

A Pair of Relatively Obscure Danes

The System Audio Pandion 30 Speakers

By Jeff Dorgay

Ole Witthoft, the founder and designer of System Audio, said recently “An experience cannot be measured or calculated. And therefore loudspeakers cannot be made purely on the basis of technical specifications. This is why I founded System Audio A/S in 1984.” I haven’t met this guy, but I like him — *a lot*. You only need to listen to the SA30s for about 90 seconds to realize he gets it in a major way. And I must confess that most of the speakers that truly engage me seem to hail from Denmark. Guilty as charged.

Somehow, most of the world’s finest, or at least the world’s most popular speakers, seem to fall into the design by measurements category or the design by feel category. Too often the speakers in the former category end up being really dynamic, but lose their appeal after any length of time, whereas the latter too often tend to do just one thing right. The music lover with a large palate usually ends up out in the cold. Not so with the SA30s. These are speakers you can listen to from the minute you get up until you fall asleep without fatigue. They are among the most natural speakers I’ve had the pleasure to listen to.

REVIEW

Their Facebook page says, “cool Scandinavian loudspeakers” and I have to agree. Every System Audio speaker has tons of style backing up the audio performance, yet none of them are massive in a physical sense. Oddly enough, System Audio has not had a lot of fanfare in the United States over the last thirty years. I hope that *TONEAudio* can change that – these are speakers you should see, touch and hear for yourself.

You might not think these gorgeous speakers can stand up to the rigors of loud, violent music, but they deliver the goods. Playing the Megadeth classic “Skin of My Teeth” at a truly punishing level instantly reveals the dynamic capabilities of the System Audio Pandion 30s. Dense metal may not be your first choice for a speaker audition, but a wide dynamic swing is so important to me, that if a speaker *can't* do this, there's no point going further – kind of like when a potential girlfriend tells you she doesn't like driving with the top down. Any other attributes don't matter, so there's no chance of a relationship. Easily passing the first test, it's easy to move on to the rest of the audition.

At right around \$10,000 per pair, the SA30s make a great showing. World class fit and finish combined with sonics that you'd easily suspect might have a higher price tag attached makes for a winning combination. \$10k is a highly competitive price point, and while most speakers at this level can't reproduce the sheer scale that the biggest floorstanders can, they often deliver a similar level of resolution.



REVIEW

Whether you are a music lover in a smaller space, or just one that doesn't need to play at brain drain levels (though the SA30s can play very loud), \$10k can buy you a major helping of what the top contenders offer. The SA30s are rapidly becoming one of my favorites.

A long and twisty journey around my record collection while auditioning other amplifiers, cables, and rooms prove the SA30s a great addition to any system. Every Dane I've met has been a great collaborator, and while an inanimate object like a speaker can't really have a personality per se, the ease by which the SA30s integrate into any room and electronics on hand is welcome. They are equally easy to set up and optimize. In my 15 x 26 foot room the SA30s achieve the best balance of sound field size and midrange to bass integration about five feet from the back wall, ever so slightly toed in, with my GamuT Lobster Chair about nine feet back.

Robin Trower's ethereal distorted guitar intro on the title track of *For Earth Below*, punctuated by delicate cymbal work and a solid bass line, fill the room as the vocals phase in and out between the speakers; 1970s trippiness at its best and the SA30s nail it. And as the record heats up, again these slim speakers prove that they can move some serious air, whether I'm listening to Aerosmith or Snoop Dogg. *(continued)*



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REVIEW

Staying in the obscure groove, the dense prog groove of PFMs *Photos of Ghosts* is easily unraveled, keeping the subtle keyboard, guitar and bass riffs all firmly planted across the soundstage.

Serious quality

Maybe it's the synergy between Danes, but tracking through Sinne Eeg's self-titled album illustrates the sheer coherence that these speakers possess. If you love a great mini-monitor speaker, but always find yourself longing for more range, the SA30 is a speaker you will love. Both male and female solo vocals are reproduced with ease — not only coming across tonally excellent, but maintaining a proper size relationship to the listening room. Where my Magne-pans offer a sumptuous presentation of nearly any female vocal record, it's an overblown, oversized, unrealistic rendition. Of course, this can be a lot of fun, and might be exactly what you are looking for, but played through the SA30s, a much more realistic view is offered.

The SA30s are all about quality with a fairly large dose of quantity as well. The wider range of music and the higher quality the recordings you have, the more you will appreciate these speakers. They are fully up to the task of mating with the world's finest electronics. While they turned in an incredible performance with the Pass Labs XA30.8 reviewed in this issue, when I switched to the much larger Pass Xs 300 Monos, they were easily able to transmit the difference between the two.

Maybe it's the crossover, or just conservative specs, but even with a 90dB/1 watt sensitivity spec, these are incredibly easy speakers to drive with any amplifier. (continued)



REVIEW

While I could crank the large Pass, Audio Research or Conrad-Johnson amplifiers on hand, even the 20-watt per channel Nagra 300p makes for an incredible listening experience – regardless of program material. You could even get by with a 9-watt SET in a small room if you don't have to shake the walls.

Under the covers

With a rear firing port, getting the SA30 a few feet out from the wall will make for the smoothest bass response, and thanks to three available finishes (black, white and walnut) they should easily fit into any décor scheme. Speaker cables terminated with banana ends will be the easiest to connect, with the binding posts on the bottom of the round base, making for a very tidy installation. You will probably need a friend to hold the SA30s as you tip them forward to insert the speaker cables, but they are light enough at about 40 pounds (22kg) to move yourself without back issues. Set up proved easy and within minutes the SA30s were playing satisfactorily.

The driver complement is straightforward, looking like some of ScanSpeak's finest. A pair of 5-inch (13cm) woofers with strategically sliced wood pulp cones with an oversized motor and long excursion surround a soft dome tweeter. The SA website says that these woofer drivers are "Maybe the world's best 13 cm woofers." Claiming a reach of 30Hz on the lower end of the audio spectrum is confirmed by a mix of test tones and bass heavy music. Not only can these speakers go low, they are able to play at a very high volume without cone breakup and the resulting distortion. Everyone who has



experienced the SA30s is pleasantly surprised when we start playing Mickey Hart's *Planet Drum*, and those little cones didn't blow right out of the cabinets. These are well-executed speakers.

Style, Performance and More

The System Audio Pandion 30 speakers have an amazing reputation in Europe where the company ships over 20,000 pairs of speakers per year, yet they remain a secret here in the United States. There are only a handful of dealers here, but should you be near one, I suggest a serious audition. They are excellent in every way and will easily fit into your system and décor. I would also like to thank Mr. Oswaldo Martinez of Let There Be Sound in Weston, Florida, for arranging this review. He is the oldest SA dealer in the US. These have been indeed a pleasant discovery! ●

System Audio
Pandion 30 Speakers
MSRP: \$10,000

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