Subject: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long)
Posted by wasteh202 on Sun, 02 Feb 2003 16:58:39 GMT
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Well, I finally got around to doing some A/B comparison of the 2Pi Towers. I don't have alot of good speakers to campare them too. Some cheaper Boston Acoustics, Michaura and some JBL. Given the price of the 2Pi Towers compared to these others the 2Pi's should have won ealsiy as I use the purchase price of the Pi's when comparing speakers as I feel it is only fair to compare DIY to DIY and purchase price to purchase price. so I figure the 2Pi Towers to cost about $900.00 shipped. The compasison I ended up for the real A/B was the Magnepan MMG.For those who are not familiar with the MMG's, they are the entry level speaker in the Magnepan line(as the Studio Series is the entry level in the Pi line) and cost $550.00 shipped(I paid $500.00 a few years ago). The MMG's are a planar speaker, and have a sensitiviey of 86db into 4ohms(and is in fact a 4ohm load which if I am correct translates into 83db into 8ohms). The low end rolls of at about 50hz. I did not use a subwoffer at all for either speaker. Which really speaks well for the MMG's as they are not rated as low on the frequency scale as the 2Pi's. The only real test for the 2Pi Towers as they easily blew away these cheaper speakers was the MMG. This comparison was not a easy comparison to make as the MMG's are a planar speaker where they Pi's are not. Another thing is the sensitivity of the two are so so different, and finally the type of amp(SS vrs. tube) used for this test probably made a big difference in the results. I will try not make this long. I believe the fact that a SS amp was used in the comparison I believe favored the Magnepans and unfortunatly I do not have a good stereo tube amp(yet). I will start out by saying that I really wanted the 2Pi Towers the win this comparison and believed that they would, but they did not.The MMG's won the contest hands down at all sound levels except below 72db where the dynamics of the 2Pi's gave them the edge and above 95db where my SS amp began to strain to drive the MMG's(as my SS amp is not even adaquate to drive the MMG's to thier potential). Even above 95db I prefered the MMG's due to the fact that the 2Pi Towers were just not as listenable(and were actually more harsh) at that sound pressure level even though the distortion in the MMG's(actually the distortion was from the amp) above 95db was becoming obvious.I used a Sansui 9090DB rated conservativly at 125 wpc into 8ohms(not rated into 4ohms but lets assume . I also used two preamps to do the comparison. Doing this had pluses and minuses. The plus was that it allowed me to do imidiate switching between the two speaker models and compare the two side by side. The minus was that it in doing this different DAC's were involved and probably effected the results of the sound due to the different nature of the specific DAC's.To keep this from getting any long, I will just say that the MMG's are much more listenable and I will even say that in my opinion the MMG's are more musical. I will also say that I believe that the 2Pi Towers stand a good chance to win the same contest with a good stereo tube amp and I know that many Pi listeners do use tube amps and will not listen to SS given a choice.I know that this speaker comparison was not a good one in that with these two types I was doing a bit of a apples to oranges comparison and I would not except that I believe that these two speakers represent some of the best values in low end speakers and there seems to be quite and inteset in both lines and both models.Given the fact that the 2Pi Towers can be build DIY for about two to three hundred buck makes them very desirable for many and with the MMG's due to the fact that they can be delevered to your door for a price of $550.00 makes them desirable as well. The MMG's require good amplification where the 2Pi Towers do not will give the Pi speakers and edge for some while those that already own nice tube amps make them desirable for others.The 2Pi is a great speaker for the money and I am still amazed at the quality and quantity of bass that these speakers put out, and also by the sensitivity and revealing manor that the music is reproduced. The 2Pi are a GREAT speaker and I

am NOT putting the down in this A/B comparsion, they just got outclassed in my opinion by the MMG's(which are not for everyone)BTW- one other thing to note here about the Magnepan MMG. This speaker is sold very cheap by the manufacture in hope of hooking the listener on the planar sound and then hoping that the listener/customer will upgrade to the more expensive models, I believe that the speaker is subsidised by the more expensive models and Magnepan probably makes little to nothing on the MMG.

Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long)
Posted by steve f on Sun, 02 Feb 2003 21:50:16 GMT
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Hi,I own a pair of Maggie MMG speakers. I've also built a pair of PI One speakers. Although I defend your right to your opinion, I believe something went wrong during the comparison. MMG's tend to have rolled off high and low ends. They can't handle much power either. The PI One's (a gift to my son) were harsh until break in. They clearly outperformed the Maggies. I used both low powered tubes, and low & high powered ss amps for comparison. Anybody else care to comment?Take care,Steve

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Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long)
Posted by Mike Borzcik on Mon, 03 Feb 2003 01:06:54 GMT
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I used Magnepan MMG's before I built my Thermionic Series 4 Pi's. Even before I built the new speakers I had kind of a love-hate relationship with the "planar sound". I loved their ability to completely disappear--I could put my ear literally 6 inches from the tweeter ribbon and it would still sound as if the music were coming from 10 feet behind the speaker. And they were very detailed and smooth, too. The thing I didn't like was that they just didn't seem to have the dynamics to make music sound real. They could go plenty loud, even with my triode-modified Jolida 302a tube amp, but even at high volumes they seemed lacking. I even tried them with some higher-powered solid state amps, and they still didn't do it for me. When I built the 4 Pi's I was relieved to find that I wasn't giving up many of the things I liked about the MMG's. The detail is there, and the imaging is about the same too. They don't do quite the disappearing act that the MMG's do--some sounds that are panned all the way to the left or right seem to be coming directly out of the horn, but even that depends on the listening room, the recording, and the equipment I'm using with them. What I gained was dynamics. I don't even have to crank them up loud in order to get a nice, full, realistic sound. The Pi's let me listen to the music instead of a couple neat tricks that my speakers can do. Listening to the 4 Pi's is overall just a more satisfying experience. These speakers are at completely opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their goals and their characteristics, and I must say that I still like them both. But if I had to choose only one pair to keep, I'd keep the Pi's.

Subject: it's all about dynamics.....
Posted by replay on Mon, 03 Feb 2003 12:08:43 GMT
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and being a former owner of a pair of mg1's i can tell you they don't have any. sure, they sound pleasing but were unable to convince me that i was hearing live music. i'll keep my premium stage 4 pi's.cheers,george

Subject: Re: Never have understood the hype...
Posted by Matts on Mon, 03 Feb 2003 13:21:56 GMT
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I never have understood the appeal of the Magneplanar speakers. Their literature has a bunch of criticism about boxes and how music doesn't come out of a box; I think it shows the disconnect between the high-end industry and real music. When I play my violin or guitar, the music is coming out of a box, and the boxes I have that say "Fender" and "Marshall" are definitely boxes, and the recording mikes are point sources. Now Mags may sound nice to some people as a "stereo", but not to me when you compare them to real music.I agree with George below- the dynamics make the sound. Speed and detail in the amps to reproduce attack and decay of notes with speakers that can handle that would be next on my list. These cues set up the psycho-acousical illusion that "re-creates" music, and Pi's do it very well. I also question the concept that a speaker company is selling a speaker at a loss to get people to buy more expensive models- people that have money to buy more expensive models will do so, people that can't afford them won't. After all, they do give mylar away free with potato chips... :)

Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long)
Posted by Garland on Mon, 03 Feb 2003 14:44:01 GMT
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The deal with Maggies is that the higher up the product line you go the more dynamic range you get. I never cared for the lesser models but the larger models do dynamics quite well. I could live with the weaknesses of these speakers very easily. You just have to have the rest of your system put together around them and then they really sing. And the room interactions are a consideration. But for the money the Pi's are definitely the way to go withawesome almost everything. There is

always room for improvement. I want a pair of Bill M.'s horns, for instance! to reside on top of my Theater 4's!

Subject: Don't count them out yet!
Posted by ToFo on Mon, 03 Feb 2003 16:04:02 GMT
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I own maggies, acoustats and Theater 4Pi's. I have also made a few things with the motorola piezo and helped a friend with some 1Pi's. It took me a while to get the Pi's in a good spot. I had to unlearn the typical hi-fi setup "rules". The places that stereophile never thought of were the best. With 1Pi's I prefer them near the corners up against the wall. I like the tweeter toed in a LOT, attenuated a bit, or some of each. The motorola is pretty hot at and above 20K so it can sound bright and very dry on axis if you can hear that high. If you think of toe in as a sweetness "knob" you can dial it in nicely. It is a small horn with a pretty wide throat for 22k, so it will gently lose top octave as you toe past the listening position, without losing power where you want it. There is also an added bonus of extreme toe for maggie fans, giving a somewhat more diffuse sound. You may find you like the piezo at a lower level relative to the woofer. lots of folks have had success adding the appropriate cap in series. Check the archives for piezo stuff, theres a lot you can do to get what you like. A fast break in for tweets is to find a cd that seems to excite a resonance or breakup in the tweeter and play it pretty loud whenever the house is empty for a few times. Nothing wrong with liking what you like. If you can keep the Pi dynamics and get a more sweet and diffuse sound, some tuning is more than justified.ThomasP.S. I have been trying a lot of piezo tweaks that I don't want to bore the forum with, but if you still aren't happy after more break in and setup, give me a shout.

Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long again)
Posted by wasteh202 on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 03:48:22 GMT
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You are entitled to your opinion... but I do not think anything "went wrong during my comparison". The speakers were sufficiently broken in. As far as the MMG's being rolled off on the low end I would agree that as far a the rating you are correct, but when listening I could not hear the lack of bass frequency as much as the lack of dynamic and possibly at the very low end some musicality but overall the MMG was in my opinion more "musical" thoughout the full range. In reguard to the high end being rolled off... I disgree both in spec and in listening as the MMG spec is rated at 24khz, again I think that the difference in what is being heard is dynamics and not frequency. I already stated that what may be missing here is the opurtunity for the Pi's to be driven buy a tube amp. If I were to drive the MMG's with many tube amps I believe that I may come to a different conclusion as many tube amps cannot deliver the power that they really

need to sound good, hence a "weakness" for the MMG's(and many planars). As many have stated here and also at the Planar Speaker forum, planars can lack dynamics, this is no secret and many have tried planars and come to the same conclusion and returned to "box" speakers. No speaker is perfect and no speaker can do all things well, including Pi speakers. But many are willing to trade of dynamics for sound stage, a great sweet spot and other attributes like being less fatigueing and more musical. Other factors which could affect the outcome of my A/B comparison compare to your A/B comparison is system components, system synergy, speaker setup, room acoustics, selection of music(I tried everything I listen to including rock, clasical, jazz, easy listening, new age, gospel, country & western, pop, and instrumental and vocals. It was a long listening session) and last but most importantly in my opinion is PERSONAL TASTE. Personal taste is by far the one factor which will affect the outcome of many listening sessions whether in home doing A/B comparison or in sound rooms at point of sale vendors. This is probably the one greatest factor which enables the audio speaker market to accomadate thousands of speaker brands and manufactures. If everybody liked the same thing(sound and looks) then there would not be such a diverse market for different types of speakers. In fact if you want to take it further we could bring horns(I'm not talking compression horns but folded horns) to the table and inject another type of speaker with a big following which are not everybody's "cup of tea". I will say not more about horns since they are not really part of this topic. I will close by saying that I can appreciate some of the things that box speakers do including "dynamics", and I do believe that Pi speaker deserve a good look at and I will be building the Theater 4 in hopes of finding a "better" speaker. In fact most of the responses here to my post have refered to the Theater 4 for the MMG comparison so I am even more excited to get going on them and here for myself. I can appreciate the qualities of both types of speakers and can enjoy both. I plan to have a tubed/Pi system as well as a SS/Magnepan speaker and take advantage of the best that both systems will offer my ears and taste. I hope that all will not take my posting of my listening comparison as a knock on Pi Speakers or especially Wayne personally because I have alot of respect for Wayne the speaker line and many folks here at the Pi speaker forum.

Enjoy the music!

Subject: Re: it's all about dynamics.....
Posted by wasteh202 on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 04:45:20 GMT
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I have yet to hear ANY speaker that convinced me that I was listening to live music. While we are on that subject... I have heard live music that sounded so bad that I would rather listen to some of my recorded music. So live or recorded is not the ishue. Yes, of course some speakers are better than others... that is why we are all here sharing ideas and experiences and trying new things. For me, my latest try was the 2Pi Tower and and I am not done(with Pi's nor dynamic speakers) as I will be trying out the Theater 4 in the future. Like I said, I WAS impressed with the 2Pi Tower and as I stated it did best some other speakers very easily, in my opinion it was not better than the MMG, JMHO. As for as dynamics go, it may be ALL ABOUT DYNAMICS for you and many others here but the Magna-planar speakers have a pretty good following and if you include other planars an even bigger following. So, there must be some people out there(including me) who do appreciate the planar sound even while the speakers may

not be as dynamic as box speakers. And there must be somethings good about them as some here at the Pi speaker forum can appreciate some of their qualities. For me personally(my opinion) the "sound stage" and the "sweet spot"(when properly set up) are two traits which favor the planars heavily and are pros that require other good features from MMG competitors to equal or overcome these benifits of planars. If the Theater 4's are as good as many here testify then I will be a happy camper. I AM HOPING the Theater 4's will best the MMG's (for my taste) as I will have found a better speaker than I already have and I will enjoy the music more than I do with the MMG's.

Subject: Re: Never have understood the hype...
Posted by wasteh202 on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 06:33:55 GMT
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You may have never understand the appeal of Magnaplanar speakers, but the "hype" is not all hype because there is a definate difference between box and planar and if you do not understand the difference or the hype or appeal then I seriousely doubt that you have ever heard planar speakers, or at least heard them with proper amplificaton and/or proper room set-up. Have you ever heard them set-up properly and with good amplification? If not then I would sudgest that you take a listen or keep you "non-understanding" to yourself.< Now Mags may sound nice to some people as a "stereo", but not to me when you compare them to real music. > The same could be said for box speakers, it just depends on your taste and frame of reference. And who made you or anybody else here the ones to decide that "the dynamics make the sound" different things sound good to different people. I did not even post my findings at the Planar Speaker forum because many of the listeners there are too arrogant about the virtues of Maggies and too closed minded to even be supprised that the MMG's would best the 2Pi Towers(if they are even familiar with the Pi's). I would have thought there were be some open minds here to be able to post my opinions without them being questioned or disreguarded, maybe I was wrong. I hope not and there seems to be some good folks around here. I have experienced Wayne to be of great personal help in building my speakers and in fact I have followed this forum for a couple years now and I am impressed by how he deals with folks here at this forum. Wayne if you are reading this... keep up the good work! Rodney

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Subject: Re: Don't count them out yet!
Posted by wasteh202 on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 06:37:24 GMT
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Thanks for the input, how many hours do you consider sufficient for break in for the speakers?

Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long)
Posted by wasteh202 on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 07:47:39 GMT
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Mike, Thanks for you opinion of the Pi's and the MMG's. I agreee with you about the ability of the Maggies to "disapear" They really do that and I like that about them too. I must admit that with dynamic speakers I do appreciate the dynamic sound but sometimes I get the feeling(especially at higher SPL's) that the speakers are SHOUTING at me, when I listen for extended periods of time I will become fatigued much more easily than with planars. What I do like about the Pi Towers is that I can turn up the SPL as much as I want and get good clean, clear, undistorted music that is very revealing even from a cheap SS amp without pushing the amp all. Best of all, too really FEEL the music!(as many have stated). I GET A KICK OUT OF LISTENTING TO THE Pi Towers. The two things that are the downside for me are the directivity of the music as you stated that the speakers do not "disappear", and the fact that at high SPL's the Towers will begin to make my ears tire fast. I can listen to the planars without feeling the pain. I do not know why but the planars are just a smoother presentation to me and for some reason more musical. I suppose that I could attribute some of the results to improper room set-up or perhaps some room treatment would be in order but was testing both side by side in the same room and so the room acoustics can have some bearing since they are such different speakers but I really thought that I was giving the benifit of the doubt to the Pi Towers since they are not supposed to be placment critical speaker and the MMG's are. I did not even have the MMG's set up where I normally have them as I thought it would be fairest to have the two set-up side by side. I did not even place the MMG's towed-in to achieve maximum sweet spot.

Subject: Not quite...
Posted by mollecon on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 13:18:32 GMT
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It's all about dynamics? Ehh, not quite. What about colouration, frequency balance, definition, perception of width & depth ('soundstage'?), distortion, & soforth...? And speaking of dynamics - only a few CD's really are recorded true to life in that respect - & it's just as well! Just as an example, I live in an appartment - if I actually tried to get the full dynamics of, say, a symphony orchestra in my living room I'm pretty sure my neighbours wouldn't be too happy (my landlady live in the appartment just above me!). This is not to say that I refuse that dynamics IS a very important aspect of music - I've also come home from live events (both acoustically based & amplified) & felt that the stereo certainly lacked something in that area.But there are other considerations as well - personal taste, not the least in music. The usual argument from audio freaks is that 'a good loudspeaker should play any music well'. In real life, however, & considering that most of us are on some sort of budget, the choice of audio equipment becomes a matter of priorities. There are a lot of factors involved - music taste, personal preferences, room considerations etc. (not to mention WAF!). That can lead to strange conclusions - for example, in some cases people get a more economical solution by having to different sets of loudspeakers with different strengths & weaknesses rather than buying the mega $ speakers that does it all 'right'...Just a general comment - my 2 cents.

Subject: Re: Don't count them out yet!
Posted by ToFo on Wed, 05 Feb 2003 18:56:09 GMT
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This is definately a fuzzy area. I had the luxury of 125 watts pounding while I was at work for 9 hours(can you say single). When I got home it was good to go. The validity or break in is argued, but when I got my Delta 15's thumping the cone sounded like styrofoam cups. After the torture test(still only half rated power for Theater 4's) I thumped them and got a tight dry thud that sounded way deeper. With soft jazz at mild levels it could be a while. I choose this example for ease of demonstration, but the tweeter should respond to break in like the woofer, give or take some for difference in construction and materials. It's like good new shoes. It's work just walking, but after you wear them some they are the most comfy things you own. Just play them a lot. Pick a disc with wide range and play it every weekend. You'll know. Let us know what you think after you move them around some, and they relax a little. I'm not saying you will retire the mags, That's to your taste, but I will bet you find a great setup for the Pi's and really enjoy them.While reading one of the other posts I thought I should add that I have had mine all over this house and they are not hard to place. Meaning they do a good job in some awful situations. As for getting them to really gel like well set up Maggies (and I do like Mags and Acoustat too) I find that up against the wall with toe in crossing well in front of you will make you grin. They will never act like Maggies and your mileage may vary, but they sound bigger and more lush that way, and placement is free. Have fun.Thomas

Subject: Re: Studio Series 2Pi Comparison(long again)
Posted by steve f on Thu, 06 Feb 2003 00:10:15 GMT
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Hi,We have a couple of fundamental disagreements about the nature of sound reproduction. That's okay. Let's part as friends who agree that enjoying our hobby, listening to the music, and the related toys is a worthy endevor.Take care,Steve