

Wilson Audio TuneTots with TuneTot stands

by Lee Scoggins

“I love the way you love me, I love the way you comb your hair...”
Keb Mo, a wonderful blues singer whose career I have followed closely, sings into my small listening room. His voice is materialising out of thin air and the presentation is so natural. The guitar is spooky real. The sound I am hearing is putting a big smile on my face. Life is truly good.

How did we get here? About a year-and-a-half ago, Wilson Audio sent their TuneTot monitors to me to listen to in a home office. I had a giant L-shaped Ikea desk and was advised to put the monitors in the far corners and slightly toe them in. The TuneTots, you see, were designed to have a boundary surface either below them such as my desk, or behind them such as a bookshelf or fireplace mantel. Consisting of a cabinet of X Material, a silk dome tweeter and a 5.5 inch midrange driver, these not-so-little speakers really produced a surprising amount of bass. The imaging, always a strong suit for Wilson, was superb as well. However, I started hearing rumours that some stands were in the works. A couple of months ago, the TuneTot stands showed up in a beautiful Ivory white finish to match exactly the same pearl-like finish on the TuneTots. They retail for £2,698 a pair.

The stands are typical sublime build quality we have seen on prior Wilson Audio products. The top and bottom plates are thick CNC-machined aluminium with slight curves on the sides of the bottom plate. The bottom plate is secure on my floor with beefy spikes. The top plate is screwed into the isolation bases on the TuneTots and the TuneTots are angled by adjustable spikes front and back that fit into slots on the top plate. Now the key thing here is controlling vibration as ▶





► Daryl Wilson explained to me recently. The posts, which are beautifully made with ever-so-slight curves on all four sides, are made of X Material, Wilson Audio's densest material. This high density phenolic material is designed by Wilson and used in many of their products. The entire look of the TuneTots on the stands is quite elegant as the wider base of the TuneTots and narrower top cabinet have an organic look with the stands that is compact but solid. The curves on the stand post echo the raised edge on the side of the TuneTot cabinet. The TuneTots have matching Steel Blue driver rings and Steel Blue isolation base tops.

Recently I was able to convert a room used for storage into a small, digital-only and more humble system adjacent to my home office. A sort of respite for building PowerPoint slides and spreadsheets in a more relaxed environment. It's really just a small 16 foot by 12 foot room with one chair and a Salamander Synergy equipment rack (bought slightly used from my friend Jimmy) and it

uses a variety of electronics: Audio Research VT-100 amp with KT-120 tubes, Mytek Brooklyn DAC (also serving as preamp), Sony SCD-777ES SACD player, and a Synergistic Research PowerCell 12 UEF line conditioner. I was curious if these monitors would perform that 'disappearing act' that some monitors are capable of...to get the best results I mimicked as best I could the WASP setup procedure that Wilson uses to dial-in the placement. Then I called setup God Bill Peugh for even more pointers. With some precise experimentation and note taking, I landed on a very precise and symmetrical placement with the TuneTots roughly around three feet from the side walls and four feet from the back walls. Like with my Alexia 2s, when the placement is right, everything just takes a huge leap forward. In a way, the Wilson speakers are like a precision microscope. It takes time and learning but get it right and magic happens. Move a speaker even a quarter inch in the wrong direction and you hear it.

But the TuneTot stands remove that boundary surface that the monitors were initially designed for. How would this affect bass and overall performance?

As it turns out, not much. In fact, Daryl Wilson believes lower bass goes from approximately 55hz to 63hz. But – and it's a big 'but' – the already clear midrange and highs get even purer on the stands. And the stands indeed create a sublime disappearing act. As I type this, Rob Loverde's superb mastering of the MFSL SACD of Keb Mo's eponymous debut album plays on and the speakers can simply not be located if you close your eyes. There is a vivid centred image and instrument placement is completely natural.

On recordings with more instruments the imaging is even more pronounced. Cue up Dire Straits *Love Over Gold* SACD [MFSL]. The lush atmosphere and dynamics of 'Telegraph Road' come alive. The soundstage is wide and deep. But something else become evident. The midrange purity is a level higher than what these monitors did ►

“It’s really hard to fault these stands. They improve the mids and highs, are built like a tank and look elegant with the monitors.”

► on my desk. There is simply more presence. I quickly prefer the stands under the TuneTots. Wilson has spent lots of hours on the tweeter and driver designs and it seems we are now hearing even more resolution indicating how fine the whole device is.

Cue up the ‘Industrial Disease’ track and the guitar effects are outstanding. Knopfler’s vocals are clear and centred. Drums sound natural but forceful. Quality mastering adding to the effect? For sure. Mobile Fidelity doesn’t mess around. But my goodness, this doesn’t sound like a monitor on stands system. It sounds more like Sabrinas in most ways. To be fair, not the very deepest bass as physics do come into play but more bass than one would expect. I love the sound quality of this system. Now, we did try a 20 watt amplifier on the TuneTots. That was just not enough power. But the VT-100 putting out 150 watts per side? Yep. It’s a quality pairing, in my opinion.

Lately I have really got into Roon with both Tidal and Qobuz. I love exploring new albums based on Roon’s artist information and the interface has become ever nicer with the latest software updates. So on many a night I open Roon and feed a stream of digits into the Mytek Brooklyn for high-resolution playback with a Synergistic Galileo SX USB cable. On many albums, this brought out even more details about the TuneTots.

Listening to David Solomon’s Qobuz WOW! Sampler was fun. Keith Greeninger’s ‘Looking for a Home’ performance from the Blue Coast sampler was so natural and relaxing. Every guitar sound reproduced perfectly. Note decays trailed off into the ether. Keith’s vocals had lots of presence and naturalness. Gregory Porter’s ‘Hey Laura’ track from his *Liquid Spirit* album [Blue Note] startles with the opening “hey Laura” which leaps out into the room. The depth of Gregory’s voice is captured perfectly. Piano timbre is spot-on. The sax solo is gratifying. The TuneTots just get instrument timbre dead-on. This is a majestic presentation that has become a demo cut for several experienced audiophiles that have come by to hear the new system. They remark often on the clarity of the midrange.

Steely Dan’s ‘Gaslighting Abbie’ [*Two Against Nature*, Warner] gets your toes tapping. My feet are moving at the jazz-funk groove being laid down by Fagen and Becker. Guitar work is vivid. Switching to a track with low bass, Malia’s I Feel It Like You from her *Convergence* album pairing with Yello’s Boris Blank has surprising dynamics and fills the room. A truly surprising amount of bass is pouring into the room. Malia’s vocals are clear as can be. Drum effects are spectacular and the beats as catchy as ever.

I really loved the TuneTots on the desk. It’s the perfect boundary-based monitor in many ways. But the stands? I will sum it up this way. I have a fairly good reference system centered around Wilson Alexia 2s downstairs. Am I missing clarity and deep bass compared to that system? Oh sure. You can’t beat the physics of huge woofers and better electronics...however, I find

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

Wilson Audio TuneTot: Starting at £11,500
Wilson Audio TuneTot Stands: £2,698

Manufacturer: Wilson Audio
URL: wilsonaudio.com

UK Distributor: Absolute Sounds
URL: absolutesounds.com
Tel: +44(0)20 8971 3909

myself splitting time between the two rooms and short listening sessions turn into multi-hour time warps listening to music on the TuneTots. I am not thinking about the gear anymore. I am completely focused on what new artists to explore in Roon or what new albums in an artists’ catalogue to listen to next I am less interested in what gear I might need for better sound and more interested in things like what other jazz albums Andrew Hill or Blue Mitchell did. The second listening room is a small room but the TuneTots with these new stands are sublime.

To wrap up, I believe what the Wilson Audio team has done here is quite special. Have a small space like a flat in London or New York? Otherwise limited on space? Or just have a nice home office and want audiophile sound like your larger listening room? This is a really superb solution. It’s really hard to fault these stands. They improve the mids and highs, are built like a tank and look elegant with the monitors and the isolation bases. And Daryl informs me that the posts on the stands come in all the standard TuneTot colours.

So do you have a small space and want much of that wonderful Wilson Audio sound in a compact form? It’s time to take a stand!

This TuneTot ecosystem of TuneTots, Isolation Bases, and Stands is not inexpensive, but I think I’m going to find a way to keep these! +