



LOUDSPEAKER

Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker
Made by: Wilson Audio Specialties, Utah, USA
Supplied by: Absolute Sounds Ltd
Telephone: 0208 971 3909
Web: www.wilsonaudio.com; www.absolutesounds.com
Price: £28,880

AUDIO FILE

Wilson Audio Yvette

Sandwiched between the Sabrina and Sasha, the new Yvette may emerge as Wilson's most popular speaker yet
Review: José Victor Henriques Lab: Keith Howard

Daryl Wilson, who recently replaced his father David as CEO and President of Wilson Audio, has described the £28,880 Yvette as 'the most advanced single enclosure loudspeaker in the history of Wilson Audio'. It sounds like a bold statement until one realises there aren't that many 'single enclosure' loudspeakers in Wilson Audio's history. Even the Watts were soon paired with the Puppies. And, over the years, I recall having tested or listened to the Cub, Duetto II [HFN Apr '14], Sabrina [HFN Aug '15] and, of course, the Sophia 3 [HFN Oct '10] – which the Yvette resembles, and now replaces.

IT'S IN THE GENES

In practice, the Yvette is not a 'Sophia Series 4' (or should I say 'Sophia 5', since Wilson Audio doesn't do 4s as it brings bad luck) for this is a new loudspeaker designed from scratch, with a slightly smaller height and footprint, signed off by the new kid on the Wilson block – who has also given us the lovely Sabrina and the dominatrix Alexx [HFN Nov '16].

In the Wilson Audio line-up, the Yvette falls right into the gap left by the discontinued Sophia: between the entry-level floorstander Sabrina and the Sasha 2 [HFN Jun '14], which was the first of the modular designs. Unlike the Sophia, designed by David Wilson and launched 15 years ago, the Yvette is, as I say, Daryl Wilson's own child, though it draws on technologies developed for the Sasha 2 and also the Alexia. This includes the 254mm paper-pulp bass driver, 'cousin to one of the woofers used in the Alexx and WAMM', says Wilson, together with the XLF's proprietary midrange driver. The tweeter is

RIGHT: Wilson's 1in 'Convergent Synergy' silk dome tweeter is married to a 7in mid and 10in paper pulp bass driver, the latter two units being mounted in separate, vented enclosures

the silk-dome Convergent Synergy III which replaced the more effusive Focal beryllium inverted dome of yore. (Good riddance, if you pardon my French!) Interestingly, Wilson's Sabrina uses a MkIV version that wouldn't fit into this architecture.

X-MATERIAL ENCLOSURE

The Yvette is a 3-way design, featuring a circular bass port and a slotted midrange port, while the tweeter enclosure is fully sealed. The top third of the single box cabinet is prismatic in shape – a truncated pyramid in fact – with a sloping back, and with the midrange and tweeter baffles angled in order to achieve the desired phase coherence. It's done this time by means of a fixed geometric alignment, rather than the more versatile modular approach found in the up-scaled

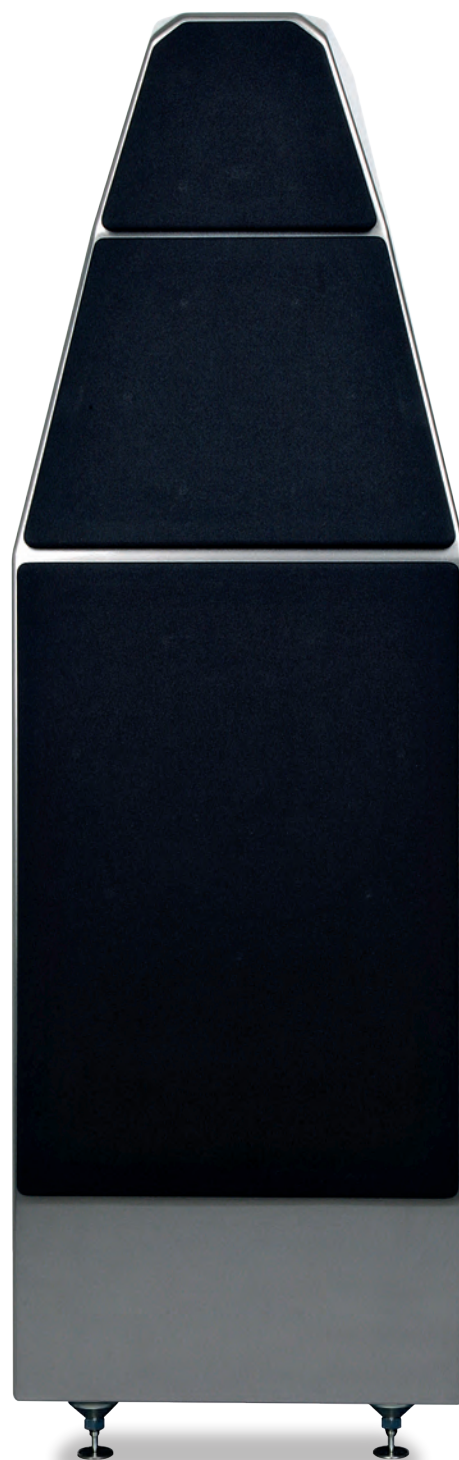
models. The angles were optimised for a propagation delay set for a listening position at 9ft and 39in height.

For each foot further away you should – Wilson says (and I'm not kidding)

– sit half-an-inch higher, or adjust the spikes to lean it back or forward. The woofer baffle also has a 2° slope for better integration with the midrange.

It is debatable whether half-an-inch would make any difference, unless you had your head in a vice. However, there is no denying that the better the phase alignment the more the perceived resolution improves, and with it the natural decay of instruments, space and time cues (*ergo* transient speed), musical energy and pace – all combining for an audibly better time-domain performance.

The enclosure is sufficiently small as to be domestically acceptable even in Japan [see p41]. But beware, as each speaker weighs a considerable 79kg, thanks largely to its 'X-material' cabinet – a low resonance, military grade composite developed by Wilson and with internal bracing determined by laser testing to



eliminate vibrations. The woofer and tweeter baffles are also X-material, while for the midrange baffle the choice fell on Wilson's 'S-material', claimed to 'sound better and sweeter and have an exquisite performance'. I don't know how on earth a supposedly inert composite can have a sound of its own, much less one that is 'exquisite', but these are Daryl's own

'Ferrari-red would have even better matched its transient speed'





HOLE IN THE MIDDLE

Some three-or-higher-way loudspeakers with separate midrange enclosures – like the Yvette – have a port in the midrange box [see picture, p41]. Why? Reflex loading is generally confined to bass drivers, where it imparts the benefits of greater bass extension and/or higher sensitivity than can be achieved with a closed box of equivalent internal volume. I've not asked Wilson – or any other manufacturer of speakers with a ported midrange section – why they do it, but I can think of two possible reasons. First, with reflex loading it might be feasible to realise the high-pass section of the bass-midrange crossover as a fourth-order acoustic filter, obviating the need for an electrical network. The feasibility of this depends on numerous factors, not least the crossover frequency. Second, I know people who claim it just sounds better, even if the port is tuned well below the midrange passband. I've experienced this myself, but why it benefits sound quality I really don't know... KH

structural stiffness while able to promote a musical airiness.

SOMETHING SPECIAL

The Yvette was driven by a Constellation Inspiration Preamp/Stereo amplifier combination [HFN Jul '15] with music sourced mostly from an Audio Research CD9 [HFN May '13]. The speaker system was set up in a well-treated room away from boundaries, using spikes with floor protectors and Transparent Ultra V cable.

I found too much toe-in degraded the timbre, too little affected focus, although dispersion was good enough to create a feasible soundstage image even sitting right in front of one of the speakers. Grilles were off during all of the listening proceedings.

Listening in earnest, I was immediately struck that this speaker was something rather special. A first audition is like the naïve first reading of a poem.

Unhindered by academic prejudice or the critical bias of a seasoned reader, an open mind absorbs the style and grabs the emotional content in an effortless way.

There was an intrinsic rightness to the sound that struck me as cohesive, with seamless driver transitions, accuracy and cleanliness. It was rhythmically satisfying, full of colour, but no coloration, revealing good texture and transparency. And it brimmed over with insightful and suggestive musical information that included a deep perception of the acoustical setting. All this was further enhanced, I thought, by the Yvette's

revised relationship between bass driver and port tuning, imparting an improved sensation of bass articulation and extension than the Sophia (and the Sabrina too, of course, given its size).

The tested pair came in Dark Titanium, but 'she comes in colours everywhere', so perhaps a Ferrari-red Yvette would even better have matched the speed of its transient sounds. Imagine the abrupt clashing of cymbals... the percussive thwack and related overtones that produce diverse drum pitches... the plucking of acoustic guitar strings... a singer's 'spitting' on a syllable to stress a rhythmic point.

Or, more specifically, the emotion conveyed by the sympathetic piano chords underpinning the gnawing words of sorrow, disillusionment and rancour as I listened to Maria Bethania singing 'Lágrima' – 'A tear for a tear, I will charge you/ All my dreams you took away, you'll pay me back, tear for tear' [Mar De Sofia; Biscoito Fino BCTO 647].

DEPTH AND HEIGHT TOO

Daryl Wilson has managed to retain the captivating, expansive, expressive and upbeat musicality of the Sabrina, while improving it in low level detail, precision and focus. Soundstage perspective is top-notch as is the illusion of depth and – dare I say it – *height*. Image stability is remarkable and consistent with a well time-aligned system. Just listen to Midori Seiler playing Haydn's Violin Concertos with Concerto Köln [Berlin Classics 03005550BC].

The Yvette is further endowed with more extended low registers than the Sophia 3. If not quite subterranean, at least it spares us the infamous grunting and artificial growling of many a testosterone-driven bass. The bass is there all right – as you can hear in the unexpected synthesised

words, so bear with me, please, until we evaluate the sound quality...

To sum up: the Yvette's functionally sculpted lines, edges and angles all derive from both aesthetic and technical considerations in order to enhance not only the looks but also the speaker's dispersion and time-domain performances. The outcome is one of organic beauty,

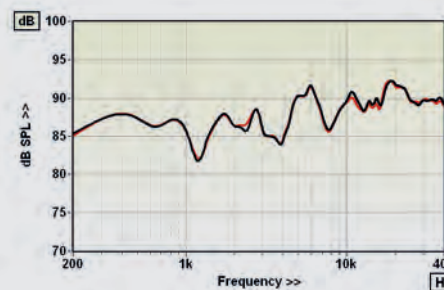


LAB REPORT

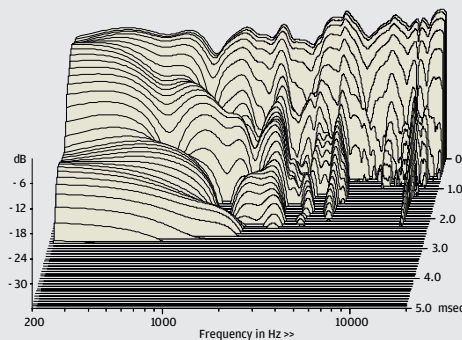
WILSON AUDIO YVETTE

The relatively compact dimensions of the Yvette preclude it from having the high sensitivity of larger Wilson models. But Wilson Audio is being conservative when it rates the Yvette at just 86dB for 2.83V at 1m: our 'industry standard' pink noise figure of 87.8dB indicates that an 88dB specification would be justified. Low impedance helps achieve this. Nominal impedance is specified as 4ohm with minimum of 2.94ohm at 90Hz, and we indeed measured a dip to 2.9ohm at 94Hz. Together with quite high impedance phase angles this causes the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) to fall to a minimum of 1.5ohms at 64Hz, which makes the Yvette a more than averagely challenging amplifier load.

Forward frequency responses [Graph 1] were measured at 1m, on the tweeter axis and with the grilles removed. The trend is flat to about 4kHz, above which output rises gently before flattening off again above 20kHz, which suggests that the most neutral tonal balance will be heard a little off-axis. This and the ripples in the response curves result in quite high response errors of ± 5.3 dB and ± 5.1 dB respectively for the pair, but experience with other Wilsons suggests that these ripples will reduce out at typical listening distances. Pair matching over the same 200Hz-20kHz is good at ± 0.9 dB and, despite the soft dome tweeter, its ultrasonic response is comfortably maintained to above 40kHz. At the opposite end of the frequency range, diffraction-corrected nearfield measurement shows the bass extension to be 38Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz). The CSD waterfall [Graph 2] indicates the presence of some breakup resonances above 2kHz, coinciding with response peaks. KH



ABOVE: Pair matching is good while the response ripples will reduce out at typical listening distances



ABOVE: Cabinet shows quick decay but note treble resonances coincident with the 'rippled' response

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Sensitivity (SPL/1m)/2.83Vrms - Mean/IEC/Music) | 89.3dB/87.8dB/87.5dB |
| Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz) | 2.9ohm @ 94Hz 11.7ohm @ 19.7kHz |
| Impedance phase min/max (20Hz-20kHz) | -50° @ 53Hz 26° @ 2.8kHz |
| Pair matching/Resp. Error (300Hz-20kHz) | ± 5.3 dB/ ± 5.1 dB / ± 0.9 dB |
| LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz) | 38Hz / >40kHz/>40kHz |
| THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m) | 0.3% / 0.5% / 0.2% |
| Dimensions (HWD) | 1041x337x510mm |

LEFT: The enclosure is built from two Wilson-developed composites: X-Material, an extremely well-damped and inert composite, and S-Material, composed for midrange performance

menacing and assertive brass section [Decca 4142032].

Brightness was kept well at bay, and I found it benign in character and downright forgivable – as with its mild midrange forwardness. Both were principally audible with close-miked recordings or tracks cut at too high a level, such as the aptly named 'Red Flags' by Andra Day [Cheers To The Fall; Warner Bros 9362492756]. A great album, nonetheless...

BANGING ON THE DOOR

Even so, I didn't dare tamper with the rear attenuator resistors, a feature of many Wilson loudspeakers and offered as a further aid to tuning. Past experience has taught me that this can only upset the delicate balance achieved by Daryl's voicing and with it the fine blending of drivers and the evenness of its output. Likewise the stereo image focus, precision and stability, which provide a sense of perspective and layering of information well above its paygrade, can suffer unduly.

The Yvettes never showed any alarming signs of stress, anxiety, congestion or distortion. I'll not contest that they sound best at cruising speed, but if you try to push them hard, it's you who will most likely end up against the wall. Remember the 'Garage Door' or the 'Dynamic Range Of Real Life' on *Hi-Fi News Test Disc* [HFN003]? Try it at your own peril... ☹️

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Pay attention, as I will say this only once: the Yvette is Daryl Wilson's best work so far, and an undeniable triumph for the family brand both in style and content. This sensibly-proportioned floorstander is a consummate all-rounder that boasts *grandeur d'âme* and more than a hint of majesty. As René Artois, the main character in the old BBC sitcom *Allô, Allô!*, might be heard to say: 'Oh Yvvette!'

Sound Quality: 89%

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low percussion notes 1m 20s into the romantic song 'Amy' by Ryan Adams [*Heartbreaker*; Cooking Vinyl COOKCD205]. Or in the clean yet propulsive rhythmic section of Keb Mo's funky blues band in 'Wake Up Everybody' [*Peace Back by Popular Demand*; Epic EPC517945].

And the same with the gutsy, articulate and clearly defined transient edges of Esmeralda Esperanza's acoustic bass in 'Samba Em Preludio' [*Esperanza*; HUCD 3140]. The Yvette allows one to easily follow single bass lines, multiple note threads or, say, the exuberant keyboard fireworks of 'Blues For Klook' with Eddy Louiss [*Sang Mélé*; Nocturne NTCD01].

The Yvette never misses a beat, a rhythm swing, a sudden twist of pace... or fate. It 'punches' hard when required as well – as in Charles Dutoit's spectacular Montreal SO Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*, with the rolling drums stampede 1m 48s into the finale, followed by the very