

£1,200 per pair ☎ 020 8459 8113 # www.aurumcantus.com

AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3 SE

Lacquered veneer and a ribbon tweeter for less than you'd expect

Although Aurum Cantus had its early roots in Europe, the company's website makes it clear that this is a distinctly Chinese operation. It was founded in 1994 and from the outset specialised in making ribbon-type drivers to handle the top end of the audio band. Combine just such a high-class tweeter with some of the finest poplar burl veneered side-cheeks you'll ever see, and the result is a substantial standmount that looks considerably more expensive than its asking price of £1,200 per pair.

Ribbons have long been highly regarded by audiophiles, from the legendary British Kelly/Decca device of the 1950s to the extraordinary full range Apogee models of the 1980s. They seem to be on the increase too, as a lot of them were visible (and audible) at 2004's Heathrow hi-fi show a couple of months back. So what makes a ribbon driver special? Essentially, the ribbon itself is the voice coil, unwound and stretched out into a strip so that actually acts as the diaphragm itself – ensuring very direct communication of the signal.

Besides the 100x8mm G3Si ribbon, which operates above 2.5kHz, there's a rear-ported 165mm bass/mid driver with a cast frame and a 115mm diameter carbon fibre/Kevlar loaded cone. The enclosure is very solid as well as beautiful, those beautifully veneered side-cheeks sandwiching piano gloss black

front, back, top and base. Useful asymmetry should help avoid focusing the internal standing waves, and clever shaping should assist lateral dispersion. High quality crossover components, fed from a pair of big and beautifully solid terminals, complete the overall luxury bookshelf experience.

SOUND QUALITY

Mounting the Leisure 3 SEs on 600mm tall Kudos S100 stands placed the ribbon at just about the right height to deliver optimum upper treble output to seated listeners, ensuring maximum transparency. Slightly shorter stands should work equally well, but it is important to make sure that the speakers are mounted at or slightly below ear height, because – as with all ribbon drivers – the highest frequencies are focused into a relatively narrow vertical 'window'. Laterally, dispersion is smooth and wide.

With that proviso, the top end of this speaker is clearly superior to normal dome tweeters in both smoothness and delicacy – so much so, the first impression was that it might be dull. On this occasion, however, that initial judgement turned out to be misleading. The strength of the ribbon tweeter lies more in the way that it doesn't draw attention to itself, and in the subtlety with which it reproduces the most delicate musical nuances without the slightest exaggeration.

Smoothness and evenness are perhaps this speaker's most endearing characteristics, against which must be set some lack of brio and dynamic excitement. The tonal balance is impressively neutral, and the sound is largely free from any 'boxiness' and cabinet coloration. On the other hand, it might be too laid back for some tastes, and the bass end in particular can sound ponderous and heavy with some material, even with the speaker kept well clear of walls. This is a speaker that will be very easy to live with, aesthetically and sonically, and while it isn't the fastest and most dramatic

communicator around, that ribbon tweeter unquestionably confers a very sweet and seductive top end. **HFC**

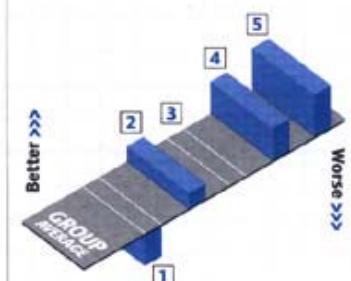


LAB REPORT

The manufacturer's claim for 88dB sensitivity seems a little optimistic here, as our test regime – using a 'real world' far-field in-room averaged arrangement – comes up with a rather more modest, and perhaps more realistic 85-86dB. That is a comfortably below average figure, but it's not unreasonable in the context of the decent bass extension (6dB at 26Hz under in-room conditions), plus the amp-friendly impedance (a minimum of seven ohms at 48Hz and 170Hz).

The reflex port here is tuned to 48Hz, which explains why there's a mild mid-bass excess in the overall in-room response. There's some general unevenness through the bass and lower midband, though the net balance is quite flat here, and things become very smooth and well ordered above 300Hz. Just a slight excess is seen 700Hz-1kHz, to add a touch of forwardness, but the trend thereafter is exceptionally smooth and well extended through the frequency range.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -30%
- 2] Bass extension >> +15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/5.4 ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	48Hz	26Hz

VERDICT

- SOUND >> 87%**
- PRACTICALITY >> 83%**
- BUILD >> 93%**
- VALUE >> 84%**

This substantially built and attractively shaped standmount comes from China, which explains how you get the fabulous lacquered veneer and classy ribbon tweeter at a relatively affordable price.

HI-FI CHOICE **86%**
OVERALL SCORE



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