

GoldenEar Triton Five

Must-Audition

Jacob Heilbrunn



In Greek mythology, the demigod Triton is a creature of the depths who carries a trident. Half-man, half-fish, he resides in a golden palace at the bottom of the sea. But perhaps his most distinguishing characteristic is his ability to blow vigorously into a twisted conch shell to calm or rouse the waves.

So Triton is a fitting name for legendary manufacturer Sandy Gross' latest loudspeaker, the GoldenEar Triton Five. Much like the Greek god of yore, this GoldenEar speaker, roughly in the middle of the marque's lineup, has the ability to create upheaval or calm within the space of a few seconds. Connect speaker cables to it, hit play, and you have a rather formidable beast playing at musical levels far beyond its very modest (by high-end standards) price range. Indeed, install it into a system like mine, where much of the equipment is considerably more costly, and it more than holds its own in both musicality and sheer output.

These speakers, in other words, can rock, which is what they did when I put the pedal to the metal with a rare first pressing (courtesy of a magnanimous friend) of *Led Zeppelin II*, an LP released by Atlantic in April 1969. "Whole Lotta Love" had a whole lotta impact through the Tritons, with drum whacks whizzing through the air fronted by electric guitar solos and various sound effects. Is it beneficial for your ears to listen at those levels? Of course not. So I cooled it fairly soon. But still, even if such sound levels would give Gross himself heartburn, the inner audio devil in me couldn't resist seeing if the Triton Fives really have what it takes to peel out. They did, and do.

The Triton Five features an abundance of noteworthy drivers—a factor that contributes to its

projection of a luscious and bountiful soundstage. Another feature that helps the Five deliver such spacious sound—and sets it apart from most other speakers in the Triton line—is its four side-mounted, sub-bass radiators that are designed to deliver subwoofer bass without the need to employ an active sub. They're also positioned close to the floor to maximize their low-end impact. (More on the bass to come.) At the other end of the frequency spectrum, the Five's tweeter features what the company calls a High Velocity Ribbon Driver (kin the Heil air-motion transformer) designed to pressurize the air rather than pushing it back and forth to provide superior impedance matching. Meanwhile, the two 6" mid/bass drivers are made from a formulated polypropylene cone material combined with a unique apical glue-bonding technique. Throw in nonparallel walls, a sleek front, and what is a decidedly elegant black finish (on the review pair submitted to me), and you have a winning loudspeaker.

Once again, though, I have to confess that, as with some of the more economically priced equipment that's been in for review lately, I wasn't quite sure what to expect from these Triton Fives. The last time I listened extensively to a speaker in this price range was when I owned the Snell E/IV well over a decade ago. The Snells provided me with plenty of listening pleasure, and I recall them fondly to this day. But they had limitations that became more obvious as time went on. At the time, the Snells, a Conrad-Johnson preamplifier and amplifier, and a Linn turntable were at the extreme of what I could afford—and were what amounted to my audio gateway drug leading to the Magnepan 3.7 and then the 20.1 loudspeaker, Classé amplifiers, and so on. So listening to the Fives not only brought me full circle, but also provided a chance to see how much

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progress has been made in loudspeaker design in what amounts to an entry-level-high-end full-range transducer.

What did I notice first? The Triton's coherence was evident, and its treble capabilities and integration were striking. Every time I go to listen to a live orchestra I'm reminded of the degree to which audiophiles often seek out what they view as an airy, extended treble, which is fine and dandy, but it can get confused with an artificially sparkly sound. That's not what the Five produces. If anything, the overall texture landed somewhere on the darker side, particularly in the treble region. On a wonderful Carlos Kleiber live recording of the Vienna Philharmonic playing Strauss waltzes, for example, I was struck by the suppleness of the strings on "Accelerations." I was consistently impressed by the smoothness and silkiness of the Triton's tweeter; there was no etch, no glare, no trace of the digital nasties.

Soundstaging was also surprisingly focused. On the Kleiber recording, bass drum whacks were clearly defined in the rear of the hall with plenty of air surrounding flutes and the various other sections of the orchestra. Another example: The recent Anderson & Roe piano duo CD *The Art of Bach*, released by Steinway & Sons, features creative and innovative arrangements that delve into Bach's compositions in new ways. Once again, soundstaging was spot-on. The two pianos were precisely delineated, making it easy not only to follow where they were positioned relative to one another, but also to distinguish their intricate counterpoint.

The Triton Fives boast an excellent jump factor—they're quite fast. I've become

increasingly aware that speed is crucial to dynamics. It isn't just the sheer wattage of an amplifier, but also the overall transient response of the entire system that can add to or detract from verisimilitude. For instance, I was somewhat taken aback by the sheer propulsive energy and whack of the Fives on the CD *Count Basie Remembered* [Nagel Heyer Records] by The New York Allstars, which was recorded live in Hamburg before an enthusiastic audience. It certainly sounded all-star. On the cut "Swingin' the Blues," the band simply exploded out of these transducers. Joe Acione's drumming came through brilliantly as did a lusty trombone solo by Dan Barrett, both delivered through the Triton Fives with snap and precision.

What about the bass? It proved to be these Tritons' weakest point. I'm not saying the low

end was anemic, just that it's not quite as good as the mids and highs, which are stellar. The Tritons go fairly deep but their bass response isn't—to borrow a marvelous term recently used by my TAS colleague Neil Gader in reviewing Kharma loudspeakers—saturnine. But this really shouldn't come as a surprise. Bass is the most expensive (and often, the toughest) part of any loudspeaker to reproduce accurately. While the mids are creamy and full, and the treble region extremely accurate—you can hear performers talking or singing with great clarity—deep bass is just a little bit murky by comparison.

Still, when you contemplate everything that this loudspeaker does do well—gorgeously prismatic tonal color, dynamic alacrity, and a beautifully lissome treble—then it becomes hard to quibble about the Fives. Ultimately, among its other attributes, the Five's ability to convey a direct emotional connection with the music is what makes it such an engaging product. On Christian McBride's album *Out Here*, the Tritons conveyed the soulfulness of the song "I Have Dreamed" in a simply mesmerizing way. The cymbal seemed to float into the ether, while the piano swells rolled on and on.

With its knack for playing a wide gamut of music convincingly, the Fives offer a tremendous amount of performance for the price. After my foray into Led Zep territory, Sandy Gross was worried that I might prematurely terminate my listening sessions by destroying the speakers—or sink into pure headbanging. Not a chance. I enjoyed hour after hour of satisfying music. I know that these speakers will appeal to a lot of audiophiles, but I can't help hoping that they

will also entice anyone (like me all those years ago) who might be looking for a reasonably priced first speaker. In sum, Sandy Gross has hit another homerun. For anyone considering a loudspeaker under \$10,000, the Triton Five isn't just an option. It's a must-audition. *tas*

SPECS & PRICING

Driver complement: Two 6" high-definition cast-basket mid/bass drivers, four 8" planar sub-bass radiators; one HVFR (high-velocity folded ribbon) tweeter

Frequency response: 26Hz-35kHz

Sensitivity: 90dB

Nominal impedance: 8 ohms

Dimensions: 8 1/8" (rear) x 12 3/8" x 44 1/4"

Weight: 40 lbs.

Price: \$1998/pr.

GOLDENEAR TECHNOLOGY

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

dCS Vivaldi CD/SACD playback system, Continuum Caliburn turntable with two Cobra tonearms, Lyra Atlas and Miyajima mono Zero cartridges, Ypsilon VPS-100 phonostage, PST-100 Mk 2 preamplifier, and SET 100 monoblock amplifiers, Transparent Opus and Nordost Odin cabling, and Stillpoints Ultra 5 isolation footers

