

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Diapason Adamantes V

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Having visited the Diapason headquarters a couple of years ago I discovered first-hand the commitment involved in each and every pair of hand-made speakers from this renowned Italian brand. So, when the opportunity arose to look closely at the new Adamantes V two-way bookshelf model, I jumped at the chance. After a brief listen at this year's High End show in May I knew that designer Alessandro Schiavi's latest creation wasn't about to disappoint. I was right.

The exquisitely crafted units are available with bespoke 75cm stands, themselves an example of Italian design renaissance. The dedicated 2/A stands combine brushed stainless steel with solid wood to provide a sure foundation for the transducers, weighing in at 12kg – that's heavier than the speakers themselves which are an easily manageable 9.3kg each. However in my listening room, I obtained excellent results with shorter (60cm) lightweight, open timber stand from TonTrager.

Revealed now in mark V form, the Adamantes dates back to 1989 and I recall its global launch while I was at Hi-Fi News. Visually they are immediately striking for their multi-faceted shape, reminiscent of a diamond which provided the inspiration for their name. They are such a thing of beauty that it is a pleasure to have them in the listening room – and there are not many cabinets I would say that about. The Canaletto walnut (lovingly cut, sanded and varnished) creates an exquisite finish, its grain beautifully offsetting the 19mm black silk-dome tweeter and 170mm polypropylene bass/midrange driver, the latter produced in conjunction with SEAS. This is direct-driven, without a low-pass filter. Driver pair-matching is better than one per cent. There is an unobtrusive reflex port to the rear although positioning proved uncomplicated.

Further specs include a higher than average crossover frequency of 4.6 kHz and a -3dB bass roll-off point quoted as 38Hz. Since many audiophiles leave them in the box, cloth grilles are offered as an optional extra. The crossover has been designed to rely on the fewest possible components and is mounted directly on the rear connectors for shortest signal path. Internal wiring is Van den Hul's oxygen-free silvered-copper CS-12, while only polypropylene capacitors are employed for the LC filter on the tweeter: all to minimise signal loss.

Diapason create an entire range of speakers including the mighty three-way floor-standing Dynamis, down to the Classic Series which begins with the Ares Excel. Located in

Brescia, between Milan and Verona, it is fitting that the brand has its HQ in an area of Italy famous for the development of stringed instruments and renowned for its high-class cabinet work.

Sound quality

Coupled to the recently reviewed and highly accomplished Hegel H190 integrated amp the Adamantes began to sing from the off. Here we have a loudspeaker whose frequency response may not be 'flat' but it's all the better for that. No lacklustre performance here, but an immediacy which captivated my full listening attention in a session which went on far longer than originally planned. It is clear that the speakers do not need anything like the power output the Hegel can provide.

Alessandro has done an excellent job here; I like the characteristics of the soft-dome tweeter and he's managed not to produce the aggravating 'thwack' so reminiscent of poorly implemented plastic midrange units. His credentials as a classically-trained musician cum recording engineer come into their own in this regard, such that the bass/mid covers a full eight octaves – impressive for a single drive unit.

Coupling to a satellite decoder, radio and TV station audio was delivered with aplomb. At one stage I rose to answer the front door bell only to discover that the sound was part of a scene from the 1960s' drama *Heartbeat* rather than a genuine caller come to interrupt my pleasure. This exemplified the Adamantes' ability to create a wide and distant soundstage, reproducing sound in a three-dimensional space. Fine credentials indeed.



When a product encourages me to explore musical delights which I have not sampled in ages, it has to be a good sign. And so it was here. The reported -3dB point is 38Hz and although I struggled to reach quite that in my room, the bass delivered was full-bodied and accurate. With the solid wooden cabinets (varying from 2cm to 4cm thick), internal volume is smaller than it would be if MDF were employed – but that is a sacrifice I am prepared to accept. At least I was not subjected to any hint of boominess to detract from the performance. Bass fiends can always add a sub to satisfy their craving. For me, it is the sweet, detailed treble and thoroughly and involving midrange which won me over, while the LF transient response was as fast as one could wish for.

On large-scale works, such as the magnificent Mahler 1 (CSO/Abbado), I found the music to be set free; the performers placed on a marvellous deep and wide soundstage created well behind and around the Adamantes' cabinets. While sounds could come from in front of the speakers, this was rare – and I enjoyed the balance which is in stark contrast to those designers who feel the need to put performers in the listener's lap with an up-front projection that is far from natural. A more distant perspective, free of the speakers is always preferable to my taste and Diapason seem to have mastered that technique.

Turning up the volume, such that my neighbour said she enjoyed blasts of Tracy Chapman, Cyndi Lauper and Diana Ross, there was no tendency towards compression as the balanced remained virtually unaltered although there weren't the dynamics associated with a mighty floorstander. Through a succession of classical repertoire, the midrange was sweet yet extremely detailed; something I noted with Bach's *Magnificat* (AAM/Preston) and Purcell's *Music for Queen Mary* (AAM/Cleobury).



Playing some clean speech, courtesy of David Suchet (as Poirot in Christie's *How Does Your Garden Grow*) required some realignment of the speaker position relative to the rear wall and a slight toe-in for optimum performance and to eliminate a hint of chestiness on male voices and mild female sibilance. But, in their new position, the Adamantes then coped well with similar material including Julian Rhind-Tutt as Horace Rumpole in the BBC Radio dramatisation of the fictional Old Bailey barrister which was presented with all the usual warmth I expect in a full-bodied sound that I know to be on the recording.

The review period coincided with this year's BBC Proms season and here the Adamantes V came into its own. None more so than with Daniel Barenboim's visit, along with his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (created to bring together Palestinian and Israeli musicians in one ensemble). The whole affair enriched by the presence of legendary Martha Argerich at the piano. The splendour of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto came across in a most engaging and entertaining way, conveying an intimate dialogue with the musicians. Then Schubert's momentous Unfinished demonstrated the orchestra's virtuosity and togetherness, passion and commitment which left one wanting more. These fine loudspeakers seemed very much at home, transporting me to the venue and placing the ensemble neatly across a very spacious soundstage and revealing inner depths of the occasion. The speaker's timing credentials are clearly excellent, and it scores highly for stereo imaging as well. Even trials with some mono recordings (early Klemperer and some of my own) gave glowing results with a sharp, central image between the two cabinets.

Cutting corners in loudspeaker design rarely works, which is why Diapason use only properly cured walnut, a process which takes time (over 20 years, in fact) but then means that the timber has a better resonant behaviour than many [cheaper] woods because it retains less moisture. That cabinet design, with its sixteen surfaces, minimises edge diffraction and improves point-source behaviour.

Conclusion

The Adamantes V is most certainly a thing of beauty and a joy. It upholds the sentiment of Keats' writing because "its loveliness increases, it will never pass into nothingness". But a loudspeaker has to be more than a box to enhance the aesthetics of a listening room. It needs to be a competent transducer to convey the recording to the listener in a convincing and entirely believable manner. This design clearly achieves that as well. The price is high, not helped by exchange rates – but, if one demands hand-crafted quality then that comes at a price. Cheap, plastic snap-together boxes are available from other sources for those not interested in aesthetics or true craftsmanship. There is, I would venture to suggest, too little attention to beauty in audio equipment today. Forsaking such elegance is a loss to us all. Thank goodness for Diapason in this regard.

Here we have a drop-dead gorgeous loudspeaker with tremendous poise and high levels of accuracy and where the music flows effortlessly and naturally. It brings home the ambience and detail of even the most complex recordings in a joyous and musical manner which makes for hours of immensely satisfying listening across a wide range of musical styles.