
Subject: Re: New Pi 4 + Pi 3 Sub buildout
Posted by [jshupe](#) on Sun, 23 Mar 2014 22:42:36 GMT
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It's about time for my review.

I've spent the last couple of months with my upgraded 4Pi mains (DE250, 2226H) and 3Pi subs, and am still in awe of what these speakers can do.

My initial configuration used the integrated amp in my Yamaha RX-A830 receiver, while the subs were powered by a Crown XLS-2500 running wide open with +10dB gain on the receiver just to smoothly transition. The setup sounded good, but was lacking something, and I was not happy with having to run the Crown the way I did just to get things to match. Last week I ordered an additional Crown XLS-1500 and two ART CleanBox Pro's to apply gain to the low output voltage on the receiver to meet the expected input level on each Crown.

I'm going to break the next section of the review into two portions, starting with the 4Pi mains.

When I first powered the system with the Yamaha AVR, the 4Pi's sounded a little cold and unmusical. I attributed this to the drivers needing to be broken in and possibly the amp not being all that great. I also questioned whether I had done something wrong in my build, to the degree of even emailing Wayne to ask about the bass response which seemed absurdly lacking. After a few days of listening, my ears mostly adjusted but I didn't feel that the situation had actually improved. I temporarily moved the mains to the Crown XLS-2500 I had for the subs and they seemed to warm up, open up, and sound much more musical, even at low volumes. Unfortunately I needed the Crown for my subs, so I reverted to the old configuration with the intent to augment the system with some vintage amps I was working on.

Once I started working on the amps, I found that they needed more work than I thought, and I didn't want to wait any longer to get the anticipated sound from these speakers. I went ahead and pulled the trigger on a new XLS-1500 and waited anxiously for it to come in.

With the gain fixed and the new amp, the speakers sing beautifully! They are open, musical, smooth, and don't seem to strain at all with anything I've found to throw at them. They sound great at low levels with tiny levels of amplification and are phenomenal at over 90dB. I listen to a lot of live recordings, and these reproduce the recordings in such a way that you can close your eyes and actually think you're there. The sound stage is as wide as the room, and every detail is reproduced. On a couple Coltrane tracks, I was even able to hear him inhale while playing the sax! Little details like that are long lost on other speakers. They make the recordings sound all that much more real.

The sound effects in Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon and Billy Thorpe's Children of the Sun are astonishing. The cannons in 1812 Overture sound like real cannons, not muffled or muted at all, though I wish the LP I had played them louder! These have had the wallet-emptying side effect of causing me to collect vinyl, because they do such a great job of picking up everything on them! That being said, they can completely ruin certain albums for you if the mastering is bad (I'm looking at you, Red Hot Chili Peppers!) because they bring out everything -- good and bad.

The 3Pi subs sounded great from the start. I didn't like that the Crown was running at the maximum gain level for both it and the AVR, but then again I knew from the start that wasn't a problem with them, but the gain structure in my system. They are absolutely necessary, in my opinion, to augment the 4Pis if you listen to a lot of different types of music, and especially live recordings. I don't have much to say about them other than they provide extremely clean, solid bass that can be subtle, or shake the house apart, or anywhere in-between. They blend well enough that if I didn't know they were separate boxes, I'd have no idea. In my experience that's the hardest part to get right with a subwoofer.

I've been listening to the following albums, most of them on vinyl:

Atmosphere - When Life Gives You Lemons
Billy Joel - 52nd Street
Billy Thorpe - Children of the Sun (1979 version)
Bruce Springsteen - Live/1975-85
Daft Punk - Random Access Memories
John Coltrane - My Favorite Things
Lightnin' Hopkins - Lightnin'!
Michael Jackson - Thriller
Pink Floyd - Dark Side of the Moon
Shinyribs - Gulf Coast Museum
Shinyribs - Well After Awhile
Sonata Arctica - Live in Finland
Tchaikovsky - 1812 Overture (Dorati)
The Gators - Live in Concert
Tool - Lateralus (2 LP)
Valerie June - Pushin' Against a Stone

... and several extended sessions of listening to the "Top 1000 Live Classic Rock Songs" playlist on Spotify.

These are in my living room. My house has an open floorplan where the dining room, kitchen, hallway, and entry way are all directly adjoined to the living room without doorways. We're talking at least 800 sq ft that these speakers have to fill, in addition to varying ceiling heights for my vaulted ceilings that range from 8-15ft. The room is the extreme opposite of ideal, but these speakers handle it gracefully.

I personally think they're better than anything I listened to when seeking an off the shelf solution at local HiFi shops. My dad came in for the weekend and we spent 20+ hours listening to them. He has a better trained ear and sold high end audio gear from the late 70s to early 90s, and confirms my appreciation for these. They're a definite win and I'd recommend them to anyone, regardless of budget, with one warning: don't skimp on the sources or the amps!
