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54.99 ISSN 1465-5950



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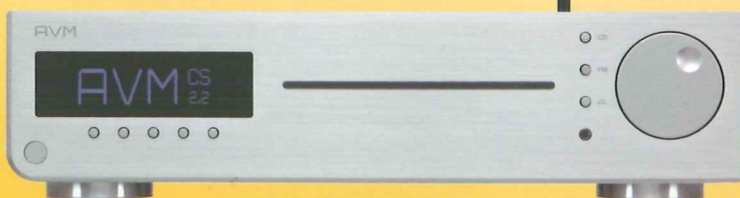
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Crystal Cable Arabesque Minissimo loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

The Crystal Cable Arabesque Minissimo could be thought of as 'The Little Loudspeaker that Could'. In the Arabesque Mini of a couple of years ago, Crystal Cables moved away from the all-glass floorstanders design of the first models, and that move is continued in the Minissimo. It retains the 'apostrophe' shape of all Arabesque models, which makes the speakers about as 'handed' as it's possible to get, and has 'enduring classic' and 'endearing design' written all over it.

Crystal Cable uses the same ScanSpeak Illuminator drivers it used in the Mini; a 25mm beryllium tweeter and 150mm laminated cone paper mid-bass design. This is no bad thing, because these are some of the most highly respected (which also means 'expensive') drivers in modern loudspeaker design. It's also a reflex model, with the port firing downward. That cabinet, however, is a no longer just a pure aluminium construction, but instead is a one-piece block matrix of resin and metal, from which the basic Minissimo



▶ shape is milled. This not only retains (possibly improves upon) many of the sonic properties of the aluminium or glass panelled Arabesque designs, but also drastically cuts the cost of the cabinet construction.

Alongside the usual portfolio of R&D tools, Crystal uses a sophisticated program called COMSOL, a multiphysics modelling program used for scientific and engineering problems. It's not commonly used in loudspeaker design, because loudspeaker builders have a habit of thinking of a loudspeaker as being something where modern engineering practices take a bit of a back seat. However, by treating the air inside and outside a loudspeaker as a gas (because, well, it is a gas) and using COSMOL's gas-dynamics modelling abilities, as well as its mechanical modelling parameters, Crystal has created a design that not only looks different, but does so for very sound engineering reasons. In particular, it means a natural resonant delay due to cabinet structure and not a forced resonant delay from cabinet damping.

The last piece in the Minissimo jigsaw is the crossover, an updated variation on the theme of a second-order network that Crystal Cable calls its 'Natural Science' crossover. This is designed to create a 12dB/octave slope while trying to minimise phase and time domain distortions. This means no nasty low impedance dips, and means that while the Minissimo is 3dB down at 48Hz, the slope is very gentle and is only -6dB down at 38Hz. At the other end of the scale, the tweeter extends to 38kHz and the crossover point is 1.8kHz. The trade-off is 86dB sensitivity.

The Minissimo can work well with small, high-quality amplifier designs, but really comes to life with some power behind it. There is an obvious match in the Devialet range, both in terms of amplifier output and industrial design. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, as the magazine went to press, it was announced the Devialet SAM scheme extended to the Minissimo, meaning even better bass depth and control, making an already extremely big sounding small loudspeaker even better. But, away from the Parisian connection, we'd recommend amplifiers of quality and quantity, and both in relatively ample amounts.

It needs sensitive installation and careful partnering then, but the Minissimo delivers much in return. It manages to scale to the room size in a surprising way. Play it in a barn of a room and it is just as comfortable as it will be in a room the size of a pack of cards. Yes, there are the inevitable volume and headroom limits imposed upon trying to make a little speaker spring to life in a big room, and it is best used in a near-field setting, but the speakers limits don't make themselves felt anywhere near as much as you might expect.

"The Minissimo allows you to better understand what it is about dance music that works for those who like dance music."

There's a sense of low-distortion rightness about this sound, not dissimilar from the kind of low distortion you get from an electrostatic, but with more dynamic range at the lower end of the spectrum. A semantic issue here is this is a speaker that does no harm and doesn't offend, but these should not be viewed as negatives. There are speakers that never offend because they are too tame and too soft sounding; Minissimo never offends because it is simply communicating music. If you find, say, dance music offensive, the Minissimo allows you to better understand what it is about dance music that works for those who like dance music. No, it's not going to turn an early music enthusiast into a thrash metal fan or a 1970s disco bunny, but it is going to help bring out your inner musicologist. That being said, plainly bad music sounds bad here. It doesn't rose tint your music, because its articulation (in terms of vocal articulation, instrument articulation, and its ability to turn on a crotchet) is so significant. What it does is give you all the information you need to draw your own conclusions about a piece of music, with your own biases set to minimum; my first listen to 'Dangerous Days' on *Taiga* by Zola Jesus [Mute] was not a good one, thinking she was trying to create some kind of bland indie dance anthem rather than her traditionally more intelligent approach to the genre. But on the Minissimo, I could reach deeper into the music and got a better take on what she's trying to do... and it's not sell out. I'm still not convinced, but I'm more willing to try to go where she's going with this new direction.

Where the Minissimo is at its best, however, is when it is in 'proper' territory. Playing 'Optimism' on *Accelerando* by the Vijay Iyer Trio [ACT] perhaps best demonstrates precisely why this speaker is not only extremely good, but extremely important. The best I can tell is this track seems to flip between 7/4 and 7/8 time between bars, making it almost impossible to keep time. In truth, it's one of those pieces of music that never gets played at audio shows (despite it ticking most of the audiophile boxes) because its every-changing time signature tends to sound like two pieces of music edited together for effect. On good systems, you can hear the shifting time signatures, but on the Minissimo you not only hear the time signature shift, but understand the 'length' of the piece of music as a whole and not just get caught up in the bar- ▶

▶ to-bar interplay. You get a profound sense of being deeply impressed with the trio, and begin eyeing those more challenging John Coltrane albums as impending future listening projects, in the process.

Truthfully, I've had to write this review several times, each time toning it down a little more than the last. Regardless, this speaker says many things – all of them good – about what Crystal Cable is doing with its loudspeakers now, and those things are worth shouting about from a great height. No other loudspeaker brand I can think of is going through such a significant improvement between generations at this time. And, while most brands are making improvements over the years, no company is approaching Crystal Cable's 'delta'. All the while, keep in mind that this is starting from the Arabesque series, which is a damn good base of operations in its own right. This important speaker deserves the highest recommendation. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two way reflex-ported standmount

Drive unit compliment: 1x 25mm beryllium dome tweeter, 1x 150mm laminated paper cone mid/woofer

Frequency response: 48Hz-38kHz \pm 3dB

Power handling: 150W maximum

Sensitivity: 86dB/W/m

Impedance: eight ohms nominal (seven ohms minimum)

THD: <0.3% from 200Hz-20kHz

Finish: Pearl white, solar orange, aquamarine blue

Dimensions (HxWxD, with stand): 96x30x25cm

Weight: 25kg

Price: £9,998 per pair including stands

Manufactured by: Crystal Cable

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Distributed by: Absolute Sounds

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