiniest strainer) equalizes the soundwave path lengths across the diaphragm surface, all the while generating a symmetrical pressure environment so the tweeter operates in a balanced linear mode. As a fringe benefit, the front plate also appears to offer the delicate dome excellent protection from curiosity seekers. I asked about the "dot" in the center of the microfoil, and Spondor's Philip Swift replied that it "does play an active role; it diffracts soundwaves emitted from the very central area of the tweeter dome—this eliminates the 'hot-spot,' or on-axis extra brightness and glare effect, that you get with a conventional tweeter."

The D7 enclosure is crafted from 18mm MDF, but you'd have to crawl inside to understand its rigidity. There you'd find Spondor's "asymmetric aperture bracing" technology. In this instance, asymmetric means that each brace has a different cut-out, whereby the variable spacing between braces maximizes the asymmetry. The arrangement prevents the generation of internal acoustic standing waves and has allowed Spondor to avoid the use of low-frequency damping, thus reducing internal resonances and eliminating a significant source of sound coloration. For mid- and treble-band vibrations, Spondor uses a form of dynamic damping—constrained polymer dampers "at key energy interface points"—to convert these unwanted resonances into heat. The D7 also features the latest iteration of Spondor's Linear Flow port, a twin-venturi, tapered baffle element, located behind the speaker terminal plate just above the plinth.

Sonically, the Spondor conveyed a full-throated presence, an up-front energy, and near full-range frequency and dynamic potency. Its midband was well-balanced tonally with some classic British speaker warmth ripening the lower mids and bass. Any semblance of British reserve, however, has gone the way of *Downton Abbey*. Indeed, this is not a speaker with a stick up its port. In fact, the overall character the D7 conveyed was a distinctly forward-leaning, emotion-filled presentation. To use the example of audience perspective, I found myself a couple of rows closer to symphony orchestras, which allowed a slightly heightened intimacy and sharper image focus and inner detail (though perhaps a little less soundstage depth and ambience). This bolder style of presentation I find preferable to the aloof, tranquilized alternative, which tends to manifest an artificially induced dimensionality that pockets images so deeply in a soundfield that they seem to melt into the surroundings. In many cases, this has been due to midrange suckout of some magnitude. At any rate, these sort of amorphous spatial effects are not part of the D7 portfolio. So if you're in the market for something sleepy or slack, that doses out music like *Ambien*, the D7 will not be for you.

The critical midrange was the D7's strongest suit. Male vocals such as Tom Waits singing "Georgia Lee" possessed solid chest tones, and remained coherent and of a piece even into his raspy upper register [*Mule Variations*]. Lower-register mids, as conveyed by cello and bass viol, had a welcoming, darkly burnished resonance that I've come to expect from the almost human "voices" of these instruments. Baritone sax was reproduced with the power, weight, and body the instrument is known for. Midrange and top-end dynamics—the lifeblood of the live-music experience—were also lively with an abundance of finely expressed gradients. I'm in equal admiration of the D7's transient abilities. As I listened to neo-Bluegrass trio Nickel Creek, the exchanges between mandolin and acoustic guitar—the definition of the flat-picks and resonant structure from the soundboards of these very different instruments—were fully revealed. The transients and micro-dynamic interplay were so fast and lively they were like tiny fireworks going off.

The Spondor was not a sweetspot speaker in the sense of requiring you to clamp your head in a vise to hear the full measure of its response and staging. Some credit must go to the generous dispersion of the LPZ tweeter. Earlier I alluded to the forward presentation of the D7. And there were times when I felt the voicing between mid and treble was slightly tipped in the direction of the tweeter. Not a continuously rising upper range as such, but a prominence in the lower treble that illuminates the leading edge of cymbals, vocal air, or string transients (like the etch of a well-rosined bow gliding along a cello string). For example during Elton John's "Someone Saved My Life Tonight," there was an added

SPECS & PRICING

Type: 2.5-way, bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker	Sensitivity: 89dB
Driver complement: 2.5-way; 1" tweeter, 7" mid/bass, 7" woofer	Dimensions: 8" x 38" x 14"
Frequency response: 29-20kHz +/-3dB	Weight: 48.5 lbs.
Impedance: 8 ohms (4 ohms minimum)	Price: \$5995

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dusting of silver air on top of the cymbal that opens the track. And during the Manhattan Jazz Quintet's "Autumn Leaves" a bit of extra coolness overlaid the trumpet solo. Oh, maybe it's just an added dB or two, but honestly my listening biases tend to lean in the other direction, so I felt the D7 pushed a little more detail that way than was strictly accurate.

Low-frequency extension plummeted forcefully into the 30-cycle range in my room. During Copland's *Fanfare* percussion, timpani, and bass drum cues were extended and well defined. Dynamic energy in these octaves was also impressive, and never failed to shore up the initial transient impact of those big drums with a solid, trailing punch. The bass bloom factor—the sense of low-frequency air being launched into the soundspace—was very good for this combination of speaker volume and driver size. And port noise was all but "invisible" to the ear. Only as the D7 reached its lower bass limits did it suggest some editorializing. In such instances, the bass drum impacts or electric bass energy would loosen slightly, with the ultimate slam softening and dispersing into the soundspace without decisive focus. On balance, however, and to the D7's credit, it performed much closer to a true three-way than a 2.5-way design. In this, it maintains a near-constant level of tonal stability and dynamic drive through the midband that most 2.5-ways struggle to achieve.

In the last few months, my listening room has welcomed a bonanza of medium-sized floorstanders from the Wilson Sabrina and Dali Rubicon 6 to the Vandersteen Treo CT. It's a tribute to the Spondor D7 that it competes aggressively in this vaunted company. Indeed it's the rare loudspeaker at any price that touches all the bases for every set of ears. But the reasonably priced D7 came very close in many areas. I've always liked high-end gear that wears its musicality on its sleeve, and the Spondor D7 doesn't hold back—not a whit. It's a speaker that should be high on everyone's short list to audition. **tas**



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