

Vivid Audio Giya G2 Loudspeakers

Category: Full-Length Equipment Reviews

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Written by Doug Schneider

Note: Measurements taken in the anechoic chamber at Canada's National Research Council can be found through [this link](#).

Few people will be able to afford the Vivid Audio Giya G2's retail price of \$50,000 USD per pair. Its appearance, which has been described as everything from unique to beautiful to bold to odd to downright ugly, means that it will greatly appeal to some people and never to others. In short, there's a limited market for a speaker of this type.

But whether or not you can afford the Giya G2, and whether or not you like the way it looks, if you care about cutting-edge loudspeaker design and performance, you should read this review. In today's marketplace, products such as this are all too rare -- the breathtakingly original results of letting a speaker-designing genius off his leash to manifest his vision of the perfect loudspeaker with a company behind him with the balls to build it.

Dickie and the Giyas

Laurence Dickie spent his formative design years at B&W (now Bowers & Wilkins), where he came up with a host of inventions, probably the best known of which is the Matrix enclosure (the first B&Ws I owned were the Matrix 1s) and the ground-breaking Nautilus. It's now Vivid Audio that's reaping the benefits of Dickie's experience, knowledge, and originality. Vivid Audio's speakers are primarily designed by Dickie in England, and manufactured at the company's plant in South Africa. This is the second Vivid speaker I've reviewed -- the first, in December 2010, was the first model in their Oval series, the outstanding [B1](#) (\$15,000/pair), first launched in 2004.

The G2 and its big older brother, the G1 (\$65,000/pair), are both

members of Vivid's top line, the Giya models, and look very similar. The G2 is a little shorter and lighter at 54"H and 121 pounds (55kg), vs. the G1's 70" height and 176 pounds, and has smaller woofers: two 7" cones vs. the G1's pair of 9" cones.

But this isn't one of those cases where the more expensive speaker is automatically the better one. The two models are similarly designed and use parts of equally high quality, and the G2 will be the better choice for some rooms. The G1's bigger woofers and larger cabinet mean that it can reach lower in the bass and play louder through that range. The increased bass depth might be an advantage if your room is big enough to accommodate it, and the increased output might help if you play your music extremely loud -- but keep reading.

By the time this review is published, the newest Giya, the smaller, lower-priced G3, will have been introduced in venues around the world and will be being readied at the Vivid plant for its launch in spring 2012. The G3's design is similar to that of the G1 and G2, but it doesn't look quite the same.

Description

A glance at the Giya G2's dimensions -- 54"H x 14"W x 25"D -- can be misleading: the cabinet's bulbous, curly-topped shape is unlike anything ever seen outside the G1. I've heard some folks say that they wouldn't buy this speaker no matter how good it sounded. They just don't like it. On the other hand, some love it.

The world of ultra-high-end speakers has more beasts than beauties, particularly from the top-dog North American firms. Wilson Audio Specialties' big speakers are styled like robots, and their small models look like the flip-top garbage cans you used to see at the mall. YG Acoustics' cabinets look like average-finished lab instruments. And have you seen the eyesores Hansen Audio is making? Magico's Q series includes some truly elegant-looking models, and Verity Audio does a consistently good job with their svelte, graceful designs, particularly the Parsifal and the models above it -- but those are exceptions to the general rule. In terms of industrial design, many makers of ultra-high-end speakers have little to be proud of.

The Giyas certainly look different, but Vivid's eschewing of the typical box enclosure is a breath of fresh air. Their looks make more sense when you hear them and realize that the cabinet is more than just appearance -- it's what helps the speaker sound the way it does. As for the so-called wife-acceptance factor (WAF), my wife has adored them since the day they were installed in my listening room. Is she an anomaly? I don't know, but she married me, so I'll just assume that her taste is good. I also like the colors. All Giya models can be ordered in the standard painted finishes of Piano and Pearl. Finishes of Sahara, Arctic, Oyster, and Borollo are available for additional cost.

Laurence Dickie's goal in designing the Giya cabinet was to create something acoustically ideal from which the drivers could launch their soundwaves. The Giya G2's flowing, graceful shape minimizes the baffle to eliminate diffraction effects. Basically, he's gotten the cabinet out of the way of the sound.

The main shell of the cabinet, which Vivid describes as a "vacuum-infused fibre reinforced polyester compound," is made in two halves, with a separate front baffle that holds the three higher-frequency drivers. The speaker's bottom panel is made of carbon fiber; it's this that the two sets of binding posts (for biwiring or biamping) are attached to, and into which the large floor spikes are screwed. Those posts are inconveniently tucked way underneath. To access the posts and attach the speaker cables, I had to get someone to tip the speaker way over. The posts should be closer to the rear of the cabinet.

Like the G1, the G2 is a four-way design: three drivers on the front baffle, and a woofer on each of the lower left and right sides. The crossover points are 220, 880, and 3500Hz, and all slopes are said to be textbook Linkwitz-Riley fourth-order designs, and electroacoustic -- meaning that the necessary 24dB/octave rolloff is created by a combination of each driver's natural rolloff characteristics and the electrical elements.

The drivers, all designed by Laurence Dickie and made by Vivid Audio, have aluminum diaphragms. Each driver's model name includes a number that indicates its diameter in millimeters. The conical drivers are fairly durable, but the domes are fragile, with numerous reports of

them getting punched in by poking fingers. Vivid supplies a protective grille of metal mesh that can be magnetically attached over the drivers. I used the grilles often, not just because of my kids, but because adult visitors to my listening room couldn't seem to resist wanting to touch them.

The domes of the D26 tweeter and D50 midrange drivers have a catenary shape, which Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition, defines as "the curve assumed by a cord of uniform density and cross section that is perfectly flexible but not capable of being stretched and that hangs freely from two fixed points." This is done to push breakup modes far higher in frequency than can typical hemispherical domes. Vivid claims that the D26's first breakup mode is above 40kHz; the typical breakup mode of a normal aluminum dome is not much above 20kHz. The goal is to get any driver resonances far out of the passband so that each driver operates pistonically.

The C125S midrange-woofer in the Giya G2 is not quite the same as the one used in the B1 or in any of the other Oval models. The Oval series uses the C125, which has been designed to go lower in the bass. The C125S has been optimized for a narrower bandwidth: about 220-880Hz.

What's not apparent from the outside of the Giya G2 are the three tapered tubes, each stuffed lightly with absorbent material and extending from the basket of one of the upper three drivers to the rear of the cabinet. The tubes are designed to dissipate the drivers' rearward-directed energy, to minimize colorations and resonances so that all that's heard from the speaker is the wave launch from the front of the drivers. This technology, a Dickie invention, was first seen in the B&W Nautilus.

The G2 has two C175 woofers, the G1 two C225 cones, but each speaker's woofers are configured the same way: they fire in phase with one another and vent through the crescent-shaped port directly behind each. The cabinet shape comes into play here. Tweeters and midrange drivers need relatively short tubes of smaller diameter that are easy to fit inside the cabinet. A woofer needs a tube much longer,

so Vivid has based the Giya cabinet's shape, including the curly top, on the tube required by the woofer. When you consider the cabinet's role in providing a clean wave launch while behaving like a tapered tube, the G2's odd shape makes a lot more sense.

Placing the woofers and ports on opposite sides of the cabinet creates a reaction-canceling effect. The woofers' opposed forces cancel out resonances that would otherwise be transferred to the cabinet structure. As for the ports, a resonance occurs when only one port is used -- it shows up as a funny blip in the frequency response. But with two ports aligned as here, the resonances cancel each other out, and the blip disappears. Clever.

It all adds up to a sensitivity of 88dB (2.83V/m), a frequency response of 29Hz-33kHz, ± 2 dB, and a distortion level of less than 0.5% across the entire audioband. Vivid says that the G2 will take up to 600W of power, an astonishing amount of juice. But specs tell you only so much. To justify its size and price, a speaker such as the Giya G2 must make its case in the listening.

Sound

When I reviewed the Oval B1, it was apparent to me that Vivid had the wherewithal to create a state-of-the-art loudspeaker. From the midrange to the high frequencies, the B1 had a neutrality, transparency, and clarity that rivaled those of my reference speakers, Revel's Ultima Salon2s (\$21,998/pair), and even surpassed the Revels in a couple of areas. In the low to upper bass, though, the Salon2 clearly stepped ahead. But all the potential was there in the B1. The moment I began playing music through the Giya G2s, they seemed bent on fulfilling that potential, righting the little B1's wrongs, and improving on everything else.

Any doubt as to whether the G2 is a full-range design capable of reproducing bass down to 20Hz at respectable volume levels was quickly set aside when I played the Cowboy Junkies' The Trinity Session (16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC, RCA) about 6dB louder than I can with most other speakers. I not only heard ultradeep bass frequencies, I also felt a swell of pressure take over my room that no speakers,

including the Revels, could match, at least at those SPLs. And while it's really difficult to isolate and gauge a speaker's bass neutrality in a listening room, which itself greatly affects what bass one hears, I knew from how the Revels measured in an anechoic chamber and performed in my room that what I was hearing from the G2s was very linear bass that extended extremely low in frequency.

But the bass wasn't just deep, it was reproduced with more visceral impact than I've heard from any speaker I've reviewed or even heard. It didn't matter what percussion-heavy track I played through the G2s, or at what volume level -- the force in the low end was mind-blowing, and the detail through these frequencies was second to none. When the G2s had to reproduce moments of slam -- as when a drum was hit really hard -- they did so with the force of Mike Tyson in his prime, yet with such articulation and control that it was apparent the speaker wasn't coming even close to breaking a sweat or straining.

The ability to deliver bass depth, weight, and impact exceptionally well not only allowed the Giya G2s to reproduce an orchestral recording with the sheer weight it deserves, they also reproduced hard-rock recordings in a way that I never thought any audiophile-type speaker could. Not many people in the world are familiar with April Wine, but most Canadians my age and a little older are. When fellow Canucks visit my house, I put on The April Wine Collection (16/44.1 FLAC, Unidisc Music), set the volume to 11, cue "Roller," then stand back and watch jaws drop. After I did this just last week, one man turned to me and said, "I almost cried." He explained that while he'd grown up hearing "Roller," he'd never heard it with the clarity and precision of the G2s, particularly in the low frequencies, where they reproduced the relentless bass guitar with awe-inspiring control. I understood exactly what he was saying -- no speaker I've heard anywhere has reproduced rock this well, and I couldn't help wondering how many people in the world have heard recordings like these reproduced so true to the source, and if even the original recording engineers and musicians themselves ever have.

The outstanding neutrality and amazing clarity throughout the midrange and highs that I heard from the Oval B1 was surpassed by the Giya G2. The G2 also projected its sound in ways so immediately

vivid (sorry) that if I hadn't known where the speakers were positioned, I'd have sworn the music was appearing out of thin air. The B1s did a similar thing in terms of getting the sound out of their enclosures (boxes just doesn't apply to Vivid speakers), but the G2s were simply better at it -- they completely "disappeared" into the soundfield. It's impossible to quantify these improvements, but I'd say that the G2's clarity and transparency and ability to "disappear" was about 25% better than the B1's -- and that's completely setting aside the improvements I heard in bass extension and impact. From that you can also glean that while the B1 didn't quite measure up to the Ultima Salon2 overall, the G2 surpassed the Revel -- which, at more than twice the price, is what you hope will happen.

To varying degrees, all the music I listened to, new or old, was a revelation through the Giya G2s. I've known Bruce Cockburn's *Humans* since it was released on vinyl in 1980, and the best-sounding version of it so far is *Humans: Deluxe Edition*, which True North Records released on CD several years ago, and which I've ripped to my music library (16/44.1 FLAC). I thought I'd heard every nuance in this recording in the nearly 32 years I've listened to it, and in all that time I've lamented its poor soundstaging (instruments, particularly drums, are placed all out of whack), the lack of acoustic space, and the limited sense of depth. The G2s didn't fix all those problems, but they did reveal more musical nuances than I'd ever heard before, including degrees of space and air I hadn't known were there -- and better delineated the spaces between the musicians, with a far greater spread from the front of the stage to the rear, than I'd ever heard. Cockburn's voice hovered at center stage with uncannily laser-like precision, and never before had I heard the kind of separation between him and the rest of the musicians that I did through the G2s. Accurate, hyper-revealing speakers don't make mediocre recordings sound worse; instead, they bring out their best. On a very good recording, such as tuba player Øystein Baadsvik's *Ferry Tales* (24/48 FLAC, BIS/eClassical), the placement of the images of the musicians on the soundstage, the spread from front to back, and the clarity of the sound itself was revelatory and, in my experience, nothing short of the state of the art.

A number of speaker designs, even some expensive ones, boast all of

these sonic attributes -- but only when you sit in a narrowly defined sweet spot precisely equidistant from both enclosures. A few years ago, I sat through a demonstration of Wilson Audio's MAXX 3 speakers (\$68,000/pair). Except for the hard-as-nails treble (which I found seriously irritating), the sound was reasonable when I sat at a specific spot between the speakers. But the tonal balance changed markedly and the soundstage fell apart when I moved my head not very far to the left or right -- and when I stood up, the MAXX 3s sounded like different speakers altogether. Some people seem to think that these drastic changes in sound, which necessitate keeping your head in a virtual vise, are good things, and are somehow the signs of a very high-performing design that needs to be meticulously set up. But to me it indicates a poor relation of off-axis to on-axis frequency response, and substandard phase integration between the drivers.

But the Giya G2's response was remarkably consistent and uniform, whether I listened on the tweeter axes, from way off to the left or right of them, or whether I stood up or sat down. The G2s provided the widest, most stable sweet spot I've ever heard. I have three main listening chairs: one in the center, flanked by others at left and right. The best spot for stereo imaging was obviously the center position, but even in the left and right chairs the tonal balance was essentially the same, with a well-defined soundstage of excellent depth. Even the Revel Salon2s, which are notable for their broad listening window, don't hold up so well off axis. The only speakers I've reviewed that match the G2s in this regard are Mirage's OM Design OMD-28s, which radiate sound through 360° (though with a bias toward the front) -- but on the vertical plane, even they don't do nearly as well as the G2s did. When I stood up, the Vivids' sound didn't change much at all, even in the highs, which is where the biggest deviation is usually heard.

Another aspect of the G2's performance that I found not only uncanny but ear-opening was its ability to play whisper-quiet and extremely loud equally well -- and when I say loud, I mean louder than I've heard any audiophile-type loudspeaker play. Not many speakers play so well at both extremes. I find that many speakers don't sound lively enough at low listening levels, and come to life only when the volume gets louder -- but not so loud that they distort and/or compress. But the other day, through the G2s, I listened to Glenn Gould's A State of

Wonder: The Complete Goldberg Variations of J.S. Bach, 1955 & 1981 (16/44.1, Sony Classical) with the volume control of the Eximus DP1 preamp-DAC just a few clicks up. At this level -- far below what I normally listen at -- a whisper couldn't be heard more than 6' away. The sound was certainly quieter than I'm used to, but every detail in the recording was apparent, and the incisiveness of Gould's rapid-fire keystrokes was wholly intact, and every bit as satisfying as when played at a more normal listening level. Never before had I heard a speaker sound so alive when played at so low a volume.

A little while later I played another piano recording, Ola Gjeillo's Stone Rose (16/44.1 FLAC, 2L), this time at lifelike listening levels -- which, if you're familiar with the sound of a real piano, you know can be loud. It's at this point that most speakers distort so badly that you figure they're going to give up the ghost. But the G2s reproduced every keystroke with complete accuracy, astonishing control, and such effortlessness that I could tell that the speakers were just coasting where many others would be falling apart. The Giya G2s could reproduce any kind of music at any volume level more faithfully and with more composure than any other speaker I've heard.

Versatility

What I've written here about the Giya G2 describes a loudspeaker that's close to perfect, given current loudspeaker technology. The only people who won't like the G2 are those who don't necessarily want extreme accuracy, transparency, and resolution, and would prefer a speaker with a distinctive "sound" -- something more laid-back, perhaps. But the G2 is the ticket for those who want a speaker that basically defines the phrase high fidelity, which means I'd better talk a bit about amplification -- the G2 presented a few surprises, including an open door to those who love tubes.

For the bulk of my listening I used Bryston's 4B SST2 and Ayre Acoustics' VX-R solid-state stereo amplifiers, respectively rated at 300 and 200Wpc into 8 ohms. As I mentioned, Vivid says you can pound out 600W to the G2s, but I found that both of these amps delivered more than enough power, even when I cranked up the

volume to levels beyond what most would consider loud, or even healthy for their hearing. If you have a reasonably powerful solid-state amplifier, you should have no trouble replicating my experience with the G2s.

Then there were JE Audio's VM60 all-tube monoblocks (\$6100/pair, 60W into 8 ohms), which I'd just received for review. I had two reasons for using the JEAs with the G2s. First, the amps were here, so why not try them? Second, when we measured the G2, we found that while its impedance is about 4 ohms through the lower and upper bass, it's way above 8 ohms from the midrange up -- a fairly easy load for any good amplifier.

I don't know if I was surprised as much as impressed with how well the VM60s worked with the G2s, delivering bass that was full and rich, highs that were extended and refined, and a midrange that was warm and liquid in a way that only tubes can manage. The G2s didn't sound as forceful or impactful when driven by the JE Audios as they did when driven by the Bryston or Ayre amp, nor would they play nearly as loudly -- but the VM60s certainly drove the G2s loud enough for most sane people. Not only is the G2 a remarkably versatile loudspeaker for how superbly it works with any kind of music, it's the kind of speaker that can be used with a wide variety of amplifiers.

Conclusions

What's left to say about a speaker that can play music better than any other speaker I know of on the market at this time? Only something I mentioned at the beginning of this review: Its high cost and unique appearance ensure that Vivid Audio's Giya G2 is not the speaker for everyone. But for those who can afford it and like its looks, and for those who want to hear for themselves the state of the art of loudspeaker design, the Giya G2 is the speaker to listen to. The Giya G2 is not only the best loudspeaker I've ever reviewed, it's the best loudspeaker I've ever heard. It may be the best loudspeaker in the world.

. . . Doug Schneider das@soundstagenetwork.com

Associated Equipment

Speakers -- Revel Ultima Salon2, Mirage OM Design OMD-28

Amplifiers -- Bryston 4B SST2 (stereo), Ayre Acoustics VX-R (stereo),
JE Audio VM60 (mono)

Preamplifiers -- Eximus DP1, Simaudio Moon 350P, JE Audio VL10.1

Digital sources -- Eximus DP1 preamp-DAC, Simaudio Moon Evolution
650D DAC-transport, Hegel HD10 DAC, Bryston BDP-1 digital
player, Sony Vaio laptop

Digital interconnects -- AudioQuest Carbon USB and Diamond USB, DH
Labs D-110 AES/EBU

Analog interconnects -- Nirvana S-L, Nordost Valhalla

Speaker cables -- Nirvana S-L

Vivid Audio Giya G2 Loudspeakers Price: \$50,000 USD per pair.

Warranty: Five years parts and labor.

Vivid Audio Limited The Old Barn

Rosier Business Park, Coneyhurst Road Billingshurst, West Sussex
RH14 9DE England, UK Phone: +44 1403-78-2221

Website: www.vividspeakers.com | <http://www.terrason-audio.nl>

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