

Oepi Transcendence 2 for max thrill power

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Jason Kennedy



Oepi Acoustics Transcendence 2 speakers

Reviewing hi-fi can be a bit of a juggling act at times, one moment you have a £700 product to assess, the next a £7,000 example of the same variety turns up and of course it sounds better. Actually it's more difficult when the opposite happens and you have to figure out whether the inexpensive product that has taken the place of the high end one sounds dull because of its cost or because it just isn't very inspiring. I was concerned about this conundrum when I replaced £45,000 Bowers & Wilkins 801 Signature loudspeakers with the Oepi Transcendence 2 standmounts at almost a tenth of the price and less than a tenth of the weight.

Fortunately these speakers proved to be absolutely thrilling with powers of engagement that put them up there with products at far more ambitious prices, so the transition was almost painless. Oepi is run by a young Danish hi-fi nut called Joakim Juhl. His speciality is cables or so it seems if you look at the wide range of such things on the Oepi website, but his background is in loudspeakers and while he uses third party drivers in this and his other designs he makes modifications to them to suit his aims.

The Transcendence 2 is a medium size reflex loaded two-way speaker which on the face of it has only a weird looking woofer and an asymmetrical driver layout to differentiate it from hordes of apparently similar alternatives. But look a little closer and you will see that these two observations alone mark this Oepi out even before you delve deeper into its DNA. That woofer is a Purifi driver, a brand which has Hypex amp and Kii Three designer Bruno Putzeys among its founders and which has disrupted the world of leading edge loudspeaker design with its weird shaped surround suspension and extremely impressive measurements for harmonic and intermodulation distortion. The claims don't stop there this driver is also said to have very low distortion relative to amplitude (eg it measures almost as well at high volumes as it does at low ones), and has a very even tonal response alongside fabulous dispersion. That

this is achieved with paper drivers is remarkable too, apparently Joakim specified the 6.5 inch example used in the Transcendence 2 without the polypropylene coating that Purifi usually applies.

The tweeter is a SEAS metal dome which Oepi strips down and rebuilds with a non-conductive voice coil. You would have thought that this could have been specified and done by the manufacturer but that would likely require a substantial minimum order at a high cost for a small scale company like Oepi. Doing this sort of thing in-house also provides a useful degree



of quality control. The purpose of this change is to give the tweeter easier freedom of movement, the standard aluminium voice coil has a small magnetic braking effect which slows its response enough to make an audible difference in Joakim's opinion. He is not alone in thinking this way, it's an approach found in a number of high end tweeters used by larger brands.

The arrangement of the drivers on the cabinet baffle looks a little odd but this has been done for the benefit of diffraction, which is the way sound is spread from the loudspeaker, with the aim being to have the same tonal balance reflecting from walls as the direct sound to the listener. The tweeter has been placed such that it will deliver an even a power response whilst





being close to the woofer for coherence purposes. The box itself is lighter than average in order to combat the slow absorption and release of energy that occurs with higher mass designs. Joakim has designed the Transcendence 2's crossover to give as flat a response as he can, this is not a common approach with domestic loudspeakers because it can sound bright and unforgiving if there are any shortcomings in the drivers. It's more common with pro monitors where stark transparency is useful but if you have good quality drivers and know how to design a crossover this Oephi suggests that it's an approach that should be adopted more widely.

Sound quality

That balance is immediately obvious when firing up the Transcendence 2s, which can be ferocious side if toed in to face the listener but worked extremely well with the backs of their oak veneered cabinets parallel to the wall behind. I placed them on 60cm Hi-Fi Racks wooden stands with foam pucks on top, these provide a degree of isolation and likely produce a more relaxed sound than the spiked stands seen in Oephi's images. The sound that's produced is tremendously engaging as mentioned above, this is because they are extremely fast and deliver timing of a standard that few alternatives match.

The Oephis prefer to play at higher levels, apparently the Purifi drivers were designed with the intent of emulating the easy dynamics of larger drive units but I found that the Transcendence 2s really came alive when turned up. But with sound that's this exciting the tendency is to turn it up anyway so that's hardly a shortcoming. They don't achieve this by omitting bass either, you can make a fast sounding speaker that majors on mid and treble with relative ease but these have decent low frequency energy as well, producing clarity and depth in the bass when the music requires it. With a good recording you get a sense of physical presence that is impressive, Laura Marling's *Soothing (Semper Femina)* has become a bit of a reviewing staple ever since Stratton Acoustics used it with their big Elypsis 1512 monitors (and I remembered that I had it on vinyl), this sounded extremely articulate in the bass and as clear as a bell on the vocal, with wide imaging extending beyond the outside of the Transcendence 2's cabinets.

Another track that's been on heavy rotation for a while is the live version of *Magnolia Mountain* by Ryan Adams (*Live at Das Haus*), this features a rambling intro that in this case brought home the live atmosphere of the performance such that when the vocal came in it felt like magic. The sense of being at the event was palpable, I really felt like I was in the audience, which for a loudspeaker of this size is no mean feat. I've been playing Tom Waits' *Swordfishtrombones* song from the album of the same name for decades now but rarely has it sounded as vivid and magnetic as it did through the Oephis. There is no chance of doom scrolling when these things are in action and a decent tune is being played, they really make the most of every detail in the recording. This can be less enjoyable with releases that have been engineered to sound great over bass heavy bluetooth earphones such as *No Gold Teeth*

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by Danger Mouse and Black Thought, but that's the price you pay for opening the sonic window wide, the occasional heavily compressed sound will turn up as well as all the glory of better productions.

The Transcendence 2s are very strong on vocals and punch well above their weight in this department, this is because the midband is so clean and this clarity extends up into the treble which is not rolled off in order to sweeten the sound. It's almost the opposite of a BBC LS3/5a monitor's cuddliness in this respect albeit they too are good on voice, they just don't have the



speed and bandwidth that you get here. Nor for that matter the scale of soundstage which the excellent dispersion allows, numerous tracks offered up imaging with substantial width, depth and height. This puts the sound of the recording in the room alongside the music and gives it a degree of realism that is enthralling. For example Nils Frahm's *All Melody* delivered a presence and physicality that's positively delicious thanks to the woody nature of the studio it was made in.

Transcendence 2 verdict

The Oepi Transcendence 2 is an outstanding loudspeaker but one that asks the question: if this is right then are most other speakers wrong? This is largely a result of the flat high frequency response, something that the Kii Threes also do extremely well, but it does make for a less forgiving balance that means ancillaries and recordings are revealed to a greater extent than usual. I didn't use anything particularly exotic in terms of electronics and played my usual mixed bag of music and the results were for the most part absolutely thrilling, in the Transcendence 2 Joakim has delivered a tremendous loudspeaker that while it won't be to all tastes will be a revelation to many.



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