

AUDIO VIDEO

MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR VISION AND SOUND

An informed and insightful choice

PEAKS

✓ FOR

A new level of sonic maturity and finesse is made available through the Thiel sound. An elegant and compact floor standing speaker which offers a large voice that is detailed, transparent, and dynamic. The .5 provides a whole lot of sonic value.

✗ AGAINST

Not all listeners may appreciate at first the sophistication offered—listen some more. Benefits from correct and careful placement, and fine amplification.

↔ TESTED WITH

Theta Data Basic II CD transport, Theta DS Progeny digital processor, Harman/Kardon HD7325 CD player, Copeland CSA 14 and Harman/Kardon HK660 integrated amplifiers, Cardas 300-B, Kimber PSB, Transparent Audio Music link plus interconnects, Kimber Illuminati MkII and Simply Physics digital coaxial links, B&W DM 610i, B&W P5 and Sonus Faber Minima loudspeakers, Transparent Audio The Wave and Siltec FTM-12 Ribbon speaker cables.

Rtc PRICE
R9 995 pair [\$2800 US]

AS ONE EXPERIENCES things, it seems kind of automatic that one starts to gain insight. I suppose the coined phrase—“Live and you will learn” sheds some light on my point, but falls short of being completely explanatory. A combination of time, experience, and honest open mindedness goes a long way to providing a level of insight that is simply not always available on demand.

My reaction to the CS.5 loudspeaker may have been very different if I had not had the opportunity of spending time with so many various speakers over the past several months—from a variety of entry level boxes to reference trend setters, including the top range Thiel CS5i and the very musical CS7, and of course my own Wilson System V.

But I have, and it has enhanced my ability to get to grips with what the Thiel CS.5 is all about.

Since 1976, Jim Thiel has been building loudspeakers, with the main intention of making listening to music enjoyable. Today Thiel offers a line-up of seven models, with the CS.5 being their smallest floor-standing speaker.

The CS.5 is a two way ported speaker, offering the same styling as the full range CS5i. The styling is classic, with a hint of state of



the art, due to the diminishing depth presented by the sloped front baffle. The baffle allows the drivers to be positioned for correct time alignment, while the crossover is designed to provide phase-accurate transitions between the drivers.

The heavily constructed cabinet uses one inch thick cabinet walls, which are said to reduce unwanted vibrations, and

improve both clarity and imaging. The one inch tweeter is a metal dome unit, while the 6.5 inch woofer incorporates a short coil/long gap motor design, which also utilizes copper, to maintain a stable magnetic field. The CS.5 is said to go down to 55 Hz, with in-room response confirming that the bass response may go even lower.

The finish of the speaker is exceptional, with the ultimate in

aesthetic flexibility being offered by a huge selection of finishes. The standard cabinet is offered in Walnut and Black wood. The review pair supplied was finished in Morado, one of the optional and more costly finishes. However, the woodwork is so fine, and the finish so beautiful, that the specialist finishes will certainly be worthwhile for some listeners.

The Thiel loudspeakers make use of what is called a Coherent Source design, the first of which was released in 1978. The basic concept behind the Coherent Source design is that proper time alignment is achieved. This is done by mounting the drivers along a sloped baffle, and using a coherent phase crossover for time and phase accuracy.

My initial reaction to the sound of the CS.5 was quite different to the way I felt towards the end of the two months that I spent with it. The Thiel offers a sound that is not characteristic of an entry level floor standing speaker. It is simply too mature and subtle to believe.

Room placement is very important with the Thiel. Put it where it is unhappy and you will lose out on its solid bass foundation, and its midrange will thin out to a point that is

disappointing. So firstly, set it up right. Then make sure the amplifier is cookin'.

The Harman/Kardon HK660 works well. The Copeland CSA 14 was splendid. The Rowland Model 8 put me into another world. But you do not need to spend that much on amplification. Most of the review was done using the Copeland, although I would have liked to hear what the new Classé 100 amp could do, since the Thiel has the ability to make the most of even the finest amplifiers.

Once correctly set up, just listen. And I did for about a week before I got a grip on the CS.5.

It is a very complex yet simple sound, offering a very open and insightful window on the music. Simple.

And yet not quite. Its ability to reproduce nuance and emotion, its tight grip on rhythmic lines and pace are subtle, yet what make the Thiel so refined and capable. This sonic integrity makes the Thiel so pleasant to live with.

Detail and transparency work hand in hand to provide a natural integration and balance throughout the sonic bandwidth. This balance follows through to the midrange bloom and integration of emotion and life. The Thiel

never seems to be trying, it simply does what it has to do.

Interestingly, this emotion and inviting musicality is managed with a sound that can be a little cool overall with immensely clean lines. The CS.5 has a liquid midrange, but let me put it into perspective by saying it's a glass and not a bottle.

But all this has a positive impact on the overall sound. While other speakers would fall short, the Thiel requires this recipe to blossom into its complex bouquet of nuances and refinement.

And that is why I believe my reaction to the Thiel was so different to what it might have been. The Thiel gives you your music straight up—no water, no ice. Musical reproduction has weight and substance, so although the Thiel's footprint is small, its sound easily fills a room.

The soundstage is large, with height reproduction handled very well. Your listening position will have an effect on the overall image height. Bass lines are tight and poignant, with a great deal of speed and transparency.

Midrange coherency and detail are superb for a speaker at this price, with very little loss of focus. Listening to the string

sections on Malher's Symphonie no. 2 was very revealing of the Thiel's ability to blend detail, air, and transparency into a very realistic reproduction.

The CS.5's tweeter is equipped with a startling revealing nature. It also has the ability to reproduce good amounts of air and space. Fine depth and imaging allow it to produce a level of sonic maturity that places the Thiel in a reference position at this price point.

The Thiel CS.5s offered me an unexpected insight into the music which was played through them. Their ability to reproduce the truth, in a superbly sophisticated way, puts them in a light of their own. They provide clean, uncluttered businesslike style, while retaining the musical integrity of the music. The sound is not lush or romantic, but its agility, fine pace and rhythm tend to take hold of your eardrums. It pleases the listener.

Probably not the first speaker you will own, but one that will be there when you are ready. If you are looking for admittance into the realm of true honest loudspeakers, the Thiel .5 has to be your first choice. Affordable, elegant and enjoyable.

—Gavin Isaacs