

3 Square Audio Translator Loudspeakers

3 Square is a small new company based in the UK, their first product is a floorstanding loudspeaker constructed out of Baltic pine ply wood and costing £2500. Ian Ringstead takes a listen.



When Stuart Smith asked me to review these new speakers he said I would enjoy meeting the designer as he had a lot in common with myself in that he used to be in hifi retailing for many years, so we would have a lot to talk about. He was right. Stuart Dunn like myself worked for a couple of retail outlets well known back in the eighties and nineties. Now he is working elsewhere out of the industry like myself, but has a strong passion for music and how it is reproduced. Stuart had always been fascinated by speakers and their design so he wanted to pursue a design that gave him everything he loved for a sensible price. Has he achieved this? Let's see.

Stuart (Dunn) has based his design on a very simple first order crossover that uses high quality components and he has experimented with the values of the capacitors and inductors, just using his ears to voice the design. Now some might criticise him for not using software analysis tools like Audiomatica Clio and laser interferometry like the big boys use. Well scientific measurements are all well and good but as we know nothing is as powerful or adept at analysing sound as the human brain and ear.

Designers of course have to use their ears, as ultimately that is what we use to listen with and make the final judgement, but I bet a lot rely on scientific testing first and foremost to justify the results. There is value in both approaches and I won't commit to either approach as being the best. It

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all boils down to what the sonic results are like. I'll get onto that later.

The Translator is a classic looking floorstander. Using Prestige SEAS drive units filtered by HF and LF First Order Crossovers. The cabinets use the best quality Baltic birch plywood which is expensive and a no compromise product. Pro audio manufacturers use the same birch ply as it is so tough and rigid which is an absolute must in that tough environment, not only for longevity and

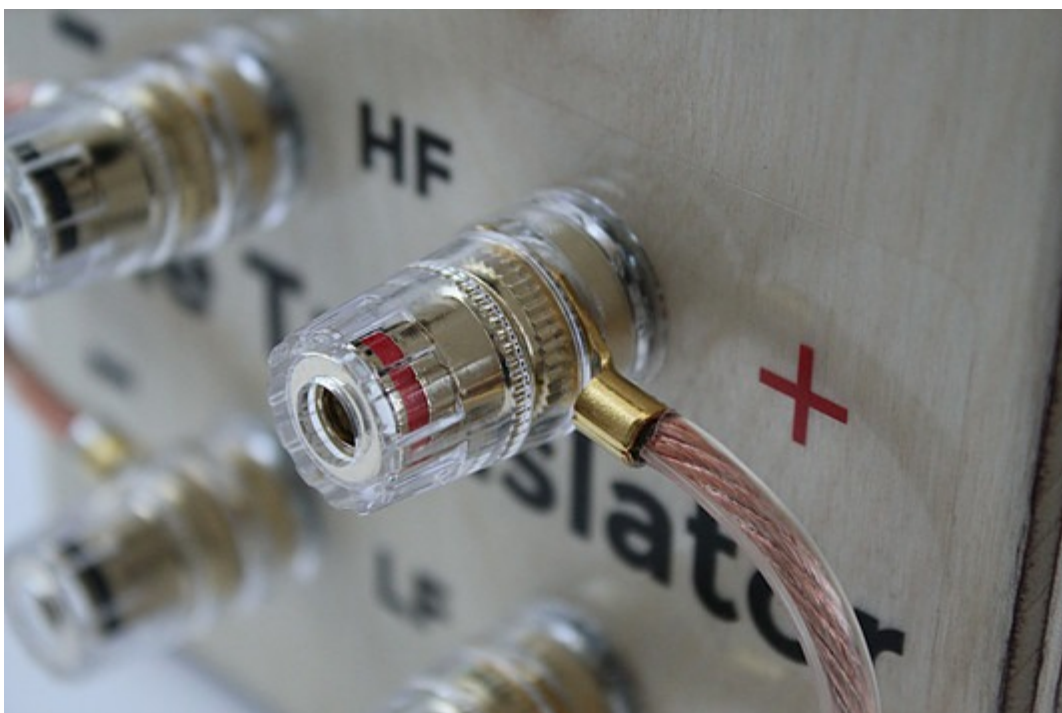
reliability, but also because it sounds good. The cabinet is mass loaded using steel and cement to give it a good low centre of gravity and allow the speaker to sit confidently on the floor. Bespoke M10 spikes are supplied to allow levelling for precise rigid placement. The spikes are custom made and were chosen for their solidity and ease of set up beneath the heavy cabinet. They are cleverly mounted onto steel threaded studs on the base of the cabinet and are easily adjusted. Interestingly there are five studs in total, one per corner and a central one so purists can just use three if they so wish, but I tried them on four



mounted in a heavy rigid cabinet and choosing high quality inductors and capacitors with close tolerances made for an interesting result. The cabinet's rigidity is further aided by two cross braces internally. At the rear are the bi wired good quality binding posts which come with jumpers if you only have single speaker wiring and a port to allow the speaker to breathe. The port is tuned so as to not cause any air turbulence (chuffing) and allow the drivers to work with the optimal air resistance. Stuart assured me they are an easy load and power wise I didn't hold back during listening sessions and had no concerns

with level issues, handling.

that a fairly large average size living room with overblown bass that tame. Well to my delight the bass was remarkably balanced nicely with the anything it was the treble lacking and was letting listened to a lot of the preceding months, speakers sound. Getting your living room can and it was a few hours treble started to make to my ears. I contacted of the initial dullness and



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he advised to just give it time for the sound to gel to my ears. His concern had been that the bass might overpower my room but it all worked out in the end.

THE SOUND

In my many years of listening to hifi I have learnt to be wary of initial impressions and make quick assumptions. Sometimes a product or system can instantly grab you and retain that magical quality, but on the flipside an initial impressive sound can soon become wearing on the ears and make me want to switch the system off. The Translator's never made me want to switch them off; it just took a bit of time to acclimatise. From the off these speakers show a great ability to reveal detail in a recording extremely well and vocals in particular were always very clear and coherent. This is a quality you appreciate when listening to densely mixed performances and I feel can make or break your enjoyment if you can't tell what is being sung or played. If you have to work hard at listening to a performance your brain will switch off as your concentration wanes. This phenomenon isn't just with hifi systems but live musical events. I go to a fair amount of concerts both classical and contemporary and if the venue or sound system affects the sound badly I come away very disappointed.

The evening before I wrote this review I went to see The Hallé Orchestra in Sheffield and one of the pieces they performed was Grieg's piano concerto. The orchestra and pianist were great, but due to the position where I was sitting in the concert hall this affected the sound and the piano sounded muted in level to my ears. My aunt was sat elsewhere in the auditorium and said it sounded fine to her. Like a poorly designed speaker or system the venue adversely affected my listening pleasure.

The Translator's won't spoil your listening pleasure. I found they liked to be pushed hard and came on song when given some current behind them. The sound opened up and the performers were easily identified and located in the soundstage. Vocals, whether male or female excelled. Jack Savoretti's new album *Written in scars* impressed with his distinctive style of the gruffness in his voice and Eva Cassidy sounded sublime (she always does on a good system), especially her album *Live at Blues Alley* which sounded so natural, and the recording and engineering is superb. Ricki Lee Jones was also tried for her distinctive style and I listened to her album *Balm in Gilead* all the way through without wanting to try something else. On my last listening to that cd I hadn't been very impressed, so the Translator's

must have been doing a good job. To test the bass and dynamic range capability of the speakers I put the soundtrack to *Gladiator* on. A great film in its own right you don't appreciate how good the soundtrack is until you hear it on a good system. It is a great recording done at Air Studios in London with Lisa Gerrard on vocals (she helped arrange it with Hans Zimmer). The



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not veneered) with the end grain of the laminated birch ply which forms the top and side panels on show making for a very neat contrast to the surface finish of the ply on all the other faces of the ply's lamination which are at right angles. It's easier to see this in the pictures than try to describe. The decision was made to leave the finish like this as veneering wasn't needed and makes for what I think is a pleasant change to the usual veneered

Lyndhurst Orchestra perform magnificently along with the soloists and the dynamic range is awesome. This recording will test any system and it certainly tested mine. The bass was incredible in places and fair shook my room, but it was never out of control. Testament to the very well controlled design and the solidity of the cabinets. I could have played louder but my wife and neighbours wouldn't have appreciated that. There was no distortion or signs of the cones breaking up so heavy rockers would love this speaker if they wanted depth and clarity of bass. Obviously other types of music were equally catered for and I didn't find a genre I listened to that I didn't enjoy.

The Translator's are extremely well made and finished with all credit going to the craftsmanship of Doug the third member of the team whose joinery skills are exemplary. The fit and finish is excellent. At £2500 they should be well made but this hasn't always been the case in my experience of products in the past. The cabinets are left in their raw state (i.e.

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or painted cabinets. A very durable waxed based finish is applied to the cabinet as it doesn't finger mark and looks very smart in my opinion. My wife didn't like the finish as she thought it looked unfinished, but she is hard to please and beauty is in the eye of the beholder as they say. It's all personal preference and I congratulate the team at 3 Square Audio for choosing

this option. This is not to say they won't supply other options in the future, but as a new company it's best to start slowly and see what develops. Custom paint finishes or exotic veneers are all well and good, but you as the customer will have to pay quite a bit more if that's what you want.

CONCLUSION

So there we have it. What was a slow start came good in the end. Persistence is the key here, as the speakers grew on me. Stuart and the 3 Square Audio team have worked hard for several years to bring this dream to fruition and have combined their expertise

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to produce what I feel is a worthy new addition to the speaker market. Given the quality of materials used, the build quality and excellent sound they deserve to do well and are competitively priced. The website <http://3squareaudio.com/> is well worth checking out and has some lovely pictures showing the speaker details and crossover for those interested.

Sound Quality: 8.9/10

Build Quality: 8.8/10

Value for money: 8.8/10

Overall: 8.83/10

Price at time of review: £2500

Pros:

High quality low colouration design

Good value

Extended and well controlled bass

Cons:

I like the looks but it may polarise views

Heavy design, so solid floors recommended to get the best out of them

Ian Ringstead

Technical Spec'

2 way floorstanding loudspeaker using a ported enclosure tuned to 38 Hz

Height 950 mm Width 198 mm Depth 360 mm

Weight 28.5 Kg each

HF driver is a SEAS 27mm Sonolex precoated fabric dome from the Prestige series.

LF driver is a SEAS 6,5 inch coated paper cone from the Prestige series.

Crossover filter is 1st order on both HF and LF circuits. Bi – amping is supported.

Inductor is Jantzen air core, Capacitor is 1% Clarity Cap.

Crossover point 2.6 KHz

Speaker terminals support bi-wire and bi-amping using bare wire, spade or 4mm plugs

In-room response typically 35Hz to 20 KHz

Recommended amplifier power 30 W – 150 W

DESIGNER'S COMMENTS

As hifi users it has been a long standing complaint of ours that most equipment comes with an inadequate spike adjustment system . It is either poorly designed or badly executed or in many cases both . We were determined to get this right . Before we had designed the Translator speaker we had designed the spike system it incorporates.

This consists of a large M10 threaded stainless steel bolt fixed to a 10mm steel plate with an aluminium coned foot of our own design mounted to it. The coned foot has a small hole through it which, with the use of the supplied allen key , makes micro adjustment easy. Due to the mass of the plate, the quality and size of the threaded parts , there is no need for a locking nut thus removing the wobble and difficulty of adjustment associated with M6 and M8 spikes.

We have also taken the opportunity to install a fifth stud on the speakers to allow the purist to stand them on only 3 spikes. We have found, however, that with our system on 4 spikes micro rocking, so common in some spike systems, is all but eliminated .

We have a passion for Baltic birch plywood . For the uninitiated this is not the sort of plywood you buy from your local DIY store or builders merchants. This is a very high quality material supplied only by specialist suppliers. Baltic birch plywood is made from veneers of very slow grown birch, no other species unlike ordinary plywood, grown in the cold Baltic regions of Finland and the once Baltic states of Russia. As it is slow grown it is a very dense timber which when veneered together, grain at right angles in alternate layers approximately 1mm thick, forms an incredibly rigid and consistent material from which we can build our products. Baltic birch is an attractive light coloured wood which has varying grain patterns on it. We use the plywood in sheet form but also by laminating it together to form the striped pattern you see on top of The Translator. We have perfected this technique over some time to form an attractive but very strong timber. Finally we use oil and wax based finish which we have developed over a few years to provide a smooth gloss finish which is hardwearing and will not chip like a lacquer or paint.

3 Square Audio