

**BLUE NOTE
ARTIST MELISSA
ALDANA**

**THE STEREOPHILE
INTERVIEW**

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WILSON ALEXIA V

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JASON VICTOR SERINUS

Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia V

LOUDSPEAKER

In the very first copy of *Stereophile* I encountered, back when issues were digest size, one review infuriated me. The writer went on at inordinate length about the fine wines he'd consumed during the review period. On and on he went, gushing about the costly drinks, until I exclaimed (in a sentence laced with expletives), "What in the world does any of this have to do with audio?!"

Lifetimes later, I think I know. Although to my recollection the connection was never made explicit, the writer was attempting to reinforce his credentials as a connoisseur in all matters.

An informed imbiber I am not—I'm often content with baby sips from my husband's glass—but I am a color, texture, and nuance junky. Give me a component that allows me to better savor the reediness of the oboe, the difference in weight and timbre produced by gut and metal strings, or the sonic distinctions among orchestras, and I'm in heaven. Briefly. Then back to *terra firma* I fall, plodding through my daily routine until the next taste of the divine comes my way.

My thoughts turn to a short scene from a black-and-white film I saw decades ago that continues to haunt me: A door opens on a second-floor room to reveal a woman seated before a white plate on a simple table, knife and fork in her hands. Outside the door, men are lined up on a staircase that descends to ground level. Each time the door opens, she holds her knife and fork upright as she utters but one word: "Next!" A man enters, the door closes. After a moment of silence, the door reopens, another man enters, and the scene repeats.¹

In my view, this scene is not, ultimately, about sex; rather, it's about insatiability, the desire to constantly fill oneself with whatever brings pleasure. In my case, it's color and texture. I can't get enough of them. My near-constant pursuit of color and texture—of new musical vistas and perspectives—is one of the things that keeps reviewing fresh for me. Rarely do I approach a component, whether a humungous amplifier or a thin umbilical cable, without asking myself, "What new revelations and pleasures await me here?"

S, V, X, and more

The Wilson Audio Alexia V floorstanding loudspeaker (\$67,500/pair in standard finish), the third iteration of the Alexia model introduced in 2012, sits in the middle of the Wilson floorstander line, with the Alexx V, Chronosonic XVX, and the mighty, limited-edition WAMM Master Chronosonic above it. Below it in descending order sit the Sasha DAW, Yvette, and SabrinaX.

The Alexia V incorporates 30 upgrades of various importance. Among the more significant—what Wilson CEO Daryl Wilson calls the "heavy hitters"—are new drivers, strategic use of the new V-Material, improved capacitors, custom-made cables, improved connectors, a new spike system, new enclosures with different dimensions and characteristics, and a new, more accurate alignment mechanism. Other upgrades—the "light hitters"—include pressure-release cutouts in the woofer blades and what Wilson describes as "a more organic design flow from the woofer up to the midrange," made possible by the tighter build tolerances enabled by the company's new CNC machine.

Since the Alexia 2 was introduced in 2017, "Five years of materials research and grassroots development² has been incorporated into the new Alexia V," Wilson explained during a Zoom chat. "I don't think it's good for our industry to churn through a particular model in less than five years unless there are enough evolved elements to produce a substantial upgrade. Having a new tweeter is not enough by itself to justify the replacement of a product that costs \$50,000 or \$100,000 or more. We are always developing on the grassroots level. When music lovers invest their hard-earned money in a product, we want it to be around and current for as long as possible."

Succeeding his late father, David A. Wilson, co-founder of Wilson Audio Specialties, Daryl is involved in every aspect of the company's manufacturing. "There's a long history of me sweep-

1 So far, no one I know has been able to identify the title of this movie.

2 To Daryl Wilson, grassroots development means focusing on and refining one element of the speaker at a time and then perfecting the synergy of parts.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Multiway, bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker. Drive units: 1" Wilson Convergent Synergy Carbon silk-dome tweeter in sealed carbon-fiber enclosure; one 7" QuadraMag alnico doped paper-pulp midrange unit in rear-slotted X-, S-, and V-Material enclosure; 8" and 10" hard paper-pulp woofers in rear-ported X- and V-Material enclosure. Sensitivity:

90dB/W/m at 1kHz. Nominal impedance: 4 ohms. Minimum impedance: 2.59 ohms at 84Hz. Minimum amplifier power: 20Wpc. Frequency response: 19Hz–33kHz 3dB, Room Average Response.

Dimensions 50.9" (129.5cm) H (w/o Acoustic Diodes) × 15.8" (40cm) W × 24.2" (61.4cm) D. Weight: 265lb (120.2kg) each. Total shipping weight: 795lb/

pair (360.6kg).

Finish Available in 4 standard colors, 12 custom colors, and 10 premium colors. Custom combinations possible. Acoustic Diode spikes: Natural stainless steel or carbon black.

Serial numbers of units reviewed 0013, 0014 (listening), 0023 (measuring).

Price \$67,500, \$69,500, \$71,500, or \$79,500/pair,

depending upon finish. Approximate number of North American dealers: 37. Warranty: 5 years with registration. Manufactured in USA.

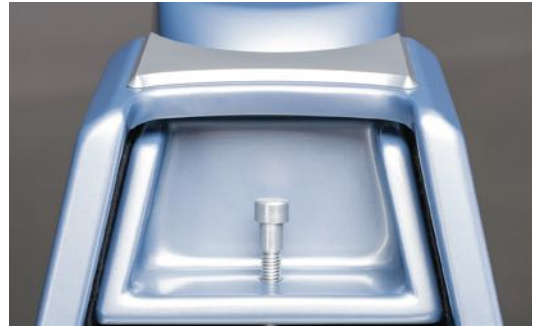
Manufacturer

Wilson Audio Specialties, 2233 Mountain Vista Ln., Provo, UT 84606. Tel: (801) 377-2233. Web: wilsonaudio.com.



ing parking lots and working for allowance,” he said at the start of our chat. “My parents never just handed me money; they handed me opportunity.”

After working in fabrication, inventory, production, and customer service, Daryl began his design apprenticeship when Dave invited him to listen in as he evaluated different crossover component values for the woofer in the WATT Puppy 7. In 2009–2010, Daryl took the lead on the design of the Surround Series 2 wall-mounted left- and right-channel speakers. But the first design that bears the full Daryl design DNA, as seen in its driver alignment and organic architecture, was the Alexx Series 1, which reached completion in early February of 2016. Today, Daryl works closely with Wilson engineers Vern Credille, Blake



MEASUREMENTS

With Jason Victor Serinus’s listening room 2900 miles from my home, measuring the Wilson Alexia V presented potential logistical problems. Fortunately, Elliot Fishkin of Manhattan audio retailer Innovative Audio¹ was amenable to my measuring the Alexia Vs that had just been installed in one of their listening rooms. (Thanks, Elliot.)

As I was traveling from Brooklyn to Innovative on the New York subway, I used the Fuzzmeasure app installed on my Mac mini for the acoustic measurements rather than the bulky 1997-vintage PC that I use with DRA Labs’ MLSSA system. The microphone was a calibrated Earthworks QTC-40. Preamplification, D/A conversion, and A/D conversion were performed by a Metric Halo 2882 FireWire interface. The amplifiers used for the testing were Dan D’Agostino Momentum MxV monoblocks.

For the spatially averaged in-room response measurements, I left the speakers in the positions where Wilson’s Peter McGrath and Innovative Audio’s Chris Forman had set them up for the previous weekend’s demonstrations. For the quasi-anechoic response measurements, Chris carefully maneuvered the left-hand Alexia V, serial number 0023, several feet away from its corner location so that it was aimed along the room’s diagonal. (Thanks, Chris.) As the Wilson speaker weighs 265lb, we

weren’t able to lift it off the floor to move the early reflections further back in time. However, I felt that if I performed the measurements at 1m rather than my usual 50”, the FFT-calculated response would have sufficient resolution in the midrange.

Wilson specifies the Alexia V’s sensitivity as 90dB/W/m, which is the same as that of the original Alexia and the Alexia 2.² My estimate was 91.8dB/2.83V/m; note the different units. As the Alexia V’s nominal impedance is specified as 4 ohms, the speaker will be drawing 2W from the amplifier with a signal of 2.83V. 2V is equivalent to 1W into 4 ohms, which means that if I adopt the dB/W/m units used by

Wilson, my sensitivity estimate is numerically 3dB lower, at 88.8dB/W/m, slightly below the Wilson specification.

I used Dayton Audio’s DATS V2 system to measure the Alexia V’s impedance. The impedance magnitude (fig.1, solid trace) remains between 4 ohms and 8 ohms for almost the entire audioband. The minimum value was 2.45 ohms at 85Hz; Wilson says the minimum is 2.59 ohms, at 84Hz. The electrical phase angle (dotted trace) is high

¹ See stereophile.com/content/where-rubber-meets-road-elliott-fishkin-innovative-audio-video.

² See stereophile.com/content/wilson-audio-specialties-alexia-loudspeaker-measurements and stereophile.com/content/wilson-audio-specialties-alexia-series-2-loudspeaker-measurements.

Stereophile Wilson Alexia V Impedance (ohms) & Phase (deg) vs Frequency (Hz)

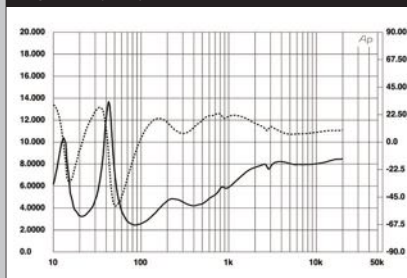


Fig.1 Wilson Alexia V, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed) (2 ohms/vertical div.).

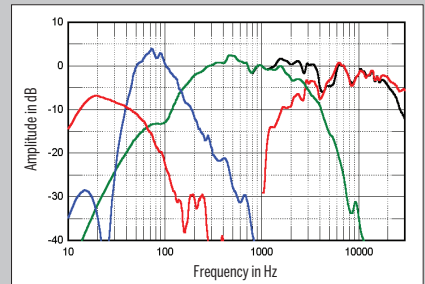


Fig.2 Wilson Alexia V, anechoic response on optimal axis at 1m of the tweeter (red above 1kHz), the midrange unit (green above 800Hz), and of both units together averaged across 30° horizontal window (black), all corrected for microphone response, with the nearfield responses of the midrange unit (green), woofers (blue), and port (red) respectively plotted below 400Hz, 800Hz, and 300Hz.

Schmutz, and Jarom Lance on virtually every component of every loudspeaker.

Development of the new QuadraMag midrange driver was started by Dave, but he died before it was finished. Daryl praises the old midrange driver, first introduced in the discontinued Alexandria series, as very fast and articulate. By using four alnico (aluminum-nickel-cobalt) magnet slugs, he and Credille endowed the new driver with enough sensitivity to blend naturally with the Alexia V's tweeter and woofers. In Daryl's opinion, the new driver moves the speaker closer to the sound of live, unamplified music.³

The Convergent Synergy Carbon (CSC) tweeter is "something we've been refining for a long time," Daryl said. "The rear wave chamber—the way we capture and address the back pressure from the tweeter diaphragm—has been developed over the last decade. Previously, we had an inverted titanium dome tweeter that had very linear off-axis dispersion. But the Alexia V's CSC tweeter, which was first incorporated into the Alexx V, has a new rear wave chamber that can only be manufactured by special, in-house 3D printers that work with carbon fiber.

"The end result of optimizing our internal lattice work and everything else is a tweeter that has more microdetail and expres-

sion," he claims. "This has come about because the new way we capture and manage the rear wave doesn't allow it to interfere with the backside of the diaphragm.

"Experimenting and refining the tweeter was a lot of fun. Carbon fiber wasn't our first choice; there were myriad materials we could print with. But the printer manufacturer is an audiophile, who thought the whole thing was really cool. ... He'd give me a sample, I'd listen and evaluate, and we'd experiment further and share ideas. If you look inside the tweeter, there's a lot that goes on between the inner and outer walls of the rear chamber. We were able to manufacture and print in ways that optimize this space."

Then there is the V-Material, from which the latest Alexia and Alexx models derive their names. Daryl describes it as an extremely damped, modified version of the third-generation X-Material, a high-density phenolic-resin composite that, along with S-Material, comprises the cabinet.⁴

³ The QuadraMag driver was first introduced in the Wilson XVX.

⁴ An outdated YouTube video describes the original X-Material, first introduced in 1992 in the X-1 Grand SLAMM, as a "very monotonic ... rigid as steel ... highly damped cellulose and phenolic composite." S-Material, which first appeared in the midrange baffle of the Sasha Series 1, is a combination of natural fibers in a phenolic-resin laminate.

measurements, continued

at low frequencies; the effective resistance (EPDR³), which is calculated from the combination of magnitude and phase angle, is >3 ohms above 225Hz but drops below 2 ohms between 50Hz and 90Hz. The minimum EPDR is 1.15 ohms at 66Hz. The Alexia V is not as current-hungry as the earlier versions—the original Alexia's EPDR was below 1 ohm through most of the bass and midrange; that of the Alexia 2 lay below 2 ohms in the same regions, with the same minimum value at 65Hz—but the V still needs to be matched with amplifiers that won't be fazed by low impedances.

The impedance traces are free from small wrinkles that would suggest the presence of cabinet resonances. I listened to the enclosures with a stethoscope while I played the half-step-spaced tonebursts from my *Editor's Choice* CD (Stereophile STPH016-2). While I could hear some liveliness between 200Hz and 600Hz on the upper enclosure's sidewalls, this was low in level. The woofer enclosure seemed impressively inert.

The saddle centered at 21Hz in the impedance magnitude trace suggests that the port on the rear panel of the woofer enclosure is tuned to that frequency, which implies excellent low-frequency extension. (The Alexia and Alexia 2 had very similar port tunings.) The port's output, measured in the nearfield and plotted with its level scaled relative to that of the woofers' summed output in the ratio of the square roots of their radiating areas (fig.2, red trace below 300Hz), peaks between 10Hz and 60Hz, with a clean upper-frequency

rolloff. The woofers' nearfield output (fig.2, blue trace) has a deep notch at the port tuning frequency then peaks between 50Hz and 100Hz, crossing over to the midrange unit (green trace) around 150Hz. (Again, this is very similar to the low-frequency nearfield behavior of the two earlier versions of the Alexia.)

Chris Forman had told me that when the speakers were set up, the time alignment of the midrange units and tweeters had been optimized for an ear height of 38" at the front listening seat, which was 160" from each speaker. As the Alexia V's tweeter is 49" from the floor with the speaker on its spikes and I was going to measure the farfield behavior at 1m, I calculated that I should place the microphone 46" high, which would place it on the line joining the tweeter to a listener's ears. The green trace above 400Hz and the red trace above 1kHz in fig.2, respectively, show the farfield responses of the midrange unit and the tweeter on this axis, while the black trace

shows their combined output averaged across a 30° horizontal angle.

The midrange/tweeter crossover appears to be set just below 3kHz and other than a narrow suckout between 4kHz and 6kHz, the response trend is relatively even. It is possible that the suckout is a result of the relatively close microphone distance, as it was not present in the spatially averaged response, which was taken at a 160" distance (see fig.3). The geometry of the Innovative listening room meant that it wasn't possible to move the microphone and its stand more than 15° to the side of the optimal axis to measure its behavior off-axis. (It wasn't feasible to take my bulky computer-controlled Outline turntable to Innovative for the measurements, even if we could have lifted the Alexia V onto it.) However, the tweeter starts to become

³ EPDR is the resistive load that gives rise to the same peak dissipation in an amplifier's output devices as the loudspeaker. See "Audio Power Amplifiers for Loudspeaker Loads," *JAES*, Vol.42 No.9, September 1994, and stereophile.com/reference/707heavy/index.html.

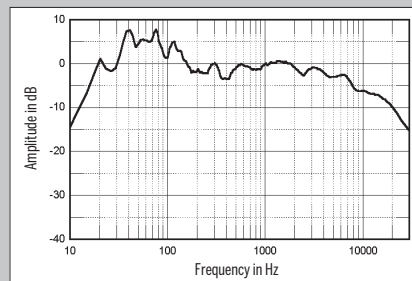


Fig.3 Wilson Alexia V, spatially averaged, 1/6-octave response in Innovative Audio's listening room.

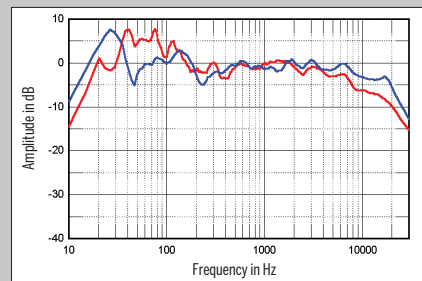


Fig.4 Wilson Alexia V, spatially averaged, 1/6-octave response in Innovative Audio's listening room (red), and of Wilson Alexia 2 (blue) in JA's listening room.

In an email, Daryl wrote that S-Material continues to be the optimal midrange coupling material at Wilson Audio. X-Material is used for the enclosures, woofer baffles, tweeter baffles, internal bracing, and for damping the external gantry. V-Material, which utilizes different damping/fill materials from those in the X and S versions, resides in three places in Alexia V:

1. At the top of the midrange module, on which the independent tweeter moves back and forth. Acting as a vibration sink, it serves to reduce vibration-induced distortion caused by unintended movement of the acoustic center point of the tweeter.
2. Nested between the upper woofer and midrange.
3. Incorporated into the housing of the spikes.



measurements, continued

relatively directional above 15kHz, which is why the black trace in fig.2 slopes down above that frequency compared with the tweeter's on-axis output (red trace). Repeating the 1m response measurement at different microphone heights indicated that a suckout develops in the crossover region above the optimal axis. The on-axis response is maintained up to 5° below that axis, however.

I compared the responses of both Alexia Vs at 1m on the optimal axis; the difference between the two responses lay within ±1.25dB from 300Hz to 20kHz, which is good pair matching.

To examine the Wilson Alexia V's spatially averaged in-room response, I averaged 20 1/6 octave-smoothed spectra, taken for the left and right speakers individually, in a rectangular grid 36" wide by 18" high and centered on the center of the listening seat. The result is shown in fig.3. The response is even through the lower midrange to the mid-treble, with small dips balanced by small peaks. The usual gentle downward slope in the top two octaves is present; this will be due both to the increasing directivity of the tweeter in this region and to the high-frequency absorption of the room's furnishings. The upper- and mid-bass regions are elevated, which may well have been due to the speakers' corner placement. I could hear this when I listened to the music recordings being played by Peter McGrath at the press preview in this room, though the Alexia V's low frequencies were superbly well controlled.

Although I had examined the spatially

averaged response of the Wilson Alexandria XLF in Innovative's listening room in 2012,⁴ the room has been significantly modified since then. I thought it more informative, therefore, to compare the Alexia V's spatially averaged response in Innovative's current room (fig.4, red trace) with that of the Alexia 2 in my room (blue trace). The Alexia 2s were positioned well away from the room corners, so the mid and upper bass were in good balance with the midrange. However, the lowest-frequency mode in my room was maximally excited. The Alexia V's midrange and low treble are more evenly balanced than those of the Alexia 2, though their greater distance from the listening position—160" vs 102"—means that the red trace slopes down above 5kHz to a greater extent than the blue trace.

In the time domain, the step response on the optimal axis at 1m (fig.5) reveals that the tweeter and woofers are connected in positive acoustic polarity, the midrange

unit in negative polarity. (I confirmed this by looking at the individual step response of each unit.) The decay of the tweeter's step smoothly blends with the negative-going start of the midrange unit's step and the decay of the midrange unit's step blends almost as smoothly with the positive-going start of the woofers' step. This suggests optimal crossover implementation. Finally, the cumulative spectral-decay plot at 1m on the optimal axis (fig.6) shows a relatively clean initial decay but low-level ridges of delayed energy at 2.76kHz and 6.28kHz.

Overall, the Wilson Alexia V's measured performance is very good, correlating with what I heard at Innovative. I was impressed by the uncompressed scale of the sound and the palpability and stability of the soundstaging in Peter McGrath's demonstration, as well as by the extended and superbly well-controlled low frequencies.

—John Atkinson

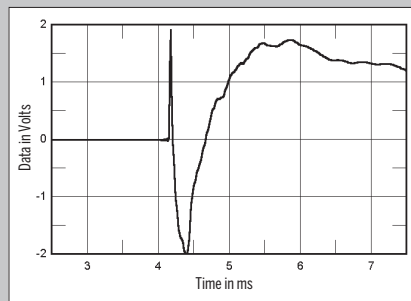


Fig.5 Wilson Alexia V, step response on optimal axis at 1m (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

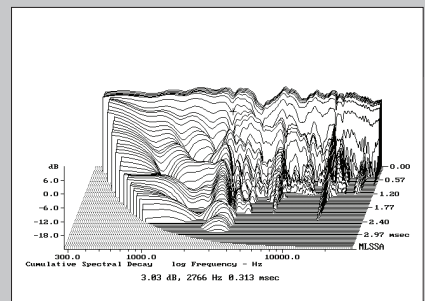


Fig.6 Wilson Alexia V, cumulative spectral-decay plot on optimal axis at 1m (0.15ms risetime).

It's fair to conclude that the company wouldn't have used V to identify its two latest speaker model upgrades if they didn't consider it a major advance in resonance control.

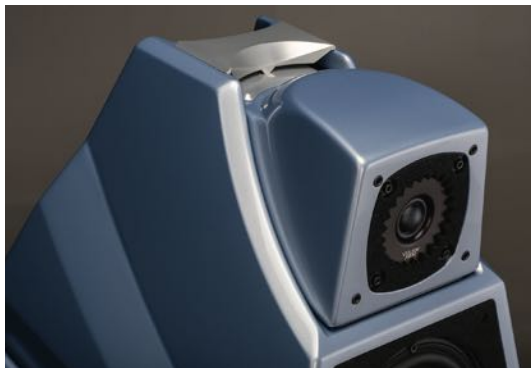
When questioned about the use of aluminum and other cabinet materials touted by rival speaker designers, Daryl replied, "We've been using a laser vibrometer system for a long time to evaluate and catalog our experiments with well over 50 slabs of identically sized cabinet material. We do use metal in the substructure of our gantry, but we dampen it with the X-Material that's coupled to it, and we also employ strategically inlaid diffraction pad material and more."

Readers familiar with the Alexia Series 2 will note several differences in size and shape. The width of the woofer enclosure—hence of the speaker itself—was increased by about 1/4", depth by 1 1/4". The internal volume of the woofer enclosure is about 9% larger, that of the midrange enclosure 6.4% larger. Daryl says this allows for "a little more low-frequency extension and alacrity in the bass and a bit more midrange bloom." Not visible from the outside are more elaborate diffusers used inside the midrange enclosure. Sensitivity is claimed to have increased by 1dB, from 89 to 90, and crossover modifications have reduced the impedance dip at 84Hz a fraction, from 2.59 ohms to 2.54 ohms. We'll see what John Atkinson's measurements have to say about that.

"Form follows function," Daryl said in conclusion. "Our primary objective was to get better performance and alignment between the drivers in the time domain. We were able to change the angle of the midrange baffle and how the tweeter and midrange adjust independently of each other relative to the launch point of the woofers. That's one of the reasons the look changed. In addition, the bass goes lower and is more controlled."

Setup

Gary Bruestle, speaker-setup wizard and design/sales consultant at Definitive Audio in Bellevue and Seattle, Washington, visited my home for the initial setup.⁵ Peter McGrath, Wilson's account executive and brand ambassador, followed up with a fine-tuning visit. In the end, the speakers remained at the same distance from the center point of the room as before but well over an inch further forward. Toe-in was decreased just a bit so that—this is new—the tweeters were aimed at points just wide of my ears. Happily, this widened both the soundstage and the sweet spot, making it possible to welcome a guest in for optimal listening, two if you sit close. Using Wilson's knowledge base, we were able to precisely align the speaker for my 41" ear height and 12'1" distance from the speakers.



I heard more warmth on the solo violin and firmer, better-controlled low lines on the cello and double basses.

Music at last

First impressions are not just important; they are vital for an objective assessment of audio components. As the ear and heart accustom themselves to changes, what at first inspires wide-eyed wonder can quickly turn routine.

My first listen was to American tenor Jonathan Tetelman, whose debut album for DG, *Arias* (24/96 WAV), has garnered accolades. I reviewed this album for *San*

Francisco Classical Voice, in the process listening to it several times. I was delighted to discover, through the Alexia Vs, additional natural color and warmth in his ringing voice. He sounded wonderful.⁶

Turning to an old standby, Boris Blank's "Electrified II" from Yello's *Toy* (24/48 MQA, Universal Music/Tidal), I discovered improved transparency and superbly controlled, pounding bass.

In *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, from *Strauss*, with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig under Andris Nelsons—our June 2022 Recording of the Month (24/96 WAV, DG)—the soundstage was wider and more convincing (thanks, in part, no doubt, to the new speaker positioning). I heard more warmth on the solo violin and firmer, better-controlled low lines on the cello and double basses. I also heard more detail and more nuanced dynamics, which further increased my appreciation of Nelsons's mastery and invited deeper involvement with the music. It was, to indulge in a cliché, as if I was hearing the recording for the first time. The Alexia V enabled me to indulge not only in clichés but also in the music, to rejoice in its compositional genius and artistry. The violin glowed as never before. I glowed in response.

Another revelation came in a subsequent listening session, when I returned to one of my most treasured vocal performances: soprano Arleen Auger's early digital recording of Obradors's "Del

⁵ Wilson's setup policy: A trained representative of the dealer who sold any current-model Wilson speaker from SabrinaX to XVX is required to be involved in the installation and setup of the speakers in the client's listening room.

⁶ By the time this review is published, I will have heard Tetelman live for the first time in San Francisco Opera's *La Traviata*.

Cabello más sutil” (From the finest hair⁷) from *Love Songs* (16/44.1 FLAC, Naxos/Qobuz), a triumph for its late recording engineer, John Eargle. I never expected a recording I’ve played dozens of times, at home and at audio shows, to contain previously unrevealed nuance. Yet, the slightest changes in Auger’s volume and vocal color were now apparent. Has it really taken more than 30 years, hundreds of audio shows, a speaker upgrade, and 5,877,323 other equipment changes to finally discover how subtle an artist Auger was?

Skip ahead to Peter McGrath’s visit. In addition to indulging in some of Peter’s wondrous recordings—Peter is not shy about extolling the role MQA remastering has played in the glorious sound of his earlier and current recording efforts—we listened to parts of François-Xavier Roth’s recording, with Les Siècles period-instrument orchestra, of Mahler’s Symphony No.4 (both 24/96 WAV download and Qobuz 24/96 FLAC—we chose whichever came up first in Roon). I’ve gone bananas many times over the contrasting colors of the woodwinds in this recording, but they were highlighted even more by the Alexia V. It wasn’t just the woodwinds: I could discern harmonics from bows on gut strings that I’d never heard before.

I couldn’t let Peter move on from Mahler’s Fourth before sharing Kathleen Battle’s heavenly performance of the final movement in her 1989 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic under Lorin Maazel (16/44.1 MQA, CBS/Tidal). As much as I like Roth’s zippy interpretation and Sabine Devieille’s superb soprano, I find Maazel’s slower rendering and Battle’s voice ideal. At the transition to the soprano’s final verse, Maazel executes a radical slowdown that intensifies the musical tension. Few Mahler conductors—Bernstein and Rattle perhaps—have managed to pull off a similar effect.

For decades, I’ve heard tales of the fabled golden glow of the Vienna Philharmonic in their own hall, Vienna’s Musikverein. Dave Wilson resolved to redo his entire speaker line after he sat through countless rehearsals in the Musikverein and kept asking himself, why can’t my speakers fully replicate that sound? I have never been able to discern that fabled glow from Vienna Philharmonic

recordings played on my system. Some may respond, “Hey, Serinus, maybe you needed to listen to vinyl instead of digital.” Maybe, but now, thanks to the Alexia V and the MQA remastering of Maazel’s early digital recording, I’ve finally heard that golden glow in my music room.

Via the QuadraMag driver, the Alexia V’s midrange sounds warmer, fuller, smoother, and more resolving than that of its predecessor. That it retrieves dynamic nuance and detail superbly was confirmed when I returned to Patricia Barber’s “Surrender,” from *Higher* (24/352.8 MQA, Impex/Tidal). I’ve played this recording countless times—it was my September 2019 Recording of the Month—but I’ve never before held my breath as I did when I discovered how often Barber, like Auger, uses minute changes in volume to imbue her music with expressive subtlety. If I’m dreaming, let me dream, because when I hear the leading edge of the guitar so perfectly clear and believable and the double bass so full, taut, and rich, I don’t want to wake up.

Some credit—perhaps much credit—is owed to the changes to Wilson’s tweeter and other components, to materials, and to cabinet dimensions. Highs seemed clearer than before, bass tauter. I could hear more air around the flute, viola, and harp on Emmanuel Pahud, Gérard Caussé, and Marie-Pierre Langlamet’s wonderful recording of Debussy’s sonata for those instruments, from Erato’s *Debussy: Sonates & Trio* (24/96 WAV).

I’ve seen less of my audiophile buddy Scott these days, as his time has been split between home life, sewing the robes he must complete to enter the Zen Priesthood, and trying to maintain serenity through kitchen-remodeling hell. When he managed to spare a few hours, we began with the title track from Grant Green’s *Idle Moments* (24/192 FLAC, Blue Note/Qobuz). I heard new, irresistible warmth. The piano sound was the epitome of mellow, and bass, solid, clear of pitch, resonant, warm. I heard new complexity—what some call microtonality—from Green’s guitar,

7 As you might suspect (or know if you speak Spanish), “sutil” translates most closely and directly to “subtle”; to me, “fine” seems closer than “soft,” which is used in the more common translation of the name of this song: “Of the Softest Hair.”



and more air around the drum. The physicality of sound of each instrument was a joy.

Equally gratifying was the natural sound of horn in Cannonball Adderley's version of "Autumn Leaves" from *Somethin' Else* (24/96 MQA, Blue Note/Tidal). Miles Davis's trumpet was varicolored, the reed sound palpable on Adderley's alto sax. Talk about up close and personal.

I'm not sure I would want to get *too* up close and personal to the floor-shaking organ at the start of Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, but it sounded mighty and clear through the Alexia V. It sounded even more massive and impressive when I heard it during the Alexia V launch at Innovative Audio in NYC. Many of the same components I have in my own system were used at that event—Stromtank S 2500 Quantum Mk II, dCS Rossini Apex DAC and Clock, D'Agostino Momentum preamp, and D'Agostino Momentum MxV monoblocks (one step up from my reference Progression M550 monos)—but Innovative Audio's longer listening room allowed the Alexia to sing and deep bass to bloom. I grew so covetous of the bass in that room that I immediately asked the universe to deliver an unexpected inheritance that would allow me to enlarge my room beyond its current dimensions. I'm still waiting.

In the Chiaroscuro Quartet's new recording of Mozart's Prussian Quartets,⁸ period instruments sounded delicious, with subtle, affecting dynamics. On "Give Me One Reason," from *New Beginning* (16/44.1 MQ, Elektra/Tidal), Tracy Chapman's voice and guitar sounded more believable than it did with the old Alexias. Terry Riley's multitracked and overdubbed *Sum Rings* (24/96MQA, Nonesuch/Tidal) sounded clearer, more colorful and detailed. It is easy to understand why it earned recording engineer Leslie Ann Jones another Grammy Award, for Best Engineered Album, Classical.

What more can one ask from a component than to move one closer to the essence of creation and inspiration?

Conclusion

It's been quite the six months in Serinusland. First the Stromtank, then the Nordost QNet and QSource, and then one of the finest DACs I've been privileged to enjoy, the dCS Rossini Apex. I never



ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources dCS Rossini Apex DAC, Rossini Clock and Transport; Innuos Statement NextGen Music Server; Roon Nucleus+ music server, Uptone Audio EtherRegen with AfterDark Gieseemann Emperor Double Crown Master Clock, and Nordost QNet Ethernet Switch, all powered by Nordost QSource linear power supplies (2); Small Green Computer Sonore Deluxe optical Module, Linksys mesh router, and Arris modem, all powered by HDPLEX 300 linear power supply; Apple 2017 iPad Pro.

Preamplifier Dan D'Agostino Momentum HD.

Power amplifiers Dan D'Agostino Progression M550 monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia 2.

Cables Digital: Nordost Odin 1, Odin 2, and Valhalla 2 (USB and Ethernet), Frey 2 (USB adapter); AudioQuest WEL, Wireworld Platinum Starlight Cat8 (Ethernet), OM1 62.5/125 multimode duplex (fiber optic). Interconnect: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. Speaker: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. AC: Nordost Odin 2, Valhalla 2; AudioQuest Dragon and Dragon HC. Umbilicals: Ghent Audio Canare for HDPLEX 300 LPS and NAS; QSource Premium DC cables with LEMO terminations for QSources.

Accessories Grand Prix Monza 8-shelf double rack and amp stands, 1.5" Formula platform; Symposium Ultra Platform; Nordost 20-amp QB8, QX4 (2), QK1, and QV2 AC enhancers, QKore 1 and 6 with QKore Wires, Titanium and Bronze Sort Kones, Sort Lifts; Stromtank S 2500 Quantum Mk II power generator; AudioQuest Niagara 7000 and 5000 power conditioners, NRG Edison outlets, JitterBugs; Tweek Geek Dark Matter Stealth power conditioner with High Fidelity and Furutech options; Wilson Audio Pedestals; A/V RoomService Polyflex Diffusers; Resolution Acoustics room treatment; Stillpoints Clouds (8) and Aperture 1 (2) and 2 (2) acoustic treatments; HRS DPX-14545 Damping Plates; Stein Music Q3 Quantum Organizer, Super Naturals, and Blue Suns; Bybee Room Neutralizers; Absolare Stabilians; Marigo Aida CD mat.

Dedicated listening room 20' L x 16' W x 9'4" H.—Jason Victor Serinus

fully appreciated how good each of those components is until Wilson Audio's new Alexia V loudspeaker let me hear so much more of what they can deliver.

All these changes and improvements can be summarized in one sentence: Assisted by first-rate amplification and source components, the Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia V presented the entirety of the musical argument more completely and satisfyingly than its predecessor did. And its predecessor was very fine.

The notion that the loudspeaker is the most important component in an audio system is hogwash, although that conversation may be more semantic than substantial. What's the point of being able to hear more of what your system can deliver if all you hear is more distortion or mediocrity?

Still, if your sources and amplification are up to snuff and your source material musically rich, their gifts can be fully appreciated only through excellent loudspeakers.

The Wilson Alexia V isn't just excellent, it's superb. Within the limitations of the scale and reach of speakers its size, its ability to deliver the range, color, texture, detail, nuance, dynamics, visceral impact, and emotion central to musical greatness is among the finest I've ever experienced. A pair of Alexia Vs can thrill you to the core and make your heart sing. ■

⁸ Reviewed elsewhere in this issue.