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Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 Special Edition & Leisure 3 Special Edition Signature Loudspeakers

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Review By Ron Nagle
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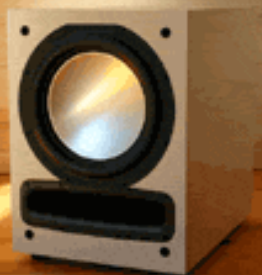
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In my ever-changing avocation I continually try to keep on top of rapidly shifting audio developments here at home and at the same time keep abreast of events abroad. As I have observed these many years, the Pacific Rim, and China in particular have established an ever-growing presence in high-end audio. The Chinese can manufacture to a high standard of quality at a price that is very hard to match elsewhere. As a result the entry level for good speakers and electronics is coming down like confetti at a ticker tape parade It is a presence that I hope will allow my merely middle-income audio pals and myself to afford better hi-end music systems.



Learning from the Japanese the Chinese have employed American design consultants to fashion audio components for the U.S. market. The Chinese



understand there exists a very strong cultural influence on what is perceived as good sound. The names of such talented people as Mr. Phil Jones and Mr. Mark Shifter should be familiar to all dyed in the wool audiophiles. As a matter of fact the entrepreneur Mark Shifter (Audio Alchemy, et al) told me that on one of his visits to china he watched a team of Italian Engineers installed a million Dollar computer controlled wood veneering machine in a Chinese speaker factory. Quoting Mr. Shifter "*They ship raw logs in at one end of the factory and finished speakers come out at the other end.*"

Understand it is not my intention to associate these names with any specific company or products. But to illustrate the lengths the Chinese have gone to and the effort they have invested in this reconstruction. I can remember a time when the Chinese made small toy cars that were stamped out of salvaged and flattened tin cans labeled made in china. The basic economy of the whole country has moved from an agrarian base to manufacturing. And so it has come to pass audio pals that a speaker manufactured in the Chinese province of Shandong has evolved into something so good that it can compete in the world's high-end audio market place. OK so all this is not exactly a hot news flash but the hundreds of millions of Yuan they have sunk into upgrading their manufacturing facilities is now evident in a two products I would like to tell you about.

Preface

Once upon a time in my audio past I once owned and then sold British Chartwell Ls3/5a monitor speakers. They taught me the value of simplicity I never forgot that in spite of their small size they could reproduce a deep and wide sound stage. Ever since that lamented time I have valued speakers that had the same wonderful ability to disappear into the performance and seemingly fade from my field of vision. The word that describes this elusive quality is 摠ransparency". It is in truth a complex mixture of design elements blended together in just the right proportions to open a



window on the performance. To achieve this the first design goal has to be seamless driver matching and phase alignment. These qualities are only two of the many factors involved but this is what always reaches out and grabs my attention. Now consider that a ribbon tweeter is a difficult choice for any designer to integrate it has very low impedance and low sensitivity and may require a matching transformer. It is hard to match the speed of this transducer with conventional piston drivers. But when it is done correctly it can render treble details with a sweetness and airy quality that is at the cutting edge of what is possible. If you read between these lines I guess I just confessed that I have a bias for electrostatic speakers. And in my estimation the next best transducer has to be another fast low mass device and that certainly includes ribbon drivers.

Profile

Right now my sight is fixed on a company called Jinlang Audio and their Aurum Cantus line of speakers from Shandong China. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines these two words (derived from Latin) as Aurum the word for Gold and the word Cantus; it is a synonym of the word chant. This company manufactures the very competent subjects of this inquiry the Leisure 2SE and Leisure 3SES speakers. When I received the first review samples the Aurum Cantus representative informed me that these very same Le 2SE and 3SES speakers use a modification of the stock Chinese crossover. It is one that is specifically intended for the American market. Outside of the U.S.A. in markets along the Pacific Rim and Australia and in England they do recognize Aurum Cantus for a very high standard of quality and performance. AC just happens to be the world's most prolific OEM (original equipment manufacturer) of aluminum ribbon tweeters.

Leisure 2 SE

The Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 SE (Special Edition) was the first



speaker I listened to in the company's product line. It is a two-way design utilizing a 70 millimeter G-2 Aurum Cantus aluminum ribbon tweeter and a 5.2" mid-woofer with a carbon fiber Kevlar composite cone. The tweeter is rated out to 40kHz and the low end extends down to -3dB at 55Hz, the mid to tweeter cross over is at 2500 Hz. sensitivity is given as 87dB/W/m. The speaker's are made as a matched pair; my samples both bear the same serial numbers, K00123. The front baffle is slanted backward to time align the two drivers. I placed the speakers at a height of 24" on matching Aurum Cantus gloss black leather and lacquer stands.

I found that along the vertical axis the listening position was not critical. The MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard) enclosure tapers upward 14" from a 9" wide and 11" deep base to a 6 3/8" width at the top. The non-parallel sides of the 25 lb. enclosures are unusually dense and inert. My samples are finished with gorgeous Brazilian



Rosewood veneer combined with a lustrous black piano lacquer. The rear panel is black lacquered and ported and has two heavy-duty

gold plated binding posts mounted on a thick aluminum plate. The appearance, the fit and finish is luxurious and screams quality! It is of great interest to me that another Aurum Cantus speaker the Le 2SVS and a rather better known speaker the \$3,500. Red Rose Music, *Rose Bud 2* are both made in the same Chinese factory by Jin Lang Audio Co. Ltd. They share many things in common with the Le 2se. They both use the Aurum Cantus sourced aluminum ribbon tweeter and a very similar mid woofer. Both speakers are housed in a ported enclosure of the same volume; both of these drivers according to Red Rose are 損 proprietary and unavailable elsewhere." Not so incidentally the larger Red Rose *Classic* ribbon speaker that sold for \$8000 is identical in appearance and driver configuration and is in fact a twin of the Aurum Cantus ?i>Moon Goddess 2 which retails for \$2,800. I realize that there may not be a Red Rose anything by the time this article sees daylight. I believe this comparison most certainly drives home the point I'm trying to make and in part explains my enthusiasm for these speakers.

The Aurum Cantus Leisure 3 Special Edition Signature

Let me say upfront that I purchased the Le 2SE speakers and I consider them a bargain at their price of 1,300 Dollars. Shortly after that I saw an ad for the new Aurum Cantus Le 3SES in a British Hi end magazine. I then sent an e-mail to the distributor requesting review samples of this speaker. It took an additional two months before the United States distributor was able to obtain a pair of the Special Edition Signature.

The Le 3SES is a larger version of the excellent Le 2 Special Edition. The cabinet enclosures of both speakers have the same shape; it is one that tapers upward from a wider base, roughly forming a truncated pyramid.



Looking at the front of the speaker the Le 3SES (converting from metric) measures 11.9" deep at the base by 9.7" wide tapering up to 7.25" wide at the top. The enclosure height at 15.9" it is approximately 2 inches taller than the Le 2 SE. Additionally the front panels of the Le 3 SES just like the smaller version is slanted backward to time align the two drivers. The Le 3 SES logically has a larger enclosure than the Le 2SE this to accommodate the larger drivers. This larger version uses a G3si 100mm aluminum ribbon tweeter, which is 30mm longer than the 70mm Le 2SE tweeter. This is paired with a carbon fiber Kevlar cone mid woofer that is 6.5" or 1.25 inches larger in diameter than the 2 SE.

It doesn't take a lot of thought to see that the object here was to extend the useful range of the tweeter and mid bass beyond the range of the smaller and very competent Le 2SE. The frequency response is specified as 38Hz up to 40kHz. Before I get further into techno babble let me reiterate that the enclosures of this speaker like it's smaller sibling is world class gorgeous. Finished with a piano black face and top and beautiful rosewood veneer wrapped around gently sculpted sides. Both speaker models are finished with 20 coats of hand rubbed (with rabbit fur) clear lacquer. The black back panels of the larger Le 3SES like the smaller version has two large gold plated binding posts mounted on a satin finished aluminum badge/plate. And just below that is a 2 1/4" diameter port. Again not so incidentally the Le 3SES also comes in matched pairs my samples are both serial numbered K00115 and the MSRP for this pair is \$1,900.

Performance

As you might expect straight out of the box both of the Aurum Cantus speakers are a bit discontinuous, in plain English there is an audible difference between the ribbon tweeter and the mid woofer. At first the piston mid driver is like an old man getting out of bed, just a bit stiff and sluggish. The ribbon has at times a very slight ringing quality on a very narrow

band of frequencies. This quality is even more noticeable with the 100mm G3si ribbon of the larger AC 3SES. However I do not consider this significant, it is a quality that fades into memory after about 8 hours of pumping tunes through them. During my evaluation I positioned both versions of the speakers about 8 feet from my seated position with both sides toed in about 12 degrees and 5.5 feet apart. This setup was arrived at after experimentation and was optimized for my listening space. Understand that my reference is the human voice. This is what I know most intimately and consequently I do not require very deep bass. For example, one of my tests for the mid range or maybe I should say voice range is a selection from the album *Only the Lonely* [Capital 48471] and of course It's the Chairman Of The Board singing *What's New*.

Let me digress for just a moment: I have a friend whom I could easily call a Sinatra expert. It was he who put me on to using this recording and this track as a male vocal reference. Listening to this same recording through the smaller Le 2SE he commented on a slight lack of "chest resonance". You should understand that when translated from Phile Speak he was referring to an organic quality that warms the sound of a human voice. At the time I agreed, but in my estimation it was slight and not getting in the way of what I loved. I was enthralled by the detailed lucid open images painted by the ribbon tweeter. Now maybe you can understand my anticipation of these same qualities albeit very much enhanced, coming from the newer Le 3SES extended range version. Side by side the description of the ability to recreate a musical performance is very similar for both of these very competent transducers. As you might suspect in a direct comparison of the two speakers the top one half of their frequency range sounds almost identical in all respects. It is the promise of the extended lower midrange and bass that compelled my interest.

Once again I listened to that same Sinatra cut *What's New* this time with the AC 3 SES and the promise was fulfilled, Frankie Sin now stands there replete with a chest and the middle range of the human voice is more organic and life like. The improvement was subtle but very evident especially in a direct comparison. I was concerned that the midrange would

be less defined by the larger mid range driver. But that was not the case the very competent ribbon driver is extended farther down to cover the mid frequencies and the mid driver uses a 3rd order sloped crossover that is 100Hz lower (to 2600Hz). I ran a crude comparison frequency sweep recorded on a Rives Audio test CD using a Radio Shack SPL meter with both versions of the Leisure speakers. During my evaluation I positioned both versions of the speakers about 8 feet from my seated position with both sides towed in about 12 degrees and 5'7" apart. My room measures 11'8" behind the speakers 22' deep and 8'3" high. My test of the AC 3SES shows that above a frequency of 80 or 90 Hz the response in the lower mid range on up to about 6.5 Kilocycles is within 2.5dB of ruler flat. When it reaches 8 kHz in my room it takes a 6dB dip and then starts to slope back up again. An audiophile friend took another series of measurements in a much larger room using a stand mounted calibrated microphone feeding into an IVIE Spectrum Analyzer. He measured a much smoother response that was essentially flat from 2.5kHz up to 20kHz at a distance a little over one meter. The bass response had a slight rise around 90Hz and at 80Hz began a gradual down slope. The scale he was using on the IVIE Analyzer only ran up to 20kHz.

Understand you should not try to apply my measurements to infer anything about sound quality in your room. I believe the majority of the inconsistent nonlinear frequency measurements we recorded in both rooms are a direct result of interaction with room boundaries and objects in the room. And I am certain that I could alter some of my test results by repositioning the speakers in my room. However I do believe my very crude little test does correlate what I hear through out the lower midrange on up. There exists two valid criticisms you should be aware of, the first is both versions of these speakers would benefit if driven by no less than 50 watts, additionally that amplifier should have very good bass control (high damping factor). The second caveat is that if you increase the volume to far the sound will progressively become congested and muddled. Both of these things I would not normally do and so I do not consider these to be a big deal. I'm convinced that's simply not what these speakers where designed to do.

I would like to mention one last recording even though it's not strictly a reference I use but rather a recording I enjoy very much. It is a gathering of famous artists brought together to celebrate the Queen of England on her Golden Jubilee. Recorded live out doors in front of Buckingham Palace this concert is ever so clean and full of spacious ambience that it serves to very clearly highlight the abilities of the Aurum Cantus designs. Listening to this performance I can believe that I am outside with the audience sitting on the grass and facing the stage. You can find it on Virgin [7243 8 12833 25] and it is called *Party At The Palace*. Did you ever hope to hear Brian Wilson performing *Good Vibrations* backed by The Royal Academy Of Music Symphony Orchestra? Of course there is much more to commend it, like Rod Stewart, Sir Elton John, Sir Paul McCartney and Eric Clapton to name only some of the talent on this disc, it is a wonderful event that is wonder filled!














Summation

The tests I ran on the AC Le 3SES roughly quantify what I was hearing. They are most definitely detailed high-resolution monitors. From the low mid range on up to dog whistle you simply hear the electronics and all the connective cabling and the quality of the source recording. The tweeters are the stars of the show portraying the sizzle of a steel brush on a brass cymbal and all the ambient clues imbedded in the performance, it is extension seemingly without limit. As you should expect only in the bass does it get a bit slower, but remember these are only two-way speakers. Still and all the integration of the two drivers are skillfully done, and additionally the component materials for both models used in the crossovers are first rate. I consider this a hallmark of the design. But In the end I purchased the smaller Le 2 SE speakers partially as an evaluation tool and for use in a second small system. And when the need arises I will use them too listen to Line conditioners and interconnect cables. For that purpose I need the G2 ribbon driver extension out to 40kHz.

The larger Le 3 SES version for an additional 300 dollars is a logical upgrade from its predecessor. You get better bass response along with a more natural organic true to life lower midrange. If I had to decide which of these two speakers to listen too full range as I might with large scaled classical music there would be no contest. The choice would be the AC Le 3 SES. Still it has surprisingly good bass extension so much so that I am really not aware that there is anything lacking. If you're like me and you focus primarily on the human voice or you prefer chamber music or a small jazz ensemble and do not require subterranean bass then look no farther. Like the British BBC LS/3 5a speakers of old these certainly qualify as excellent Mini Monitors capable of painting a wide and deep reality you can listen into. These speakers have been a refreshing breath of fresh air both of them are 2-way speakers that are better than most 3-way speakers on the market. With the right equipment played at a reasonable volume they offer hours of deep emersion into the music I care about. With the exception of the bass extension they have no major faults. If you understand that these speakers fit within a niche and if your requirements are much like mine then you need not look any further. I think they are easily worth their asking price. Possessing an exceptional imaging ability both versions of this speaker are very easy to set up on 24" stands. You can easily pick them up and move them along with their stands to where they sound best. In this world of crazy costly (Italian) Hi-End two-way speakers these Aurum Cantus products are an unabashed bargain. Indeed I must confess I harbor a feeling of satisfaction that I was the one who found them in this country. Easily two of the best Mini Monitor speakers made anywhere I can and do recommend both of them.

Semper Hi Fi

What follows is the standardized Enjoy The Music rating system but in this case bear in mind that the sub bass rating of 2 notes is for the Le 3SES. The smaller 2SE only rates 1 blue note for sub-bass everything else is almost identical.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	
High-frequencies (3,000Hz on up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape width front	
Soundscape width rear	
Soundscape depth behind speakers	
Soundscape extension into the room	
Imaging	

Fit and Finish	
Self Noise	N/A
Value for the Money	

Specifications

Leisure 2 SE

Type: two-way bass reflex design

Frequency Response: 55Hz to 40kHz

Dispersion: Horizontal off axis 30 degrees

Sensitivity: 87 dB/W/m

Impedance: 8 Ohms, minimum 6.4 Ohms

Power Handling: 150Watts

Tweeter: G2 70mm aluminum ribbon shielded

Mid-Woofer: 5.2" Carbon Fiber and Kevlar copper coated aluminum flat wire

Port tube: 2.25" diameter

Crossover: 2500Hz

Crossover: Attenuation: Woofer 12dB Tweeter 18dB

Connections: 5 way gold plated Mega binding posts.

Base Dimensions: 14.2 x 9 x 11 (HxWxD in inches)

Net Weight: 23.1 lb/each

Price: \$1299/pr in standard version, \$1499/pr (Signature), stands add \$199/pr

Leisure 3 SES

Type: two-way bass reflex design

Frequency Response: 38Hz to 40kHz

Dispersion: Horizontal off axis 30 degrees

Sensitivity: 89dB/W/m

Impedance: 8 Ohms

Power Handling: 100 Watts

Tweeter: G3si 100mm aluminum ribbon, shielded

Mid-woofer: AC-6.5" Carbon fiber Kevlar cone, 25mm copper coated aluminum flat wire. voice coil, 5mm excursion

Port tube: 2.25" diameter

Crossover: 2600 Hz, 3rd order

Crossover Components: Mundorf-Supreme capacitors (M-cap), 5N copper inductors, metal oxide film resistors

Base Dimensions: 15.8 x 9.7 x 11.9 (HxWxD in inches)

Connectors: 5way gold plated Mega binding posts

Net Weight: 28 lb/each

Price: \$1899/pr

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