

Wilson Audio Yvette Loudspeaker

Minor Miracle

Jim Hannon

My association with Wilson Audio products goes back several decades to the first Wilson Audio Tiny Tot (WATT). When I first heard this speaker, I was amazed by its resolution of fine detail, its openness and transparency, its wide and focused soundstaging, and its crystalline clarity. Its time-alignment and inert cabinet really helped reduce smearing. I owned both the WATT 1 and WATT 2 but never added the Puppy—marrying my early WATTs initially to Entec subwoofers and, eventually, to the woofer towers of the Infinity IRS Beta before the Puppy was introduced. I parted with my WATTs in favor of dipole speaker systems such as the Infinity Beta and the Quads (from the originals to the ESL-63s with full Crosby mods).

The WATT was originally designed by Dave Wilson as a location monitor for recordings, but I—like many other audiophiles—used it as a mini-monitor in my primary system. However, I was never able to integrate it seamlessly with subwoofers, and its somewhat analytical, “tell-it-like-it-is” presentation, which is so good for monitoring recordings, proved to be aurally fatiguing in extended listening sessions. While later WATT iterations ameliorated many of my initial objections—and the Puppy was a much better match than the subs I had employed—I never returned to the WATT or its successors. However, Peter McGrath of Wilson

Audio has showcased many of his brilliant recordings for me on various Wilson speakers at industry shows over the years, so I’ve kept pace with the evolution of the company’s loudspeakers.

At the 2016 RMAF, I heard the Wilson Audio Yvette (which replaces the Wilson Sophia 3 rather than for the WATT/Puppy), and was very impressed. Here was a single-enclosure, full-range loudspeaker that offered a harmonic richness—an improvement over the sterility of the original WATT—without its losing any of the compelling sonic attributes that first drew me to the WATT. I was so taken by the Yvette’s remarkable



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performance, particularly on demanding solo piano recordings, that I gave it my “Best of Show” award when it was demo’d in a system with VTL electronics, Brinkmann/dCS front ends, and Nordost Odin 2 cables. I was anxious to hear what the Yvette could do in my own listening room with somewhat more modest electronics and cables.

The evolution of Wilson Audio and its loudspeakers has been well documented in these pages. For example, see Jacob Heilbrunn’s insightful review of the WAMM Master Chronosonic in Issue 276, or the company profile of Wilson Audio in *The Absolute Sound’s Illustrated History of High-End Audio, Volume 1: Loudspeakers*. Dave and Sheryl Lee Wilson, and now son Daryl, have built a company that has enjoyed enviable and well-deserved success. Assembling a top-flight group of professionals over the years who share the Wilsons’ vision has been a key factor in that success. On a recent trip to the Wilson headquarters in Provo, Utah, I was surprised to learn that top Wilson lieutenants Peter McGrath and John Giolas had owned high-end audio dealerships, and several others on staff also had worked in audio retail. I suspect this is one of the reasons the company places such an emphasis on first-rate dealer training and customer support.

From the outset, accuracy in the time-domain as well as extremely low enclosure resonance have been hallmarks of Wilson designs. The same holds true for the latest loudspeakers, for which Dave’s son Daryl served as lead designer and continued to improve performance in these areas. Moreover, Daryl’s Yvette and Alexx designs have benefited from being developed alongside Dave Wilson’s masterpiece, the WAMM Master Chronosonic, whose micro-adjustments of individual driver positioning mark the ultimate manifestation of time-domain accuracy in a multiway speaker system.

Dating back to the original WATT, Wilson enclosures have been extremely inert—to help minimize spurious vibrations that can smear the sound and reduce clarity. As mentioned above, the Yvette’s enclosure is designed for time-domain accuracy and extremely low resonance. In contrast to the WATT/Puppy, the Yvette employs a single enclosure built from pro-

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proprietary Wilson-developed composites—its third generation X-material, as well as S-material developed specifically for enhanced midrange performance. A replacement for the Sophia 3, the Yvette is about the same size as the Sophia, though slightly shorter and a bit deeper, it weighs ten pounds more due to its more “ambitious bracing.” A laser vibrometer, which measures minute mechanical vibrations, helped the Yvette’s design team create a significantly less resonant cabinet. Another plus is that the Yvette’s resistor-tuning system is more accessible and uses improved hardware over that found in the Sophia 3. The actual volume for the woofer is larger in the Yvette due to angled bracing behind the midrange driver that adds internal space for the woofer. However, the Yvette has slightly (1dB) lower sensitivity than the Sophia 3 and a dip to 2.94 ohms versus the 3.1 ohms minimum for the Sophia 3.

The Yvette has certainly benefited from advances in Wilson’s far costlier and more massive loudspeakers. I heard the Wilson Alexx (designed by Daryl Wilson) at an off-site dealer location during the 2016 Munich Show and gave it my “Best Sound in Munich” award.

The Yvette uses the same Mk III version of the Convergent Synergy Tweeter found in the Alexx and the Sasha Series 2. In contrast to the Sophia’s inverted titanium dome tweeter, the Yvette uses a sealed, one-inch silk dome optimized for time-domain performance and dispersion; it’s situated on its own baffle made of X-material. Each of the Yvette’s other drivers are also positioned on separate baffles and angled to optimize time alignment and dispersion. Its 10-inch rear-ported woofer is “a cousin” of the 10-inch woofer found in both the Alexx and the WAMM, and its rear-vented 7-inch midrange is the same midrange unit found in Wilson’s formidable Alexandria XLF. The Yvette uses a venting system similar to that of the XLF, Alexx, Alexia, and Sasha Series 2.

These marvelous drivers are housed in a single non-resonant enclosure built to the most exacting standards I’ve seen in the industry. During my factory visit, I was surprised by the minute measurements and frequent inspections taken throughout the manufacturing process of the Yvette. The slightest variation from the standard resulted in the enclosure being rejected. This degree of precision and attention to detail rivals that of a medical instruments company.

On the same visit, I had the pleasure of hearing the formidable WAMM at David Wilson’s house and was stunned by its overall sonic excellence. It showed me just how close we’ve come to bringing the concert hall into the living room, and underscored the importance of accuracy in the

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Specs & Pricing

Type: Three-way, rear-ported floorstanding loudspeaker

Driver complement: One 1" tweeter, one 7" mid-range, one 10" woofer

Frequency response: 20Hz–25kHz +/-3dB

Sensitivity: 86dB

Impedance: 4 ohms

Maximum SPL: 115dB

Dimensions: 13.25" x 41" x 20 1/16"

Weight: 175 lbs.

Price: \$25,500 (in standard colors)

WILSON AUDIO SPECIALTIES

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

United Home Audio UHA-Phase 12 tape deck; Merrill-Williams R.E.A.L.101 turntable with Tri-planer U-II and Kiseki Purple Heart cartridge; Audio Alchemy PPA-1 phono preamplifier with PS-5 power supply; ModWright-Oppo BDP-105 digital player; Mytek Brooklyn DAC; MFA Venusian (Frankland modified) and BAT VK-33SE preamplifiers; Hegel HD80 integrated amplifier; BAT VK76SE and PrimaLuna DiaLogue HP monoblock amplifiers; Magnepan 3.7i and Quad ESL-57 (PK modified) loudspeakers; Silver Circle Audio TCHAIK6 power conditioner; Shunyata Research Alpha Digital power cable; Nordost Tyr2 cables and power cords; AudioQuest Niagara interconnects and Metro speaker cables; Critical Mass Systems amplifier stands, etc.

time domain. Transients from its multiple drivers arrive at the same time for amazing clarity, coherence, and realism. Although it lacks the WAMM's precise and adjustable individual driver positioning to optimize time alignment, the Yvette's fixed-position-driver approach can yield very good time-domain accuracy with careful speaker placement, which is key to the Yvette's superlative performance.

The Sound

The first thing that struck me about the Yvette, particularly compared with the original WATT, was its harmonic richness. Gone was the sterility that had led to aural fatigue with my WATTs. Fortunately, this richness does not come at the expense of fine detail retrieval, nor does it blur the leading edge of transients.

What initially drew me to the Yvette was its ability to reproduce the full power and range of a concert grand piano on demanding recordings, one of the most difficult tests for any loudspeaker. The absence of time-domain and enclosure smearing helps the Yvette replicate the piano accurately, coherently, cleanly, and with realistic timbre. The bottom end is reproduced with power and authority and provides a solid foundation to the music, and the singing tone of the piano on good recordings is remarkably well

preserved. Additionally, one can hear bass details that are often obscured by other loudspeakers, including many that cost significantly more.

I enjoyed listening to a wide range of piano recordings, from Horowitz playing Mozart sonatas [Deutsche Grammophon] to the brilliant reissue of Reference Recordings' *Nojima Plays Liszt*. In each case, the piano was reproduced with natural timbre, lifelike clarity, and clean transient attacks. Particularly on the Liszt recording, the Yvette reminded me that the piano is most correctly classified as a percussion instrument, as one can clearly hear the hammers striking the strings, as well as other fine details such as fingernails hitting the ivories and the movements of the pedals, which one can most certainly hear in a live performance. Even when the most powerful chords were struck on fortissimos, the Yvette hung together sonically without distortion, dynamic compression, or stridency. The speaker also told me a lot about the recording venue, as well as the brand of piano used. In short, the Yvette reproduced the piano with more lifelike realism than any loudspeaker I have had in my house.

Proper time-alignment of its drivers and freedom from enclosure smearing made listening to other percussion instruments on the Yvette a real treat as well. Snare drums had snap, timpani had explosive impact, and cymbals shimmered without sizzling. It made listening to all kinds of music—from rock to jazz to power orchestral—more engaging and thrilling.

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hang, and its drivers appear to start and stop "on a dime." It also sounds much bigger than it looks. I did not expect such overall excellence from a speaker with such a relatively small footprint. In practice, I found myself turning the volume down a bit, because the Yvette has such wide and startling dynamic swings. Surprisingly, it maintained its composure on dynamic peaks without sounding stressed or strident whether I was listening to Janis Joplin on *Cheap Thrills* [Mobile Fidelity], Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* [Reference Recordings], or Harry James and his big band on *Still Harry After All These Years* [Sheffield Labs].

Another pleasant surprise was the Yvette's bass performance. Given its relatively compact size, it was more extended than I thought it would be (rated as -3dB at 20Hz), and with a good amplifier, like the BAT VK-76SE monoblocks, or the Hegel HD80 integrated, the bass was articulate, well controlled, and lifelike, as exhibited by Scott LaFaro's bass fiddle on the brilliant MoFi reissue of the *Bill Evans Trio: Sunday at the Village Vanguard*. With the Yvette, this live recording put me in the club, sans the cigarette smoke.

Here's a speaker that is quite coherent with seamless transitions between drivers.

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On both male and female vocals, it's difficult to tell where one driver stops and the other starts. Its coherency and clarity also help the Yvette achieve a high degree of transparency. Like some of the finest mini-monitors, the Yvette virtually disappears, and instruments are very well focused across a broad soundstage.

Much like my beloved Quads, the Yvette is great for long-term listening. Indeed, with its abundance of sonic strengths, it almost compels one to listen far longer than anticipated. While I spent most of my time with classical and jazz recordings, the Yvette can also really rock. Recordings of James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and Led Zepelin had terrific rhythmic

drive and felt quite at home with the Yvette. It acquits itself quite well with any music you're likely to throw at it.

Because time-domain accuracy is one of the Yvette's greatest strengths, you will not enjoy this level of performance without precise setup, and perhaps some listening position flexibility. Fortunately, Peter McGrath set the Yvette up for me using his wonderful original recordings. It is quite a meticulous process, with seemingly small differences in placement yielding dramatically different results. I did have to move my usual listening seat about a foot closer to achieve the best sound. Each Wilson dealer goes through a rigorous training program so he can set up

speakers using the same approach as Peter did for me.

The Yvette's superlative capabilities are difficult to fault, but it falls slightly short of the best in a few areas. Like almost every loudspeaker in my experience, it lacks the pellucid midrange performance of the Zellaton or the original Quad, although it is very open and engaging. The Yvette certainly outdistances the Quad in dynamic range and punch. While the Yvette doesn't have the awesome bass extension or impact of the WAMM Master Chronosonic, it has a definite family resemblance. Most will be stunned by its concussive impact, and bass extension and articulation. Admittedly, I could have used even more extension and air on the organ's pedal tones on Saint-Saens' Symphony No. 3 [Reference Recordings], but what the Yvette rendered was quite satisfying.

The Yvette represents some of Wilson Audio's best work to date. Its time-domain accuracy really helps the multiple drivers sound surprisingly coherent, clear, and natural. It features even better resolution, clarity, and transparency than its predecessors of similar size, and it packs a surprisingly powerful dynamic punch for such a relatively small-footprint loudspeaker. If your room and listening position allow you to get the full benefit of the Yvette's time-domain accuracy, it's a lot like hearing the amazing WAMM but on a somewhat smaller scale, thus making the Yvette a great value. **tas**

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