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Icon Audio |



When we tested the Icon Stereo 300B amplifier we thought it was good but quite critical of the partner: many valve amps it prefers a high sensitivity design and it just happens that Icon makes such a product: a loudspeaker (The MFV signifying that they are Made For Valves).

The MFV3s are well built, conventional looking, floorstanders with the drive units arranged in a D'Appolito (a tweeter is set between the twin bass-mid units in a vertical array). The high quality Cherry wood of the beautifully finished with the pair being veneer matched showing great attention to detail. The break line baffle and sides worked well to break up the mass of the speaker visually giving them a more slender appearance. You leave the rather bulky grilles in the box as they do have a negative effect on the performance and detract from the speaker aesthetically.

From the first bar it was obvious that the MFV3 was a better match than those we had tried previously for the higher sensitivity and less demanding nature of the speakers really suited the amp allowing it to breathe more. The speakers have very good weight and body, with the bass providing a solid foundation to the music; extension does seem to be at the expense of upper bass slam, and snares lost some of their natural snap involving listen with impressive dynamic range and transients even when used with a low-powered amp.

The MFV3 provides a fast and expressive mid with plenty of detail and good layering of instruments even in the last word in finesse. The high sensitivity manifests itself as a slightly wayward top end, a sense that the speaker took priority over ultimate control and polish: this is not a bad thing as they sound free from the much tweaking and filtering that can plague some modern speaker designs. The MFV3's warm and wonderfully seductive element to it with instruments displaying a very tangible quality.

Partnering the MFV3 with the more vice-like grip of a good solid state amp did reign in the wayward treble but something was definitely lost in the transition: the wonderful sense of freedom and air disappeared. This can be attributed to the move away from valves but ultimately reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the speaker. It is a pleasant change to hear a speaker that has a sense of freedom to it, and that does not trade it for frequency response or technically best measured performance. When combined with an amp such as the Icon Stereo 300B these speakers are capable of wonderful musical insight if not the highest fidelity in performance territory. The richness that was evident when we reviewed the amp was still there but now the system had musical rhythm. On the majority of tracks the timing was impressive but on occasions, with very complex harmonies, the puppy dog eyes of the speakers had a tendency to muddle the fine detail and, as a result, the rhythm and timing suffered.

SUMMARY

The MFV3s certainly live up to their name: when partnered with a quality valve amp they excel in the music's timing and rhythm, the foundation of all great systems; the MFV3's strengths far outweigh the weaknesses: wayward treble and slight lack of finesse because the sense of freedom and exuberance is a real breath of

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