

Dynaudio Temptation: An Unabashed Love Letter

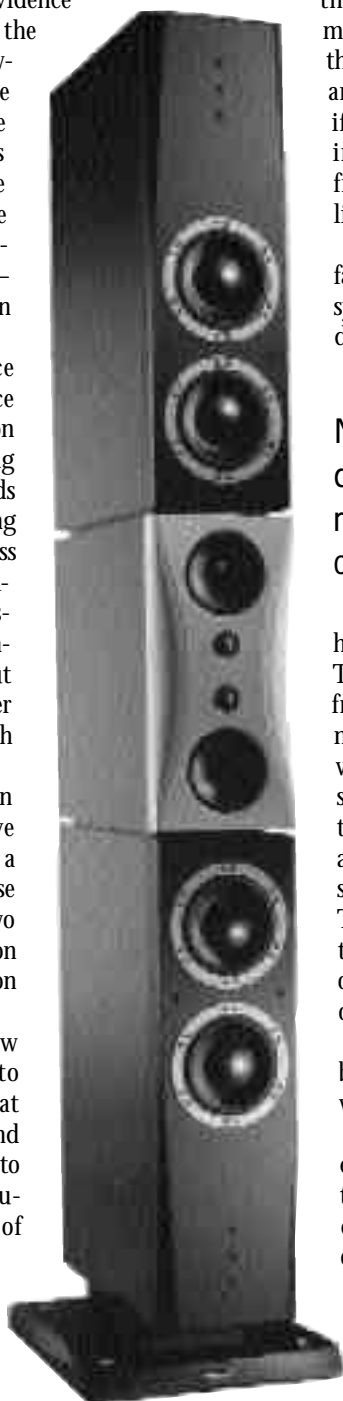
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A year ago, I reviewed the Dynaudio Evidence Master and I found it to be one of the finest speakers ever. At \$85,000, however, it existed as a demonstration that the finest in state-of-the-art components are beyond most real-world audiophiles. This year, Dynaudio has issued a sibling—the Evidence Temptation—with almost all the same technology, but at \$30,000. In addition, the Temptation is a superb speaker—the best-sounding I have had in my home in nearly two decades of reviewing.

I am *not* saying that the Evidence Temptation is better than the Evidence Master. I *am* saying that the Temptation sounds better in my middle-sized listening room than the Evidence Master, which needs a larger room to sing its best. My listening room has great standing waves in the bass that I cannot eliminate, and I could not really get the best out of the Masters. The listening room really is the most difficult component of all, particularly below 100 Hz; but when you get synergy between the speaker and the room in the deep bass, you approach audio Nirvana.

I also am *not* saying that the Temptation is better than the other speakers I've reviewed. If my review also reads more like a love affair than an objective analysis, please note that I have a similar love affair with two speakers I use as references—the Revel Salon and Thiel 7.2—and I remember the Wilson Maxx with almost equal fondness.

Nevertheless, I am writing this review after a long weekend of trying to prove to myself that the Temptations are flawed, that my favorable impressions are not valid, and that I should keep adding qualifications to my praise so the reader will be suitably cautious. In the process, I went through all of my audio torture tests of deep bass and dynamics. I blew my circuitbreakers twice because the sound of the most complex and demanding music remained so clean that I didn't recognize



the levels and power drain. I ran through my most difficult classical and jazz records to see if the ones with elevated highs would grow hard and fatiguing. I did comparative listening to see if the midrange was really that clean and the imaging that precise. In the end, I simply confirmed my response of several months of careful listening: This speaker is *truly* excellent.

My judgment is not driven primarily by the fact that its bass response happens to interact synergistically with my listening room to produce the tightest, deepest, most natural bass I've

No other speaker I know has done as well with reproducing really clean sound at the loudest climaxes as the Temptation.

heard. The real strength of the Evidence Temptation lies in its overall transparency at *all* frequencies, and its ability to reproduce midrange and treble detail in ways that reveal what is on the recording without coloring the sound—without making it euphonic or adding the hardness and the kind of reflections that alter the shape and size of the apparent soundstage. In short, you may not hear bass from the Temptation that works quite as well in your listening room, but you will surely hear every other aspect of its sound quality that I am going on to praise.

First, I should explain the design concepts behind the Temptation and how it compares with its \$85,000 elder brother, the Master:

The Temptation has the same basic design concept. Like the Master, it is symmetrical, with two 28mm tweeters (one atop the other in the center), two 15 cm midrange drivers (one above, one below the tweeters), and four 17 cm bass drivers (two each at the top and bottom sections of the cabinet enclosure). A key to its success is Dynaudio's driver technology, which uses custom-made drivers that

require extraordinarily careful assembly and then are individually tested. (Having visited the factory, I can testify that this is no hype. It was more like visiting a watchmaker than a speaker manufacturer.) The Temptation uses the same drivers for tweeter and midrange as the Master. The bass drivers are smaller, and all have a hybrid magnet system with neodymium combined with ferrite.

The center section of the speaker utilizes a massive 40 mm thick, CNC-machined, solid aluminum baffle into which the tweeters and midranges are integrated. The mechanical precision of the driver mounting is exceptional, and this along with the high mass of the baffle material helps integrate the midranges and tweeters while ensuring that the reproduction of dynamic detail in the high-midrange band has only limited coloration. Dynaudio states that this combination of mechanical precision and high mass is important because the amplitude of the mechanical movement of the tweeter is small and the acceleration of the tweeter mass is extremely high (calculated at 19,000 G acceleration for a 1,000 watt transient).

The four bass drivers are specifically designed for optimized performance in the Temptation cabinet, and they offer an extremely fast transient response. In total, the bass drivers' four 75mm (3 inches) wide, long-throw aluminum voice coils produce an incredibly high dynamic output.

Similar attention is paid to minimizing midrange and treble coloration. The front baffle of the dual bass modules

is 40mm thick HDF (high density fiber-board) and the walls are extremely well damped.

The Dynaudio Directivity Control symmetric driver array and advanced crossover-filter technology give the speakers greatly reduced vertical dispersion. This limits energy transfer to the floor and ceiling, and reflections or cancellations off of these boundaries are reduced by at least 75 percent. This, in turn, makes the Temptation less dependent upon room acoustics and listening position than most high-end loudspeakers.

The four cabinet sections (two bass modules; one mid-high module; one crossover module per speaker) are bolted together, and the speaker is housed, in effect, in one enclosure. The middle section is divided into two parts: One provides the air volume for the midrange drivers; the other houses the crossover. The crossover module cannot be rapidly modified and adjusted as in the Master. It is, however, specifically vented to maintain a stable operating temperature for all components, even when the speakers are listened to at high volume levels over an extended period of time. The section's back plate is made of a non-magnetic aluminum alloy. The crossover components are soldered onto a double-thick, glass-fiber reinforced PCB (printed circuit-board) that uses extra-thick copper traces. The impedance-corrected crossover design of the Temptation employs low-loss dielectric capacitors, zero-compression resistors, and OFC (oxygen-free copper) cable throughout.

The Temptation's cabinet is similar in finish to the Master, though is finished in-house, in contrast to the authentic Steinway & Sons lacquering of the Master. The Temptation is thinner and shorter than the Master; is deeper than it is wide. This makes it far less conspicuous. It is massive, weighing 249 pounds each, and mounted onto a massive bottom plate with an adjustable spike assembly.

Yes, I know that no list of features will convince some audiophiles that any speaker can be worth \$30,000, but I hope it will show how serious this speaker is and why there are good technical reasons for its extraordinary performance.

And yes, the Evidence Temptation is extraordinary. I've already said that it is extremely clean at very high power levels. Well, I mean levels well above a measured 115 dB with no detectable change—no dulled transients, definition, timbre. Like the Master, the Temptations produce an incredible amount of measurably flat, deep, bass power in my listening room.

They are superb with a demanding test band such as Track 18 of the Chesky Gold Stereo and Surround Sound Set-Up Disc [CHE 151]. This test tone sweeps down from the lower midrange to 20 Hz, and is designed to demonstrate the limits of speakers and subwoofers. The Temptation was still clean at a volume where room (and house) vibrations made a louder test impossible. The Temptation also made an even smoother transition in my listening room from the bass you can hear to the kind of bass you can feel than had the Master.

What really counts, however, is the ability of the Temptation to handle difficult music and deep bass at the same time and do so with coherent detail and imaging. Any good recording of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* will serve as proof. I also use two organ spectaculars: "The Great Gate at Kiev" on the Jean Guillou performance of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* [Dorian 90117] and the climax of the Second Movement of the Royal Philharmonic recording of Saint Saëns' *Symphony No. Three* [Telarc CD-80274].

Getting clean and coherent sound and the best soundstage is difficult with both these. Getting *really* clean sound at the loudest climaxes is much harder. Yet, no speaker I know has done as well here as the Temptation, even at levels well above 105 dB. Moreover, no speaker has produced fewer standing-wave variations in bass energy at different points in the room while keeping the midrange and maintaining a wide, deep soundstage over a wide listening area.

It's equally good with jazz and rock. My son took the Temptations from low listening levels to far above those he could stand while remaining in my listening room. (He listened to levels above 105 dB from the kitchen.) He assures me that the Temptation is also the cleanest speaker he's heard in reproducing rock at high levels. (The most I could stand was an old Creedence Clearwater Revival LP called *Chronicle: The 20 Greatest Hits* [Fantasy Stereo CCR-2] at levels around 107 dB. "Proud Mary" remained as clear as ever, but I'm just too old for rock-concert levels.)

Like the Master, the Temptation can reproduce the full dynamic range of SACD and 96 kHz/24-bit digital recordings, and its superb midrange and treble detail are particularly apparent with such source material and the best LPs.

The reproduction of voice is exceptional. Bass voice is clear and realistic. Tenor and soprano are as clear and clean as the recording permits, with no added hardness or exaggeration of breathing noises. I have long enjoyed the Lenneke Riten and Thom Janssen recording of Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* [van den Hul VDH99CR07]; it's one of the most musically natural female vocal recordings I've heard. The Temptation drew me into the music with constant minor discoveries of new levels of detail.

The same was true of the SACD of Jacintha's *Autumn Leaves* [Groove Note GRV-1006-3]. The natural detail and timbre—and a really good performance of Johnny Mercer's best songs—is almost a cure for Washington. At the same time, I also again heard new levels of detail from a reference recording I thought I had worked to death—Jennifer Warnes' *The Hunter* [Private Music 01005-82089-2]. One key test for any speaker is if it breathes new life into overused favorites. The Temptation does so splendidly.

Like the Master, the Temptation does a beautiful job with choral music, even on complex orchestral passages. The Robert Shaw version of Mahler's *Eighth* [Telarc CD 80267], so rightly called "symphony of 1,000" has never sounded better. Both voice and instruments are beautifully reproduced and detail and imaging are preserved in sudden transitions from low level to high.

The realism and coherence of the grand piano is also the best I've heard. If you audition the Temptations, be sure to bring a solo piano recording. And don't forget demanding string music, as well. The L'Archibudeli and Smithsonian Chamber Music Players recording of *Octets for Strings* [Vivarte/Sony SK 48 307] is a relatively close-miked recording of demanding chamber music, recorded with all Stradivarius instruments. Flat, open speakers with air often sound hard with this music, but a speaker that is warm or blurs detail loses vital information. The midrange and treble of the Temptation had an almost perfect balance, and imaging detail and soundstage depth and width were equally good. Like the Masters, the Temptations give great live recordings air and life.

The Temptations share with the Masters some potential drawbacks—for *some* audiophiles. They are not the speakers for clumsy multi-tracking, close-miking, poor digital processing, and the flaws of analog recordings and front ends. You will hear every mistake, with no romance or forgiveness. They have a remarkably flat and extended upper-octave timbre and the upper octaves may seem slightly elevated. At the same time, the Temptations do *not* have peaks or shifts in the upper midrange and treble that create a false picture of detail. As I said of the Master, the result is both more intellectually convincing and emotionally involving.

The Temptations also are front firing speakers intended to produce a coherent point source, and so do not offer the touch of added air and soundstage expansion provided by dynamic speakers with rear-firing tweeters.


As for ergonomics and set up, the Temptations required only minimal experimentation with set up. If the test of

room dependency is getting good performance in real-world listening rooms, then the Temptations are much less room dependent than most large speakers.

Only one amp and one speaker cable are needed per channel to provide the best performance. These speakers are an easy load, although they average 4-ohms impedance and require an amp with high-current capability, and the ability to handle moderately low impedance loads.

I compared their performance with Pass X600 amps and lower-power units, and found that the superb dynamics benefit from power levels over 100 watts. These are revealing speakers, and you need real power to get the best from them, dynamically. They are instantly revealing of the normally small sonic differences between speaker cables. The top-quality Discovery Cable did fine, but I preferred the top Kimber Select and the Transparent Audio Reference XLs. (The Kimbers had the more natural timbre, but the Transparent Audios added a touch of welcome apparent detail.)

I warned you that these speakers gave me so much musical pleasure, my judgments may be colored. Indeed, I'm so involved that I am teetering on the verge of *buying* them, in spite of the price tag and the practical problems their size will cause me as a reviewer.

This is the stuff of audio legends. You really should listen for yourself. 

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

Dynaudio North America
1144 Tower Lane, Bensenville, Illinois 60106
Phone: (630) 238-4200
www.dynaudio.com
Price: \$30,000

SPECS

Sensitivity (2.83 V/1 m): 90 dB
Impedance, nominal: 4 ohms
Frequency Response (+/- 3 dB): 23–25,000 Hz, typical room
Dimensions: 210/390 x 1933 x 490 mm
Weight: 113 kg

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Room 1:

Van den Hul Black Beauty, Sumiko Celebration, and Koetsu Onyx cartridges; VPI TNT turntable, HW Jr. II arm; Mark Levinson 360S DAC; Theta David DVD/DVD-A/CD transport; Pass Xono phono preamp; Pass XO stereo preamp; Pass X600 power amplifiers; Thiel 7.2 speakers; Kimber XL interconnects and speaker cables and Transparent Audio Reference XL interconnects and speaker cables

Room 2:

Audio Alchemy, PS Audio, and Pioneer CD/DVD transports; Sony 777ES SACD Player; Perpetual Technology P-1A and P-3A DAC and processor; McIntosh MR-71 tuner; Pass X1 stereo preamp; Krell MDA300 amplifiers and custom-rebuilt modification of McIntosh tube amplifier; Thiel 7.2 speakers; Discovery Cable and Kimber XL interconnects and speaker cables