

# Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Concert Grand Reference Loudspeakers - The Audio Beat

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## Vienna Acoustics • Beethoven Concert Grand Reference Loudspeakers

*"... a speaker that obeys the first rule of audio by putting the performance first, breathing life into recordings irrespective of genre or scale."*

by Roy Gregory | June 23, 2021

There are certain brands for which the mere mention of the name provokes an almost automatic mental association. I can't necessarily put it into a single word, but every time the Linn LP12 comes up in conversation, *that sound* forms in my mind: you know -- warm, slightly soft, slightly compressed with that subtly padded bottom end and, for me, an equally subtle inability to sit still. I could go on, with a list of other brands that have equally memorable (or haunting) characteristics, but it quickly becomes tedious -- as well as insulting to the owners of various products with my particular prejudices. But with Vienna Acoustics the word, the single word the brand name conjures, is *value*. Not "value" in the sense of sheer quantity; the Vienna speakers are generally both elegant and more compact when compared to their price peers. This is "value" in terms of musical satisfaction and longevity. The Vienna Acoustics speakers don't just deliver a lot of music for the money, given the chance, they'll go on doing so for years and years to come. Sadly, it's something of a hidden virtue, playing neither to the quick-to-impress requirement of comparative demonstration, nor the audiophile-hobbyist's incessant requirement to swap equipment. Yet, despite that, Vienna Acoustics has quietly built a solid fan base of listeners who appreciate the virtues and recognize the cost of getting them anywhere else.



Price: \$13,495 per pair in standard finishes;  
\$15,495 per pair in rosewood finish.  
Warranty: Five years parts and labor.

Vienna Acoustics  
V.A. Lautsprechermanufaktur GmbH  
Boschanstrasse 3/3  
2484 Weigelsdorf  
Vienna, Austria  
+43 1 8896815  
[www.vienna-acoustics.com](http://www.vienna-acoustics.com)



But look a little closer and you realize that the value is not just price dependent -- it has tended to increase with price. The diminutive Haydn could hardly be described as a great value in material terms, but it's true to the Vienna DNA in two important ways: not only is it intensely involving on a musical level, it is also unusual in design and execution. Move to the other end of the range and, since its launch in 2008, the flagship The Music hasn't just been an exceptional loudspeaker, it has been the best-value, genuinely full-range model on the market -- a status that has only increased as the competition has gotten progressively more expensive. In fact, The Music is now so underpriced (in performance terms) that it has dropped off the radar, with few audiophiles taking it nearly as seriously as its performance warrants. That's partly down to fashion and the assumption that progress means that newer models must be better; partly down to the structural factor that makes it hard to get reviews, attention or even a mention in the press when it comes to anything other than a new product. Yet, for me, the converse is often true: Any product that has been around for a decade or so, largely unchanged, has to be doing something fundamentally correct. The Music is proof of that particular pudding. If you don't believe me, just take a listen -- you are in for a shock.

The problem is that simply knowing your product is great doesn't necessarily translate into sales. It either needs to play by the market-imposed rules (just look at the regular upgrades that kept the LP12 front and center of the media circus for so long) or the company needs to produce something new that does. For Vienna Acoustics, that product arrived in the distinctive shape of the Liszt, a speaker that brought the company's Music Center concept down to a more affordable price level. This combination of a separate, pivoting enclosure for the midrange and treble, combined with a flat-coned, dual-concentric driver marks the Liszt instantly and unmistakably as both a Vienna Acoustics loudspeaker and first cousin to the flagship model. It also underpinned a performance that rapidly established the Liszt as the benchmark for reasonably priced, wide-bandwidth speaker systems. With a bottom end that the company conservatively rates as reaching a -3dB point of 28Hz, in-room and with an

appropriately muscular driving amplifier, it was capable of creating an acoustic scale and coherence that belied its slim profile and which integrated seamlessly with the dimensional precision, natural tonality and musical textures of the midrange and above.

Why the long preamble before even getting to the speaker under review? Because the Beethoven's family tree and its evolutionary arc are central to understanding both its achievements and why it represents a step change of what was already an extremely positive performance/value equation for Vienna Acoustics. So let's start with that even longer name. If giving your product a short, snappy designation is a marketing must, then this loudspeaker is an epic fail: two words in the company name, another (Beethoven) for the family, two more (Concert Grand) for the model/series, and finally, Reference to designate a major revision of a pre-existing product. That's a six-word mouthful -- although it starts to make sense when you realize that not only was there an earlier speaker called the Beethoven Concert Grand, it also has (and had) a smaller sibling called the Baby Grand -- but more on that later.

To anybody familiar with the Liszt (I've been using it as a benchmark product for nearly five years), there's more than an air of familiarity about this Beethoven. With almost the same size and proportions (the Beethoven is slightly wider, slightly shorter and a tad shallower), pivoting head aside, the two speakers look extremely similar, helped by the prominent outriggers and the large spikes they support. The speakers are both three-ways with a trio of 7" bass drivers, a 6" midrange unit and, although you can't see it, almost identical crossover topologies.

But there are two big differences in the driver lineups: the Liszt uses the company's signature, flat-cone, dual-concentric driver, mated to bass units with X3P advanced TPX/polypropylene spider cones, in which the clear diaphragms are stiffened with molded radial ribs. The Beethoven uses a conventional soft-dome tweeter, but an all-new driver construction for the midrange and bass drivers. Dubbed "Composite Cone" by the company, it represents a significant development, extending identical flat-diaphragm construction across both drivers. But contrary to your probable assumption, there's no carbon-fiber involved here. Instead the flat, outer element of the diaphragm is again molded from an advanced TPX/polypropylene compound, in this case Vienna's latest X4P formulation, with similar flying-buttress reinforcements to the familiar midrange element of the coincident drivers. Polypropylene might not be fashionable these days -- among high-end speaker manufacturers the only ones I can think of that use it are Wilson Benesch and Vienna -- but if carefully used (and judiciously mixed with additives such as TPX and glass fibers) it affords very real benefits. Combined with FEA modeling it is possible to mechanically tune the diaphragm to tailor its response. The three-dimensional nature of the flat disc and radial reinforcements allows even greater latitude when it comes to accurately calculating the moving element's stiffness and self-damping characteristics. Being a molding, these triangular flanges can be precisely shaped, in terms of thickness and profile, to produce drivers that are not only highly tunable but also utterly consistent in output.

However, where things get really interesting is in the middle of the drivers. Built around large, 5cm/2" voice coils, that central zone contributes significantly to the upper-range output of the different drivers. Rather than a flat face or conventional dust cap, Vienna has chosen to use an inverted fabric dome, double-coated on its inner side. This combination of two different materials means that they can be combined to further control not only the driver's output but its out-of-band behavior -- something which is fast being recognized as a key factor in speaker performance. In the case of the Beethoven, not only does that two-part, composite construction aid performance of the drivers, both construction and materials are consistent across both the bass and midrange drivers -- which is never a bad thing. Vienna has been working toward this point ever since the first, flat-spider cone midrange drivers first appeared. The Beethoven Concert Grand is the first speaker, along with its smaller sibling, the Baby Grand, to realize the goal of identical flat drivers throughout the midband and lower registers.

Clever drivers (and make no mistake -- Vienna's drivers are genuinely clever) don't guarantee a great result. But that's where 30 years of experience building and optimizing cabinets from their chosen materials comes in. Vienna Acoustics was an early adopter of accelerometer technology, and

combined with narrow but incredibly thick baffles and substantial cabinet walls, it convinced them of not only the need to brace cabinets, but that the shape and distribution of the braces -- as well as the shape and distribution of the internal chambers that resulted -- were critical to performance. The result is cabinets that are as beautifully and exactly constructed on the inside as they are flawlessly finished on the outside. To suggest that this cabinet construction has reached its apogee in the case of the Beethoven Concert Grand is perhaps disingenuous. It just represents the latest culmination of accumulated knowledge, a pool that is constantly evolving and advancing. But however you slice it, Vienna Acoustics has always produced exceptional cabinets to go with its unusual and innovative drivers -- and the larger the cabinet, the greater the benefits that accrue.

### **Too big? Too much?**

If you like the sound of the Concert Grand but don't have the space to let it breathe, or the brass to make the purchase, despair not. Take a look at the Baby Grand, the Concert Grand's little brother -- in every sense of that phrase. An inch narrower, two inches less in depth and three inches less in height might not sound like much, but put the two speakers side by side and the Baby's reduction in overall bulk and visual impact becomes obvious. In numerical terms it's a 30% reduction in volume -- and it looks all of that. Along with the reduction in size comes a modest 5Hz reduction in bottom-end extension, offset by a 1dB reduction in sensitivity, compared to the larger model. At \$10,495 per pair, that's a small sonic price to pay for a speaker that costs less and will work in smaller spaces. But know this -- like many a smaller sister, these babies can be distinctly demanding. The smaller cabinet and loss of extension and sensitivity that go with it translate to an equivalent loss of scale and the easy-breathing, easy-going characteristics of the Concert Grand. Short of direct comparison, you are unlikely to miss that extra heft and space and, used in a smaller room, the Baby Grand will still deliver extremely impressive weight, presence and a seriously coherent acoustic. It's just that you are going to have to work harder to achieve it.

In many ways, the real cost of stepping down to the Baby Grands lies in the demands they place on setup and the driving system. Placement, height and attitude are just as critical as with the Liszt, while the speaker is even less forgiving of the driving amplifier than the Concert Grand, at least if you are going to extract the impressive bass qualities and quantity of which it's capable. But treat it with the kid gloves that it expects, and like many a younger sibling, this Baby can be a real charmer, testament to the success with which Vienna Acoustics has managed its performance to provide another solution for different spaces, rather than just another price point. In many ways the Baby Grand is just as impressive a musical performer as its bigger brother -- which is great news if you live in a smaller space and have (or are willing to invest in) the amp to go with it.

-Roy Gregory

The other area in which the company has always excelled is attention to detail. Whether it is the incredibly effective outrigger spike system that doesn't just increase the speaker's footprint and stability but also makes it easier to set up and precisely adjust the crucial height and attitude, or the beautifully executed terminals, Vienna Acoustics has always sweated the details so that you don't have to. That makes for products that don't just promise exceptional performance, but they achieve it, from the packaging and the manual to the finer points of final setup. It's something that matters, because setup is the one area where Vienna's products have consistently made extravagant demands. The

Beethoven Concert Grands are not small speakers, but they are certainly compact given the same claimed -3dB point (28Hz) as the Liszt. Combine that with a 4-ohm load, 90dB sensitivity and rear-facing bass and midrange reflex ports and you've got yourself a potentially potent performer that might just get you into considerable system or room-related trouble. I've used the Liszt as a long-term benchmark for exactly that reason: It demands power and control from the driving amplifier, while its ease of adjustment means that (with a little experience) it can easily be balanced against the driving system and the room boundaries. Having said that, with that much bottom end and a smaller room, if it does get away from you, it's *really* going to get away.

**W**ith all that in mind, I approached the Beethoven Concert Grand's initial setup with considerable care -- only to be thoroughly disarmed by both the speaker's charm and the ease with which it fell into place. It's not that the output or electrical characteristics were any less demanding than those of the Liszt. It was just easier to hear exactly what was required. It was the first inkling that I was dealing with something as different as it was unexpected. As I said, take one look at the Concert Grand and it is unmistakably a Vienna Acoustics speaker. But listen to it and here was a sound that was immediately fresh and more communicative. When it came to setup, there was no inching gradually toward the musical performance. Indeed, rather than indulging in what might be described as passive resistance, the Concert Grands just put it out there and invite you to refine the results.

The process is much the same as before, with an exacting pursuit of precise lateral spacing and distance to the rear wall -- it's just a whole lot easier with the Beethovens. As usual, the final touch comes with the use of the spikes and speaker height to fine-tune the bass response and speaker attitude, but, again, the cost/benefit curve is easily discernible. As regards driving amplifiers, I've run the Concert Grands with the Gryphon Diablo 120 and Levinson No.585 integrations (perhaps its natural partners) as well as the more ambitious Simaudio Moon 860A v2s (in stereo and -- spectacularly -- mono form) and the VTL S-200 tube amp. You'll note that all of these sit well to the right side of 100 watts rated output, and even though the Beethovens are friendlier than previous Viennas when it comes to partnering amps, a healthy three figures should still be considered a working minimum. Having said that, I'd never have reached for the 200Wpc S-200 with past Viennas and here it worked astonishingly well.

As a reviewer, I enjoy (and sometimes endure) a regular flow of new products, a constant changing of system components and perspective. Within that passing parade, the special products often stand well clear of the crowd, as obvious as they are impressive. Generally speaking, it ain't hard to spot them; more often the challenge comes with trying to define just what it is that makes them special -- because the truly special goes way, way beyond a single, standout attribute. It depends on doing everything and doing it all well enough that nothing seems missing. But even within that qualification, it's not about everything being there but about making sense of everything. If music is about pitch and pattern, preserving those things is paramount -- or at least it should be.

The Beethoven Concert Grand is, in its latest guise, a very special product indeed. It's special in the general sense, but it is also special in terms of what it represents for the company. If it is the balance of virtues that is the secret strength behind all great products, it's no surprise that the Concert Grands excel. That innate sense of balance has always been *the* Vienna hallmark, the reason why their speakers have so often proved so satisfying. It's also why they often don't sound as immediately impressive as the competition; there's no standout characteristic to grab your attention. But the longer you listen the more apparent and beguiling their qualities become. In one sense at least, the latest Concert Grands break that mold. To anybody familiar with the sound of live, acoustic instruments (and don't forget, that includes the human voice -- even a speaking voice) their fidelity is obvious and impressive, right from the get-go.

Listen to the Concert Grands and, despite their impressive sense of space and scale, the first impression that's going to really hit home is the ease with which they allow the music to breathe. It reflects the fact that this is a bigger speaker than its elegant proportions suggest, but it also reflects

two other facets of its performance: the musical continuity it displays right across the audible range, and the level of immediacy and microdynamic expression that belies its modest efficiency. That's all about driver integration, but it's about more besides. It's about a really well-behaved cabinet, whose resonant behavior isn't allowed to intrude on the sound -- or place unproductive demands on the amplifier. It's about really well-behaved drivers -- both within and beyond their passband. It's about a carefully crafted crossover -- one that subtracts the minimum amount of musical energy. It's about a deftly voiced and weighted bottom end -- one that carries weight where it matters and doesn't overflow into areas it shouldn't. But above all, it's about balancing those virtues. If those flat drivers indicate the achievement of a long-sought goal, they are just the most visually apparent indicator on a product that seems to bind together the parallel developmental threads that have for so long underpinned the performance of Vienna Acoustics' speakers. While listening to the Concert Grands, it's hard not to conclude that those evolutionary threads have come together to create something musically greater than the sum of the parts.

The second movement of Peteris Vasks' Concerto for Viola and String Orchestra (Maxim Rysanov and Sinfonietta Riga, [BIS-2443 SACD]) is both beautifully recorded and performed -- and a one-stop shop when it comes to appreciating the qualities of the Beethoven Concert Grand. The dispersed, pizzicato phrases that scatter across the stage to create the staccato opening reveal the scale and nature of the church acoustic, the Concert Grands not just re-creating a coherent sense of that towering space, but locating each section of the orchestra precisely within it, defined in terms of height, lateral placement and depth, scale and specific tonal character. It's a spatial tour de force, helped of course by the depth and transparency of the speaker's bottom end. But that is only the start. The plucked notes have a real sense of life and attack, naturally rich harmonics and the size of the sound box behind them. There's no confusing the violins and violas, or the identity and character of the solo instrument, with its plangent, almost melancholy tonality.

You'll rarely hear the different string instruments so clearly and naturally separated in tonal terms -- and certainly not by a speaker at this price. It might not have the absolute immediacy and reach-out-and-touch intimacy of more efficient speakers like the Wilson Sasha DAW or the Living Voice OBX RW, but it's considerably cheaper than one and goes way deeper than the other.

The entire Vasks Concerto is an exercise in contrast, balancing brooding, pervasive melancholia with lighter glimpses of hope. Successfully conveying that emotional range depends on capturing the tone and texture of the instruments, the shape and pattern of the phrasing and the range of dynamic contrast. It demands the ability to allow the music its own pace and tempo, to let it dwindle naturally or swell without constraint. It needs a speaker that can convert energy with a natural sense of scale, but also without temporal or spatial discontinuities, awkward hesitations or bands of one-note opacity. That's exactly what I mean when I described this as a speaker that lets the music breathe. It's a quality that is crucial to reproducing the human agency in a performance, whether that's a performance of classical music, jazz or some bangin' dance track from the likes of Sofi Tukker.

So when you listen to Alina Ibragimova performing the Shostakovich Violin Concertos (Vladimir Jurowski and the State Academic Symphony Orchestra [Hyperion CDA68313]), the Vienna Acoustics speakers allow you to feel her sheer intensity, a quality in her playing that overcomes an instrumental voice you might assume was more suited to the chamber repertoire she so often records. I approached this disc with a degree of skepticism, after similar disappointments -- live and recorded -- with the likes of Vilde Frang and Hilary Hahn, but now and in no small part down to the Concert Grands, I'm a believer.

In fact, all three of the discs I've referenced so far, along with the atmospheric *Tinker, Tailor* soundtrack (Alberto Iglesias [Silva Screen Records SILLP1369]) are recordings that have arrived and been enthusiastically embraced since the Beethoven Concert Grands came into play, a testament to the degree of musical access and insight they deliver. Meanwhile, the performance on more familiar material is equally impressive. So just as the speakers generate the burgeoning tension and sense of barely suppressed musical energy that builds through the fourth movement of the Vasks Concerto,

they capture the same quality in those sustained, hanging notes that ratchet up the anticipation and make Barbirolli's *Tallis Fantasia* (English String Music [Warner UHQCD WPCS-28020]) so powerful and instantly recognizable. It's an object lesson in not just playing the notes but delivering the power behind them, preserving that all-important pitch and pattern. It's a direct function of just how comfortably the Concert Grand handles and scales musical energy. This is a speaker that never sounds big; if it needs to be, it just *is* (big, that is). Of course -- and crucially -- the flip side is that it can also sound small, mirroring the music's demands when it comes to scale and dynamic range. The Concert Grand has a natural sense of coherent space and weight that combines with its textural and harmonic resolution to dramatic effect. Performances are lively and vital, with no sense of dead, constricted or constipated energy.

For a speaker with this much bandwidth and moderate sensitivity, the first weakness I'd normally look for is a loss of immediacy. If the two key questions to ask of any speaker are, "Does it sound like people?" and "Does it sound like they're in the room with you?" it's the second of those that you'd expect to challenge the Concert Grands, so maybe it's time to discuss that aspect of their performance. When it comes to immediacy, you don't get much more revealing than solo voice and acoustic guitar. The intricate rhythmic patterns of Suzanne Vega's track "Cracking" (from *Close-Up Vol 3, States Of Being* [Music On Vinyl MOVLP375]) underline the Beethoven's relaxed, sure-footed confidence. The partially spoken vocal, with solo acoustic accompaniment, breaks the sentences down into distinct, separated words, longer words into discrete syllables. It's a perfect test of a speaker's ability to play not just the notes but the gaps between the notes. With the Concert Grand's rich harmonic development and deep bass, it's no surprise that each word or syllable is a solid, distinctly placed part, or that those parts assemble into a single, powerfully communicative whole. But that effortless clarity and substance extends to the leading edge of notes and words, so that the accents on the bars and the vocal emphasis become a natural part of that whole, key to the sense in the sounds without drawing undue attention to them. This isn't that "reach out and touch, just there" immediacy that comes with leading-edge emphasis and high efficiency. This is a fully dimensioned sense of solid presence, the very essence of stereo. It's a remarkably subtle and effective performance (from the speaker) that reveals the remarkable subtlety in Vega's presentation and technique. In this case, knowing how it's done in no way diminishes but rather adds to the song.

The Yepes/Argenta LP of the Rodrigo Guitar Concerto [Decca SXL 2091] should bring "Yes" answers to both questions asked above. This 1958 recording places the soloist front and center, wrapped in a characteristically slightly narrow but deep soundstage. The playing is superb, with Yepes's technique beautifully apparent, from his attack, placement and shaping of notes, to his verve when it comes to their phrasing. It's built not just on speed but also delicacy and his remarkable control of each note's weight -- almost like a pianist. Where some systems will perch the solo instrument on the front edge of the stage (and place the listener in the front row) the Vienna Acoustics speakers offer a slightly more distant perspective, placing Yepes within the soundstage, but bringing a real sense of body and substance to his instrument. While it is tempting to concentrate on the strings, the attack and the rapier-like leading edges, the Concert Grands back those up with the volume of the instrument and the layers of harmonics it generates, while bringing that same sense of weight and presence to the accompanying instruments.

Never less than impressive, this recording can occasionally sound like a sprint -- all quick, explosive action. What the Beethovens bring to the party is a greater range of musical and emotional expression -- the full decathlon, if you like, as opposed to a one-off, flash in the pan. You hear it in the wistful and contemplative second movement, where the balanced instrumental weight and the real sense of humanity in the playing bring pathos to the proceedings. You hear it in the shape of the notes and the articulation of the phrases. You hear it in the ease with which you recognize the different guitar strings and the way both Rodrigo and Yepes use them to add contrast and depth to the music and performance. But where you really hear it is in the third movement, so often presented as an almost throwaway coda to the more serious and affecting music that precedes it. The Vienna speakers bring such a sense of presence and clarity to the performance that the development and complexity of the instrumental conversation that grow from that simplistic, almost jaunty theme takes on a captivating

fascination. In its ability to hold a listener, this may be more a case of presence than immediacy, but it's a presence that draws you to the performance, rather than an in the face quality that throws that performance at you. In musical terms, that's immediacy; in audio terms, it's also immediacy -- just not quite as you probably know it. The Beethovens might position you slightly farther from the action than some, but they place you firmly in the same room -- much more firmly and credibly than most. Like any change of perspective, you need to adjust to the new point of view, but in terms of appreciating the recorded performance it's an adjustment that's well worth making. You can also, to some extent, choose your seat through your choice of driving amplifier, with the solid-state options giving the sound a noticeably more familiar audio thumbprint. But for me, there was a beguilingly convincing quality to the Vienna/VTL combination that lifted the overall performance to a very special place indeed.

The coherence of the Concert Grands is such that rather than suffering at the hands of more demonstrative speakers, it highlights their foibles and exaggerations. It brings a sense of proportion and articulation, stability and authority to underpin the musical performances -- whether those performances issue from acoustic instruments playing a classical score, or the more raucous end of the rock and pop spectrum. Acoustic music might be the Concert Grand's natural forte, but make no mistake, they have the bandwidth and dynamic range to do rock with serious intent too. These are not exactly unfamiliar attributes. I associate them with many of my favorite speakers, perhaps most notably the Sasha DAW and the Stenheim Alumine 5. It's just that both those speakers are considerably more expensive than the Concert Grands. Granted, the Vienna speakers can't match the dynamic range and expression of the Wilsons or the textural resolution and transparency of the Stenheims, but they come close and they shade both of them when it comes to their natural tonality and harmonic development. That's not just punching above their weight -- it's getting in the ring and trading a few blows. That's an incredible performance at the price. Genuinely engaging and expressive, nearly full-range loudspeaker performance just got a whole lot more accessible -- both in terms of price and drive requirements.

**S**o, what is it about the Beethoven Concert Grands that makes them special? The ability to satisfy, the ability to deliver enough, that they don't leave you craving more. This is a speaker that obeys the first rule of audio by putting the performance first, breathing life into recordings irrespective of genre or scale. It's a speaker that has the knack of disappearing -- and taking the rest of the system with it. Small and intimate or huge and imposing, the Beethoven Concert Grands are all about access: access to the event, access to the energy that generated it, access to the emotional range expressed. What they deliver is that most elusive of audio qualities, musical connection -- whether you want to connect with the deeper philosophical aspects of *Das Lied von Der Erde* or indulge in some equally serious air-guitar action. That they do so in a package that is both more obviously accomplished as well as more user and system friendly than previous Vienna speakers is also significant.

The use of near-identical drivers to cover the most important parts of the musical spectrum brings obvious advantages in terms of time and phase coherence, along with consistent dispersion characteristics. That's reflected in the remarkable spatial, temporal, dynamic and tonal coherence of the speaker, it's ability to reproduce broadband input signals without bending them out of shape or disturbing their flow. It's what makes the music hang together so convincingly, the performances so intelligible. As I've already said, those drivers are simply the most obvious facets of the Concert Grand's engineering, but it's tempting to conclude that the considerable care and experience that's been accumulated over the years and lavished on this product -- on its crossover, cabinet and bass voicing -- has finally met its match in terms of driver design. Vienna's Music Center flat diaphragm, coincident driver was a significant musical step forward. But the combination of identical driver structures across midrange and bass is even more significant: for the company in terms of the performance it can offer, for its customers in terms of the performances they're going to enjoy.

I can't wait to hear what happens when the Music Center meets the Composite Cone bass driver. Until then (and the long-overdue arrival of The Music 2) I'll just have to live with the Concert Grand. But then, as you'll have gathered by now, that's no great sacrifice. ☺



## Associated Equipment

Analog: VPI Classic 4 turntable with SDS and Track Audio feet; VPI JMW tonearm with 12.7 and 3D12 armwands. AMG Giro turntable with 9W2 tonearm. Lyra Titan i, Skala, Dorian, Dorian Mono cartridges; DS Audio Master 1 and DS-W1 cartridges. Tom Evans Groove Plus phono stage. DS Audio Master phono stage/energizer. Stillpoints LPI record weight.

Digital: CEC TL2-N CD transport, Wadax Pre1 Ultimate and Atlantis digital-to-analog converters.

Preamplifiers: Trilogy Audio 915R and VTL TL-5.5 Series II Signature.

Power amplifiers: Simaudio Moon 860A v2 and Trilogy Audio 995R monoblock, VTL S-200 stereo amplifier.

Integrated amplifiers: Gryphon Audio Diablo 120, Mark Levinson No.585 .

Cables: Complete looms of Nordost Valhalla 2 or Crystal Cable Dreamline Plus from AC socket to speaker terminals. Power conditioning/distribution was via AudioQuest Niagara 7000 or Nordost Quantum Qb8s, with a mix of Quantum Qx2 and Qx4 power purifiers and Qv2 AC harmonizers. CAD Ground Control and Nordost Qkore grounding systems.

Supports: Hutter Racktime equipment racks, each upgraded with two sets of Track Audio feet. These are used with Nordost SortKone or Grand Prix Audio Apex equipment couplers. Cables are elevated on Furutech NCF Cable Boosters.

Accessories: Essential accessories include the SmarTractor protractor, a USB microscope and Aesthetix cartridge demagnetizer, two precision spirit levels (one bubble, one digital) and laser, a really long tape measure and plenty of painters tape. I also make extensive use of the Furutech anti-static and demagnetizing devices and the Kuzma Ultrasonic record-cleaning machine.