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Vivid Giya G3 loudspeaker

by Jason Kennedy

The curvy Vivid Giya G3 loudspeaker is a smaller version of the Giya G2, itself a Giya G1 'mini-me'. And at CES this year, the company showed a Giya G4 and it's even smaller. If Giya got any smaller, it would be the world's most radical desktop, but Vivid has stated it's done with *Honey, I Shrunk The Speakers*. For now.

The G3 challenge for Vivid engineer Lawrence 'Dic' Dickie was to make a smaller Giya, but not so small that it wouldn't take the 125mm upper mid driver seen on bigger Giyas. All three Giya models share a common motor system for the bass drivers, arranged back to back and firing sideways in this model. It's effectively like putting a V12 engine in a Mini; the cones are only 135mm in diameter, but have the magnet system from a 225mm driver. With a short coil in a long gap, control is not likely to be an issue; it's more likely that the bass system could sound overly dry. You could even end up with midrange that's capable of high SPLs but no bass. That is unless the company is Vivid, which has the enormous advantage of being able to design the cabinet, the drivers and the crossovers as one system. This is because it makes every part of its speakers at its facility in Durban, South Africa. So Dic designed the bass system to give the best fusion of speed and extension that he can in this four-way, five driver loudspeaker.

The cabinet construction remains a sandwich of glass reinforced plastic (GRP) skins either side of end grain balsa. This results in an immensely stiff yet relatively lightweight cabinet that ensures minimum vibration at audio frequencies, and thus minimises cabinet colouration. It also allows for automotive quality paint finishes in the colour of your choice.

The tweeter and midrange drivers have catenary rather than spherically shaped domes and this, combined with the protective crossbars, makes them look relatively ovoid. Both have tapered tubes to damp rearward output and use edge-



▶ wound aluminium voice coils, which provide the best match with the aluminium domes. The tweeter uses specially formulated ferrofluid that can tolerate the massive flux density created by the radially polarised, neodymium magnet system that Vivid employs. The aforementioned mid-bass driver is the same employed in the bigger Giyas: an aluminium cone with a 50mm copper ribbon coil on a highly vented former with a radially polarized magnet structure and compliant mounting. The smaller bass drivers and reduced volume of G3 compared to G2 means that system sensitivity should have been lower than it turned out, but Dic came up with a crossover configuration that produced a figure almost as good as the G2 at the time. As a result the crossovers on G2 and G1 were revised and gained another 3/4 dB of sensitivity.

As ever with Giya, the bi-wire terminals are hidden under the base. This looks good, but is fiddly to use. Spikes help raise the base, but Vivid doesn't consider them essential.

My initial impressions were very similar to those encountered with the G2: immense transparency to the driving system, in this case Naim NDS streamer, Townshend Allegri passive controller and ATC P1 power amp. But results didn't seem to gel as well. Yes, I could hear a lot thanks to the inherently 'quiet' nature of the cabinets and the bass extension was prodigious – too much for the room, in fact. Given that this had not been the case with G1 and G2, I figured that the extra power available from the P1 was the reason, but I didn't want to give up the extension and grip by moving to a less powerful amp. This amp is one of the most powerful I have had the pleasure of using, yet it is also transparent to tempo, very revealing, and possessed of powerful bass.

The answer proved to be the use of Townshend Seismic speaker bases. These raised the speakers a small amount and decoupled them from the floor. This tightened up the bottom end, which meant the timing became spot on. Combine that with the resolution that the G3 brings to the rest of the audioband, and you have a window into the performance that few loudspeakers can match. Now the sound could escape the enclosures completely, the soundstage became precisely as wide, high, and deep as the recording allowed, and the detail coalesced into a musical ▶



▶ experience that was like no other. Bugge Wesseltoft's 'Leave My Head Alone Brain' [*Duo*, Universal] expanded out into the room and revealed that at least some of its inspiration came from 'Take Five', both piano lead pieces after all. Now it was difficult to press pause, especially when the recent live album *Norwegian Woods* kicked its drum and revealed the scale of the venue. The singer's voice appeared in the room out of nowhere and inhabited it to the extent that it would have been rude to do anything but listen.

I also gave one of 2L's high res files a spin to see how the G3 would cope with a really serious recording. As soon as Mozart's Violin Concerto in D major [Marianne Thorsen with TrondheimSolistene, 2L 24/192] started playing, the vitality and expressive qualities of the musicians took over. Again, the speakers slipped from aural view and I had the ensemble in front of me in such spectacular fashion as to render visual cues unnecessary. That 2L recording is renowned for being excellent, but rarely has it sounded so convincing, engaging, and real. By way of contrast, I also gave Infected Mushroom a blast. The level was a little high on account of the previous piece, but the G3s rolled with it and delivered such taut, muscular, and neighbour-crunching bass that I didn't leap for the volume control immediately. Instead, I bathed in the electronic waters, drifting out into the sonic swells. Which is all very well, but it doesn't get the job done; it did, however, inspire me to put on James Blake's 'Retrograde' [*Overgrown*, Polydor], which the Vivids rendered in a heart-breakingly beautiful, totally uplifting, and alarmingly dark manner.

I decided to turn up the heat by using a turntable, and not any turntable either, but a Rega RP10 with Apheta MC and Trilogy 907 phono stage. Now the system was completely absent from the presentation, and all I could hear was the way that musicians were playing and what they were trying to convey with the music. I have been absorbed by computer audio of late, but the Vivids reveal that an analogue source is still king of the hill when it comes to communication and musical integrity.

The timely arrival of better digital components did narrow the gap. The first was Antelope's Platinum DSD DAC, which was initially paired with my Macbook Air and the latest incarnation of Audirvana Plus. These showed just how much transparency the G3 offers by digging out so much of the nuance and timbre of John Lurie's voice and then blowing me away with the emotional power of Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep' [21, XL]. It's a melodramatic song, but I rarely get past the first chorus because the compression is so savage; here it avoided the pain, presumably because neither speaker nor source were struggling with the sudden increase in density. Listening to the whole thing turned me into a bit of a wreck and I had to calm down with Dylan's 'Visions of Johanna' [*Blonde on Blonde*, Columbia] before a semblance of normality was restored.

The next breakthrough occurred when I hooked up the digital output of a Naim NDS to the Platinum DSD. This proved more focused than the Macbook with better leading-edge definition and stronger timing. You could hear more hardware character, but the result was no less engaging. Then along came the final element in what was to prove a formidable digital source. This was the Computer Audio Design CAT, which ▶

► CAD has built to show off its 1543 USB DAC. However, as well as having a USB output, the CAT is a NAS drive, but not in the usual sense. In fact, this is the most thoroughly thought out variation on that theme I have encountered. It has a 256GB SSD for music storage, linear power supplies for every part, and it makes even dedicated audio RIP/NAS devices look lightweight. With the NDS taking its signal from the CAT, the speakers jumped into another league all together, proving once again that source is still king. To be honest, I couldn't believe how low the noise floor became and how much there is going on down where most of us can't hear it. Some of that low level sound you don't need to hear, but much of it being the final few milliseconds of delay or the end of the reverb tail. It's uncanny really and all this via an affordable power amplifier.

I did put the Consonance Cyber-100 valve amp in the system for a while to see how it would fare, and it showed a little bit more of the magic in the signal. I realised that the power amp is the limitation in this system, but didn't have a Constellation Audio to hand! The Consonance, however, showed just how quicksilver fast the G3 is. It has so little character that every change to the system is obvious and by default every nuance that the musician puts into the recording is plain to hear as well, if the system lets it through. And this system let it through with a vengeance. In essence, it did what I think any high-end system should be capable of; it stopped me from thinking about anything else and allowed the music to transport me to the time and place of its making. It makes you close your eyes and immerse yourself in its dynamic, tonal, and emotional range. In short, it carries you away and leaves your cares behind.

Given that I achieved most of this with a £2,000 power amp suggests that the G3 can give more, but it does require decent power to deliver a convincing wide-band result. In fairness, most speakers do, but most speakers are more coloured and less ultimately resolute than this. The Vivid Giya G3 is not inexpensive, but few alternatives come close to this degree of perfectly timed transparency. It would seem that the pace of improvement available from source and amplification have allowed the G3 to exceed the results I got with G2 and G1, and that can't be bad for a 'little' speaker. +

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Configuration: 4-way 5-driver system

Cabinet: Glass reinforced balsa cored sandwich composite

Drive Unit Configuration: D26 26mm tweeter and D50 50mm midrange with tapered tube loading, and catenary dome profile. C125S 125mm midbass with tapered tube loading, short-coil long-gap motor design, 50mm copper ribbon coil. Two C135 135mm bass units with short-coil long-gap motor design, 75mm copper ribbon coil

Bass loading: Exponentially tapered tube enhanced bass reflex

Sensitivity: 87dB @ 2.83Vrms and 1.0 meter on axis

Impedance (Ohm): 6 nominal, 4 minimum, low reactance

Frequency range - 6 dB points: 33 - 36,000 Hz

First D26 Break Up mode: 44,000 Hz

Frequency response (Hz): 36 - 33,000 +/- 2 dB on reference axis

Harmonic distortion: (2nd and 3rd) < 0.5% over frequency range

Crossover frequencies (Hz): 220, 880, 3500

Power handling (music program) watts rms: 800

Dimensions (H, W, D): 116x34x 58cm

Net weight: 41kg

Standard finishes: piano black, pearl white

Optional finishes: Multi component high gloss automotive

Price: £25,500 per pair

Manufacturer: Vivid Audio

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