

# Magnepan Magneplanar .7 loudspeakers

by Eric Neff

“Hey, come here! You have to hear these things!” So said one of my friends in our early audio days. “These” turned out to be the Magnepan Magneplanar Tympani full-range quasi-ribbon big-as-a-room-divider flat panel speakers from decades ago. Walking into the room at the audio dealer, my first thought was “where are the speakers?” Instead I was looking at something taller than me, thin, and three-panels wide, like I would find splitting up the Sunday school rooms at church, except they were producing an incredible sound. Walking behind them there was still sound. Amazing. They were less than 3cm thick. Driving home that day I knew I needed to get some time with these speakers from Magnepan. I just did not realise it would take 30 years. But that’s the point with Magnepan: the best things come to those who wait.

One of the other things making my unfulfilled long time listening goal so crazy is that I live within three hours of the factory in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis. When I got the call that I would be reviewing the .7’s, rather than wait for the delivery van I simply called Wendell Diller, Marketing Manager of Magnepan and asked him if I could come by and collect them. Little did I know I would get a full factory tour from Wendell. Talk about one of the perks of the business! While he was showing me around we went into the production area where they applied the aluminum ribbon to the diaphragms. He broke off a foot-long piece of ribbon and said “Hold out your hand”. I did so and he dropped it into my palm. It weighed basically nothing. I could see it but I could almost not feel it sitting there. It’s 1/10 the thickness of a human hair, and under normal circumstances no ribbon material this thin and light could withstand the pressures of being a speaker driver. However, when applied to a Mylar diaphragm suspended in front of magnets it work wonders with sound. It is this ribbon-based, very low mass, non-boxed approach that imbues the Maggie’s with incredible air and dimensionality. As I discovered when I got them home, I had not heard anything yet.

The last few pairs of speakers moving through my man cave were classic tower or floorstanding box designs. Some weighed in at over 50 kg apiece. Even with stands attached, the Magneplanar .7’s come in at a svelte 12 kg. At a height of nearly 1400mm, this was a change, and a welcome one too as the Maggie’s do require some patience in proper placement. Anyone who has spent a few days fine tuning the positioning of 100kg or more of loudspeaker boxes will relish the idea of a loudspeaker that weighs so little. The Magnepan Magneplanar .7’s tweeter is located on one vertical section of the entire 1400mm height. Sold in mirrored pairs, you can set them up with tweeters on the inside or outside depending on room size and listening preference. You are also recommended not to place Magnepan’s parallel to the rear wall. Instead, they are to be toed in (angled ‘outside forward, inside to the back’) and away from walls to allow the panel to radiate, using the walls as reflective surfaces. So, a bit of experimentation was in order. My final positioning was with the tweeters to the outside placed about 2.3m apart and my listening chair centre equidistant in front. Rear walls were 1m away from the closest speaker point.

Magnepan’s are reputed to require lots of power. One dealer I have visited only shows them with large wattage amps. Wendell said to try any amp and see how it went. So I started my listening with my Cary SLI-80 tube integrated in 40-watt triode mode and began with James Taylor’s *October Road* [2002 Columbia, 16/44.1 AIFF]. The title song is a sweet acoustic guitar-centred ballad in the classic James Taylor style. The .7’s were up to the task; James was in the room and had a substance I do not experience with many speakers. The track, however is not a demanding one for low frequency notes. It was, rather, in the sweet spot for the .7’s whose bass extends to about 45Hz. Larger Magnepan’s with greater surface area will dip into the mid-30Hz range or even down to 25Hz for the mighty flagship 20.7’s. However, I do not have the room for a speaker that large. With this style of music in a mid-sized room the character of the .7’s was very pleasing and offered a strong first impression.

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► Moving on to something with more kick in the low end, I chose Steely Dan’s ‘Babylon Sisters’ from *Gaucha* [1980 MCA HDTracks 24/96 AIFF]. The driving low bass notes throughout the song were there, but without the authority I am accustomed to. I switched the amp into Ultralinear mode at 80 Watts and the solidity improved. Still, I was beginning to understand where music types and genre’s along with amp pairing and room size made a more significant difference with these smaller paneled quasi-ribbon speakers. Moving on then to the PS Audio BHK250, I upped the game to 500 watts into 4 Ohms. Steely Dan was back in a good way with the extra power and current. The .7’s opened up much more, and the crisp and authoritative bass was nearly perfect in my smaller listening room. In addition, I was enjoying an almost holographic listening experience as the famous Magnepan dimensionality appeared right in front of me.

Having found the performance sweet spot of power and placement I went for the classic Magnepan experience; female vocals. Reaching into the depths of the music collection I pulled out Linda Ronstadt’s *What’s New* with the Nelson Riddle Orchestra. [1983 Elektra/Asylum DVD Audio 202 Warner Strategic Marketing]. The title song is a standard style torch song with massed strings and horns. Whether it is Holly Cole, Lyn Stanley, or Linda, the experience of feeling like you are in the front table at the club sitting a few feet away from the singer is, for me, always a special one. The sense of presence was exceptional. The scale of the backing orchestra was powerful yet properly controlled when placed in a supporting role for a single singer. I seized the opportunity to listen to the entire disc with this chain of excellent audio gear.

Knowing that a high-end Class AB amp paired well with the .7’s I looked around for another amp to try. Sitting in their boxes waiting to be shipped back were the Bel Canto Ref600M Class-D mono’s. 600 Watts into 4 Ohms fit the bill perfectly. I pulled them out of their boxes and put them into the system along with the companion DAC 2.7. If you are a fan of acoustic guitar you must spend time with Tommy Emmanuel. He uses the guitar as a percussion instrument as well creating a sound that is nuanced and unique. His album *Center Stage* (2008 Favoured Nations CD Rip 16/44.1 AIFF) offers up ‘Mombasa’, a sonic performance that takes the guitar and turns it into a drum kit and seemingly two guitars

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Two Way Quasi Ribbon

**Frequency Response:** 45-22kHz +/- 3dB

**Sensitivity:** 86dB/500Hz /2.83v

**Impedance:** 4 Ohms

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 387mm x 1378mm x 32mm

**Weight:** 12 kg each

**Price:** £1,995 per pair

**Manufacturer:** Magnepan Incorporated

**URL:** [www.magnepan.com](http://www.magnepan.com)

**Distributed in the UK by:** Decent Audio

**URL:** [www.decentaudio.co.uk](http://www.decentaudio.co.uk)

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playing at the same time. I have heard this live, and it is wonderful. You could not comprehend one person was doing everything you were hearing. However, having it reproduced on the Magnepan Magneplanar .7’s with the Bel Canto gear was a close second, and that makes this an exceptional audio experience.

While this is a single product review I have to comment on the synergy of the two Minnesota based brands; Bel Canto, and Magnepan. For a system that comes in at under £10,000 to sound this fantastic and to be as practical from a living space point of view is terrific. Small home owners need never look with wistfulness on their friends’ ‘Audiophile’ system again. This is not a compromise at any level. It is music.

Tradeoff’s? Magnepan’s will not blow your neighbours off their porch, and the Magnepan Magneplanar .7 being the smallest of them all is no loudspeaker for a headbanger. Also, large orchestral works will not bloom to their maximum in the lowest registers. Both of these issues can be mitigated with Magnepan’s DWM bass panels. For most music, however, the delivery will have a spaciousness and dimensionality to be savoured, so yes, “Come Here, you have to hear these things!”

The Magnepan Magneplanar .7’s are an exceptional value! Most highly recommended. +