



# Opera Callas Tebaldi

*This monumental multi-driver model from Opera has a big, generous voice*

PRICE £9,995 per pair CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer, Bucks SL0 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.operaloudspeakers.com

**O**pera is an Italian speaker brand that has particularly close links to UK distributor UKD, as the latter is a major business partner in the Opera, er, operation. *Hi-Fi Choice's* previous experience of Opera models has been limited to two very small Prima standmounts, but this £9,995 per pair Tebaldi is one of the largest, heaviest and most complex speakers ever to come into the magazine for scrutiny. It stands nearly a metre and a half tall, and its depth is nearly half of that considerable height, so while the front view remains a fashionably slim 25cm, the total weight here amounts to a daunting 90kg – and that's not including the wooden packing crate in which it travels.

Though unquestionably enormous, this enclosure is also unquestionably exquisitely made, showing that Italian flair for craftsmanship that has played an important role in putting that country firmly on the international hi-fi speaker map. Real solid or veneered wood covers the overwhelming majority of a very complex enclosure. The top is hewn from solid wood, and shaped to chamfer and smooth the edges. The veneered sides are curved and bowed, just 25cm wide at the front, reaching a maximum of 30cm about a third of the way down the sides, and then tapering to a narrow 15cm at the rear.

The veneer is laid on as a series of wide horizontal strips which supplies attractive patterning. The front is a chunky slab of MDF, covered in leather and heavily chamfered at prismatic angles to promote good lateral distribution. Not that there's any risk of instability here, but the aesthetics benefit considerably from a generous flared plinth. This is fitted with castors rather than spikes, as the designers believe the mass alone is sufficient to ensure solid support. Three separate optional grilles are supplied to cover the various drivers, if desired.

The Tebaldi uses an extraordinary total of nine drive units, and that doesn't include a pair of auxiliary bass radiators (or ABRs) – these are devices which look entirely like regular drivers but behave like ports. That's a whole lot of drive units to try and get working together harmoniously, so how does it work?

Despite more drivers than the start of Le Mans, this is essentially a three-way design. Twin midrange drivers and a solitary tweeter are visible on the slim front baffle. Two bass units, each in its own sub-enclosure and loaded by an associated ABR, are situated on the inside faces. And a vertical row of four extra

tweeters adorn the slim rear panel. The bass drivers are both 200mm units with 155mm aluminium cones; the midrange is supplied by two 140mm drivers with 90mm magnesium cones; all five tweeters have 25mm doped fabric domes. Phew!

Both the bass and midrange pairs are described as operating in 'semi-parallel', presumably meaning that each driver of each pair uses slightly different filter points, which should improve the crossover transitions. Nominal crossover points are 160-200Hz (depending on the setting of a 'mid-bass' selector switch) and 2kHz. The most unusual feature is that rearward facing row of tweeters, which are configured as a cross-linked dipole, combining in- and out-of-phase units. This is in order to enhance the reflected treble soundfield without causing interference with the front tweeter.

The rear panel accommodates three terminal pairs plus a couple of toggle switches. The latter may be used either to reduce the rear tweeter output by 4dB, or to reduce the midbass level by 2dB. The three pairs of terminals don't address the three separate 'ways', as one might expect, but in practice the uppermost pair just feeds the rear tweeter array, allowing this to be simply disconnected if preferred. The other two pairs separately feed the solitary front tweeter and the bass/mid combination. Although the two ABR units look

bass sector from 30Hz to 80Hz is some 10dB stronger than the broad midband. This is obvious because the 100-250Hz region is 2-3dB too shy – despite using the higher midbass output setting on the network. Above 500Hz, though, it's beautifully flat and smooth.

Potential bass/room size issues aside, this speaker delivers a very fine performance through the upper registers. The sound here is beautifully neutral and open, with no hint of harshness, a fine dynamic range and impressive headroom. The unusual 'cross-linked dipole' rear tweeter arrangements turned out to be particularly effective, adding worthwhile spaciousness without in any way detracting from the precision of the stereo image. Big, generous, but above all spacious are the adjectives that immediately spring to mind in describing the sound of the Tebaldi.

This is a speaker that is sensitive not only to room size, but to music type, too. What could prove a little too heavy when playing relatively percussive music, such as rock or dance genre material where the kick drum and bass guitar tend to be well up in the mix, was much less of a problem with classical (and of course operatic) material. Here, the balance helped to give the whole soundstage a very engaging generosity, by giving extra emphasis to the reverberation and ambience that is present when a recording or broadcast is made in a large auditorium.

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just like drive units, they actually have no motors behind their cones and they are free to move in just the same way as an air column within a port. The advantage of the ABR is that it offers greater control over the various design parameters.

Sensitivity here is a quite modest 88dB, just as stated in the specification, and although the load falls to around four ohms through the lower midband, the Tebaldi is not particularly difficult to drive. The switch labelled 'mid-bass level' has most impact at 100Hz-250Hz.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Tebaldi and its pair of 200mm units sounded too bass-heavy under our room conditions. In our 4.3x2.6x5.5m room, the far-field averaged measurements confirmed the

This was particularly noticeable when listening to Radio Three's *Choral Evensong*, broadcast live and with invariably sensitive mike techniques from one or other of our medieval cathedrals. Few venues can match the atmosphere of an environment which is arguably better served by surround sound than most music sources, but the spaciousness and weight of the Tebaldi's performance certainly made the most of a very fine quality FM stereo transmission.

The Tebaldi proved a less than ideal match for our particular room size and type, but it can deliver a more even balance in a larger space with more low frequency absorption. Its sheer bulk is also clearly best suited to very large rooms, where the sheer beauty of its cabinetwork will be properly appreciated. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*