

Equipment Report

Gauder Akustik DARC 250 Mk II Loudspeaker

Dynamic, Articulate,
Resolving, and Coherent

Andre Jennings

My first listening experience with a Gauder Akustik loudspeaker was a little over nine years ago at CES in 2015. That speaker was the Berlina RC 9. The RC 9 is a reference-quality 4-way system utilizing a $\frac{3}{4}$ " pure-diamond tweeter, a 2" pure-diamond midrange driver, a 7" ceramic lower-midrange driver, and three 7" ceramic woofers paralleled in a bass-reflex enclosure. The speaker incorporated impressive and extremely steep 60dB/octave crossovers on all drivers, producing sound that was attention grabbing. So much so that I requested a review pair for TAS. That review was published in Issue 262 (you can also read it online at theabsolutesound.com/articles/gauder-akustik-berlina-rc-9).

Fast-forwarding to April 2023, I had the opportunity to audition another Gauder Akustik speaker. This time, the venue was AXPONA, and the item was from Gauder's new DARC Series: the 3-way DARC 200. The sound was, again, attention grabbing—enough to earn a Most Coveted Product mention in my show report. That experience stayed with me, and after talking with the manufacturer and distributor (Axiss Audio USA), I selected one of the DARC Series loudspeakers for review. Given my experience with the 4-way Berlina RC 9 (now discontinued), I chose its successor in the DARC line.

The DARC 250 Mk II is Gauder Akustik's only DARC 4-way loudspeaker, currently enjoying flagship status in the series (by the time this review is in print, that may have changed). Compared to the RC 9, everything is newly designed: crossovers, cabinet, drivers, and other components. What remains from a general perspective revolves around the DARC 250 Mk II being a 4-way with 60dB/octave crossover slopes on all drivers. The speaker system utilizes a $\frac{3}{4}$ " pure-diamond tweeter, a 2" pure-diamond high-midrange driver, a 7" ceramic lower-midrange driver, and two 9" back-coated aluminum woofers paralleled in a bass-reflex enclosure. The speaker enclosure is made using stacked aluminum ribs (more on this later).

If you've read the Berlina RC 9 review, many of the details listed below will sound familiar. The DARC 250 Mk II, like all Gauder Akustik loudspeakers, takes a physics-based systems-design approach, utilizing mathematical models developed for each product. These equations are derived from Euler's formula



and describe every parameter of the speaker system (drivers, cabinet, and crossover) and its performance characteristics (including vibration, oscillation, damping, and decay of driver diaphragms, cabinet materials, and electrical components). More mathematical transforms are then applied to create transfer functions representing the speaker-enclosure size, Thiele-Small driver parameters, and electrical parts for the complete speaker system.

As with the RC 9, Gaud-

er says there are no off-the-shelf driver solutions used in the DARC 250 Mk II. The required Thiele-Small parameters (along with some additional requirements) are transferred to the driver manufacturers to produce the exact physical component that has been developed mathematically. Gauder believes there is no room for compromise, and the drivers must be made precisely as specified. The precise adherence to specifications results in drivers that are fast, rigid, and nimble, with strong magnetic properties.

The 250 Mk II enclosure is constructed from stacks of high-quality, oval/drop-shaped aluminum ribs with fiber damping ribs installed between each of them. DARC stands for Dynamic Aluminum Rib Construction. Dr. Roland Gauder has shared the idea of this rib design concept many times; it is how he thought nature would build a loudspeaker—

like a human being, with a sternum (front baffle), ribs (sides), and spine (for stability) to enclose a volume for low resonance. Gauder says this construction technique provides structural rigidity and suppresses a loudspeaker's inherent tendency to vibrate. It also limits the ringing that would normally occur if the speaker were made of full-length aluminum side panels (which tend to require a significant amount of bracing to overcome such issues). Gauder's rib construction, first used in the Berlina series, was a natural fit for the use of aluminum, while negating any need for excessive internal bracing. The 250 Mk II's enclosure is made from 31 alu-

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Specs & Pricing

Driver complement: ¾" pure-diamond tweeter, 2" pure-diamond upper midrange; 7" black ceramic lower midrange; 2x 9" black back-coated aluminum woofers

Crossover type: Symmetrical 4-way

Crossover frequencies: 148/1200/4000Hz

Crossover slope: 60dB/octave

Impedance: 4 ohms nominal

Power handling: 810 Watt

Dimensions: 11.81" x 57.08" x 17.71"

Weight: 264.5 lbs., each

Price: \$249,975 (add VU meter: \$4995; add MusicLight: \$4995)

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Reference System

Analog tape: Otari MTR-10 Studio Mastering (¼" 2-track) tape deck with custom Flux Magnetic Mastering Series repro head and secondary custom tube output stage, Studer A820 Studio Mastering (¼" 2-track) tape deck (x2), Studer A80VU MKII Studio Mastering (¼" 2-track) tape deck, ReVox A700 (¼" 2-track and ¼" 4-track heads) tape deck, Stellavox SP7 (¼" 2-track) tape deck with ABR large reel adapter, Nagra IV-S tape deck with custom large reel adapter, ReVox G-36 (¼" 4-track) tape deck

Analog vinyl: Basis Audio Debut Vacuum with Synchro-Wave Power Supply, Basis Audio 2800 Vacuum, TW Acoustic Raven 2 tables; Basis Audio SuperArm 9, Basis Audio Vector IV (x2), Graham Phantom III, Graham 2.2 tonearms; Lyra Atlas Lambda, Lyra Atlas SL, Lyra Etna SL, Lyra Titan-i, van den Hul Colibri XGP, Hana SL, Hana Umami Red, Hana Umami Blue

Analog phono stage: The Raptor (Custom), Ayre P-5xe, Musical Surroundings Phenomena II+ w/Linear Power Supply.

Digital source: Intel i7 10th generation processor-based music server hosting JRiver Media Center, Roon, and Qobuz.

Preamplification: Dual Placette Audio Active Linestage

Amplification: Custom-modified solid-state monoblocks, Soudation 511 (x2)

Loudspeakers: Vandersteen Model 3a Signature with dual 2Wq subwoofers and dual SUB THREE subwoofers using M5-HPB high-pass filter, Gauder Akustik DARC 250 Mk II.

Cables: Assortment of AudioQuest, Shunyata, Tara Labs, Acoustic Research, Cardas, and custom cables.

Support: Minus-K BM-1, Neuance shelf, Maple wood shelf, Symposium Ultra

Acoustics: Walker Audio

Accessories: Aurios Pro, Pneuance Audio, Walker Audio, Klaudio KD-CLN-LP200, Kirmuss Audio KA-RC-1, VPI 16.5, Clearaudio Double Matrix Professional Sonic.

Room: 18' (W), 8' (H), 43' (L)

minum ribs, 32 fiber damping ribs, a heavy aluminum top, and a heavy aluminum baseplate. The front baffle is made of thick wood-based material mated with additional, constrained-layer-damped, heavy black flagstone attached to its exterior that has a textured finish to help breakup acoustic resonances. The ribs are compressed together with six threaded rods (three on each side) that provide the necessary pressure to acoustically seal the enclosure. The speaker is 30cm (11.81") wide, 145cm (57.08") tall, and 45cm (17.71") deep, and weighs 120 kg (264.5 pounds). The front baffle of the 250 Mk II holds, from top to bottom, the tweeter, upper-midrange, lower-midrange, and both woofers in a vertical array. Below the woofers, the Gauder logo is centered towards the bottom of the baffle. On the rear of DARC 250 Mk II are two sets of WBT Next-Gen binding posts that allow bi-amp or bi-wire configurations. The bottom of the baseplate has the port for the bass-reflex system, where the distance to the floor, set via four adjustable feet, provides a limited amount of control over the port's acoustic impedance. The height of each of the four feet of this wide base are easily set via a threaded dial. The position of each of the feet can be seen by a stepped indicator adjacent to the threaded dial. On the center rear of the baseplate is a bubble level that serves to verify each speaker's position relative to center-level. The bi-wire/bi-amp set of WBT binding posts are located on either side of the bubble level. Adjacent to the binding posts, on either side of the speaker,



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are a set of frequency shelf/level adjustment jumpers with an additional bass-extension adjustment jumper underneath the baseplate below the bubble level (more on these adjustments later). The DARC 250 Mk IIs are available in natural brushed aluminum, powder-coated (black, anthracite, white, silver), or custom clearcoat paint (available as a custom quote). Additionally, the speakers can be ordered in hand-polished natural aluminum. The fiber damping ribs are available in black, white, silver, or gold.

Because of the design approach Gauder Akustik employs, the speaker requires discipline in all aspects of development—the 250 Mk II's cabinet and custom drivers certainly fit that bill. Bringing this enclosure and high-quality driver-array together are the crossover designs that form the beating heart of the DARCs.

That beating heart is centered around complex, symmetrical, 12th-order (yes, that isn't a typo) passive crossovers that have 60dB/octave slopes. Although the cost is higher due to the doubling of parts, the symmetrical crossovers (equipped with components from Mundorf and Intertechnik) are distributed equally along the positive and negative terminals of the drivers. These crossovers contain 68 components that are sited on four printed circuit boards, strategically located to minimize magnetic interference. This design's complexity required significant processing power to solve several multivariate equations simultaneously. Gauder mentioned he had to feed these complex equations into one of the largest university supercomputers in Germany to solve them, thereby achieving the results necessary for such an ambitious crossover design, which incorporates the driver T/S parameters and the enclosure volume (sealed and/or reflex). The 60dB/octave crossovers significantly reject sound energy from audio signals outside the design-intended passband of each driver. Gauder believes having such steep crossover slopes ensures each driver can play its intended spectrum of music with greater clarity and dynamic headroom. This design is also said to have the advantage of better avoiding the breakup modes and crossover distortions that tend to show up sooner in lower-order crossover designs using similar-type drivers with music played at louder levels.

The 7" ceramic midrange operates in its passband from 148Hz up to 1.2kHz. The 2" pure-diamond midrange takes over at 1.2kHz and continues up to 4kHz where the ¾" pure-diamond tweeter comes in. Below 148Hz, the dual 9" back-coated aluminum bass drivers occupy a 68-liter ported bass-reflex enclosure. Gauder says the woofer/cabinet's lower frequency has a second-order high-pass filter around 20Hz to block DC and subsonic frequencies, suppress frequencies below the resonance of the drivers, and add an octave of low-end response. Additionally, Gauder says the filter reduces the impedance of the bass-reflex system, so the speaker can take (and use) more energy from the amplifier. (The bass-extension feature is covered below.) Therefore, Gauder recommends using a robust solid-state amplifier, although he says several high-power tube amps have driven the DARC 250 Mk II successfully. (Note: I intended to acquire a high-powered tube amp for this evaluation, but the timing didn't work out.)

Included in the design of the DARC 250 Mk II are two



compensating time-delay filters: one for the pure-diamond tweeter, and one for the pure-diamond midrange. These time-delay circuits are used to counter the inherent inductor-induced group delay between the two diamond drivers and the ceramic midrange. The delayed tweeter and high-midrange relative to the lower-midrange is due to electrical group delay and the position of the driver coils relative to each other. Gauder says the audible result of this phenomena is generally observed as slightly smeared impulses and smoothed-over transients. Implementing his Time-Delay-Control (TDC) circuit adds the proper delay for the two diamond drivers to generate impulses and transients at the same time as the lower-midrange driver, allowing synchronous projection of sound into the room for a more precise impulse response. Gauder says the outcome is better instrumental attack without energy-robbing time-smear or smoothing.

The DARC 250 Mk II has three sets of adjustments that can help with in-room setup and/or personal preference.

The first is a high-frequency shelf adjustment for the pure-diamond tweeter, operating at 4kHz and above, that has three settings: -1.5dB, 0dB, and +1.5dB. The second adjustment is the low-frequency shelf adjustment that operates on the woofers from 148Hz down, also with three settings: -1.5dB, 0dB, and +1.5dB. The final in-room selectable option is what Gauder calls the bass-extension adjustment. This allows the user to select six settings that control the bass levels between 30Hz and 70Hz. This range is generally in the area where room-related bass issues tend to arise because of loudspeaker placement. As such, a location in proximity to room boundaries can dictate which bass extension setting is implemented in the speaker: close to corner/wall tends to give more bass output, where farther into the room away from boundaries tends to produce less bass. Additionally, if there is an observable resonance, the levels in this area can potentially be adjusted for a more linear response. There are four bass-extension modules and a jumper for setting the levels.

This description of the

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complex design and specifications of the DARC 250 Mk II shows how much effort was put into making this loudspeaker. For a one-on-one discussion about the design of the DARC 250 MK II and close-up videos of the speaker in-house, check out the TAS YouTube channel's video preview/interview I conducted with Dr. Roland Gauder of Gauder Akustik, in which we discuss many of the features of this uniquely designed transducer.

The DARC 250 Mk II loudspeakers were delivered by a team from U.S. distributor Axiss Audio USA. Dr. Gauder was also on-site for installation. The process went very smoothly since the 250 Mk II is horizontally mounted on a rolling base inside its crate. The speakers were rolled into the listening room then lifted vertically into the approximate locations with the rolling bases attached. Once vertical, a couple of straps were removed and the DARC 250 Mk II was ready for speaker connection, positioning, and music playback. Since the DARC 250 Mk II is shipped completely assembled, the process of setup is straightforward with no assembly required. The finish on the pair of DACR 250 Mk II's that arrived was a beautiful powder-coated black with black damping rings. In-room, the contrasting shades of black made a pleasing impression.

At this point, speaker connections were made, and we began the process of position adjustment and dialing in the speakers to the room. My listening room is approximately 18' wide and 43' deep, with an 8' ceiling (a little over 6000 cubic feet) with permanent openings that add a few thousand cubic feet of additional space. This room has proven to perform very well with low frequencies, providing a subjective result that doesn't overload with bass. To back up that subjective result, the measured low frequencies generated are usually smooth across the spectrum. Since I had experience with previous Gauder speakers, as well as many others, in this listening room, getting the speakers to initially play well didn't take much time. The speakers were approximately 4.5' from the sidewalls, 8.5' out from the front wall, 9.5' apart, and a little over 10.5' from the main listening position.

Utilizing the adjustment capability of the DARC 250 Mk II after more fine-tuning, I ended up leaving the high-frequency tweeter shelf adjustment set for neutral (0dB). The +1.5 dB setting in my more neutral (not over- or under-damped) listening room was slightly too much for my preference. The -1.5 dB setting was usable, but neutral was preferred. The woofer's low-frequency shelf adjustment sounded excellent in the neutral setting and even better for my room in the +1.5dB position, which is where I left it. (The -1.5dB setting sounded nice as well, but my preference was for the +1.5dB setting's overall sound.) When we tried the bass-extension setting in the maximum position, the DARC's produced a healthy amount of low end for speakers located that far away from room-boundary reinforcement. When we tried the +3.5dB module, the quality improved a bit, and that's where we left it. I believe this speaker's adjustability will prove to be particularly useful for many rooms and allow users to get the most satisfactory sound they can.

One item to take note of is the tweeter location on the baffle. There is a common myth that the listener's ear should always be at tweeter height on every speaker. It is just that, a myth, which

can easily be exposed through discussion with a speaker designer who didn't design the loudspeaker to have the tweeter at ear height. The tweeter location is dependent on the designer's choice, the selected tweeter's dispersion pattern, and several other technical factors. The DARC 250 Mk II has an acoustic center (where the sound was designed to be coherent) located between the upper portion of the 7" ceramic midrange and below the 2" pure-diamond midrange. With that in mind, and based on careful listening, the 250 Mk II's were slightly tilted (using the threaded feet) to align the acoustic center of the speaker with my listening position. Favorable results were achieved in terms of slightly increased resolution and instrumental focus.

During the two days I hosted the U.S. distributor and Dr. Gauder, we listened to music of many different types, time periods, and formats (CD, streaming, lots of vinyl, and 15ips/30ips open-reel tapes). In every case, the sound was significantly greater than favorable, enjoyable, and entertaining. I believe it is safe to say the distributor and Dr. Gauder were very pleased with the installation.

The sound of the DARC 250 Mk II is as nearly complete as any loudspeaker system I've experienced, anywhere. The level of transparency, dynamics, inner detail, spaciousness, depth of soundstage, truth to timbre, and revealing the intentions of the musicians, mastering engineer, composer, or a combination of any or all can be exciting, educational, enjoyable, and mesmerizing all at once.

I've heard many speakers that impress with initial transients, only to shortchange the note with a reticent sustain of the harmonic envelope and/or a miserly decay. Likewise, there are speakers that tend to soften and shortchange the initial start of a note in favor of harmonic development and/or note decay. With the DARC 250 Mk II, in my listening space, the note presentations appeared complete from the impulse of the initial transient to harmonic development and on to decay. This sense of transparency to the music results in uncanny realism that easily draws you into the performance. For example, the Analog Productions UHQR reissue of Steely Dan's *Aja* serves to demonstrate the plethora of instruments scattered throughout the mix. The clarity of many of these instruments was buried in other previously issued *Aja* albums on vinyl. Through the DARC 250 Mk II, the guitars were more readily audible in many sections where they weren't audible prior to the UHQR reissue. The ability to listen far into this multi-track pop/rock mix is fascinating. From the start of "Aja," one hears the fundamental and harmonics of the synthesizer and Fender Rhodes as transparently as can be and much more realistically than in prior pressings. The clarity of previously obscured percussion and multiple guitar licks also impressed. Overdubbed backing vocals were heard much more easily. This level of transparency and the ability to peer deep into the mix is something the DARC 250 Mk II seems to accomplish with ease.

One can play a classical

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recording of acoustic instruments in an acoustical space to get another picture of transparency. Whether the performance is large-scale like Rossini's *I'Italiana in Algeri, sinfonia* [Fonè 016, 45RPM] or small like Prokofiev's Sonata No. 1 played by Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg with piano support from Sandra Rivers, you get a picture of the venue and of the space around instruments. The 250 MK II will also let you know more about the choices made with respect to how much of the recording venue ambiance is captured (or not). The Rossini *sinfonia* is a short thrilling instrumental delight. Due to the level of transparency of the 250 Mk II, the sounds from each section of the orchestra (down to individual instruments) are heard, while the ensemble remains whole, coherent, and complete. The speakers seem removed from the room, as there is no edge or glare, only what sounds like timbre-correct transparency. With the Prokofiev Sonata, Nadia's violin tone is rendered exceptionally well, and her playing demonstrates that the beauty of her instrument is rendered with precision. You can hear the speed of attack and bow strokes used to convey the emotion of the music. Rivers' piano is rendered equally expressively, especially the low registers, harmonics, and hammer strikes. With the DARC's, this performance tends to sweep you away to the moment in that space.

With the 250 MK II, one gets an unblemished sense of music's pace, rhythm, and timing (sometimes called PRaT) because of its ability to accurately convey the impulse at the start of notes,

which gives music the propulsive drive it needs. Herbie Hancock's *RockIt* is an excellent example of keeping up with the speed of the music and its PRaT. The DARC's zeroed in on the timing of this music and never let go. The group's rapid-fire percussion, continuous drumbeat, and synth bass set a foundation that allowed the relentless musical drive to flow without etch or glare. Musical timing was spot on due to excellent impulse response that made the musical attacks sound alive and rhythmically in step. Additionally, nearly anything from Count Basie started feet tapping. One could follow the rhythmic tempo shifts of Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite, or the slow but melodic rhythm of Ray Brown's bass on "Round Midnight" from the *Memories of Thelonious Sphere Monk* album, or the steadfast dynamic pacing of the live version of DJ Kool's "Let Me Clear My Throat." Each piece of music was reproduced with precise tempo and propulsive drive through the DARC 250 Mk II.

Vocals sounded pure, realistic, and truthful. There was no distorted cresting on fortissimos, no slight wincing because of unnatural speaker-induced timbral anomalies (typically noticed across handoffs from one speaker driver to another, where some crossovers can cause weird phase shifts that muck-up harmonics). Régine Crespin singing Ravel's *Shéhérazade* on a 1963 Decca, backed by a wonderful orchestral soundscape, produced powerfully intense vocals with effortlessly rendered crescendos through the 250 Mk II. One could clearly hear the shad-

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ings and intensity of her soprano accompanied by its reflections within the performance venue. Another example would be Harry Belafonte's *Belafonte Sings The Blues*. This album covers Harry's vocals from soft and smooth ("A Fool For You") to louder and more dynamically expressive ("Losing Hand"). Through the DARC 250 Mk II, his vocals were pure and clear with excellent weight and plenty of genuine tone color that made him sound real. It was relatively easy to listen and detect that the recordings of these two songs were captured at different times and different studio locations.

Speaking of Belafonte's "Losing Hand," the DARC 250 Mk II rendered the dynamics of his appealing pianissimo-to-forte vocal shifts with ease. When transitioning many levels of loudness, Belafonte's voice never sounded strained or compressed due to the speakers. The dynamically impressive guitar or saxophone accompaniment, with occasional spotlighting, was just as impressive, rendering the entire composition a delight. The Rossini performance mentioned earlier produced huge dynamic swings across a massive soundstage that created a mid-forward hall sound that was invigoratively captivating to the point of holding one's attention until the very finish, which is followed by a standing ovation from the attendees of this live performance.

The bass performance of the 250 Mk II is lyrical, fast, clean, and solid. Ray Brown's playing on "Round Midnight" digs deep, and the speakers captured every bit of the wonderful tone of his instrument without adding any perceived overhang. His bowing was smooth and flowing with every note. Similarly, Steely Dan's *Aja* played excellently. It is dynamic, dry sounding, and has good punch without any hint of misguided woofer action. The drums of the Rossini were spectacularly fast with attack and then retreated nearly as quickly as they appeared, which gave the music its dynamic drive and hard-hitting fortissimos. Every piece of music played with instruments in this lower register was near excellent, thanks in no small part to the DARC's design and adjustability (bass level and bass extension) in the low octaves.

The DARC's midrange is also pure and uncluttered. No matter how intense the music got, as with the Rossini piece, it never compressed or lost its composure or its ability to clearly present the music and its nuances. It was a joy to witness the way timbre-correct sounds were located across the soundscape unwaveringly or how a mono recording with all instruments centered was still easily parsed because of the clarity.

High frequencies through the 250 Mk II were very pure and clear sounding with no hint of speaker-induced harshness or breakup on any music played. Bells and cymbals showcased the speaker's excellent behavior. The percussion instruments on Jennifer Warnes' "The Panther" were delightful, and their distinct tones were easily rendered. Likewise, the digitally generated cymbals of "Rock-It" and the orchestral percussion of Ravel's *Schéherazade* left me with the same feeling of outstanding treble performance.

These virtues of transparency, spaciousness, inner detail, soundstaging, imaging, etc. would go for naught if the speaker couldn't put you at ease and allow you to enjoy the perfor-

mance. The DARC 250 MK IIs have that musical ease that gives you the elusive element of satisfaction with the thrill, sorrow, joy, humanness, and/or musical flow of a performance. Through these speakers, music sounds complete and coherent without any anomalies that tend to spoil the moment.

Having listened to and lived with the DARC 250 Mk II for several months, I have to say it is an excellent performer across the board. Nothing is perfect, but these speakers perform extremely well. Having said that, a couple of items come to mind that could be of interest to readers.

The first thing is the innovative design of the bass system and the use of the high-pass filter along with the bass-extension modules. This greatly beneficial feature is only possible because of Gauder's design. One of the conditions that result from this feature is his recommendation to use a robust/powerful solid-state amplifier. The reason for this is that to get the bass extension modules to do what they do, the speaker will "borrow" power from the amplifier to achieve the selected bass levels. Given the performance possible with these speakers and the significant investment to acquire them, it is best to pick a suitably capable amplifier. It isn't a good idea to skimp on the use of a suitable high-power/current amp to drive such a well-designed product. During my evaluation time, I used my high-power/current solid-state monoblock amps or a pair of Soudation 511 stereo amplifiers configured for monoblock operation. In

both cases, there was abundant power on hand to drive the DARC 250 Mk II brilliantly.

The second observation is the bass-extension jumper is on the bottom of the speaker base. Because of this, the speaker will usually require being tilted slightly forward to remove/install a different module. Hopefully, the optimal module will be installed during initial setup. If not, or if the speaker is moved, or if there are other changes, be sure to get help to safely tilt the speaker.

The third observation is minor but notable. This has to do with the location of the inner WBT binding posts. A normal-sized adult's hand can't get comfortably between the post and the rear of the enclosure. Because of this, you have to use $\frac{3}{4}$ of a rotation to torque the binding posts down tight enough to secure a spade connection. Thankfully, the WBT posts have enough grip to allow you to do this. That said, I'm hard-pressed to find any serious flaws with the DARC 250 Mk II's sonic performance or visual styling.

The sound produced by the DARC 250 Mk II is spectacular; the speaker is mesmerizing in the way it removes itself from the performance. While DARC officially means Dynamic Aluminum Rib Construction, it could just as easily stand for Dynamic, Articulate, Resolving, and Coherent. It has fabulous transparency to both the music and upstream equipment. Based on the many attributes observed in-house and mentioned throughout this evaluation, the DARC 250 Mk II is truly a top-echelon performer. **tas**