

# AUDIO ESOTERICA

HIGH PERFORMANCE AUDIO FOR THE

MUSIC LOVER

australian  
**hi-fi**  
and home theatre technology



## SUPERSTAR SPEAKERS

Exotic sound for everyone and (almost) every budget

REVIEWED

### HEAD MASTERS

Yamaha presents the ultimate  
headphone partner

REVIEWED

### EXPERT CONTROL

McIntosh preamp delivers valves,  
versatility and value



ALSO INSIDE: MUSICAL FIDELITY | VIVID AUDIO | DENON | IDEON

FUTURE

ISSUE #1-2024 A\$14.99 / NZ\$14.99  
9 134 060 1100 10221  
01

# ESTELON EXTREME MK II

Reviewer Paul Burrows

LOUDSPEAKERS



“**I**t’s OK if you cry,” we are told as we prepare to sit down to audition the new ‘MK II’ edition of Estelon’s highly acclaimed Extreme loudspeakers.

Just moments before, upon entering the main reference listening room (appropriately named ‘The Gallery’) of Audio Connection’s store in Leichhardt, Sydney, the emotion had been one of sheer amazement... even astonishment. If you’ve never seen the Estelon Extreme in the flesh before, the first encounter truly takes your breath away. These towers have a powerful presence with two capital ‘P’s — and they’re still silent at this point! The Gallery is a big space, as you can gauge from the photo below, but the Extreme still look huge and, it has to be said, just a little bit menacing. Think H. R. Giger’s xenomorph from the *Alien* movie franchise, but there are two of them! Indeed, at full height they stand over two metres tall, with each one weighing 250kg (which, as an aside, makes the logistics of transporting them quite the challenge).

At full height? The design actually comprises two self-contained modules, and the height of the upper section, which houses the tweeter, midrange driver and midrange woofer, is adjustable

by over 30cm in either direction to optimise the stereo imaging to the size of the listening space. Consequently, this area can be as small as 50m<sup>2</sup> or as large as 200m<sup>2</sup>. The adjustment is motor-driven — the Extreme come with a remote control — and the movement follows more of a shallow arc than a straight line up or down, with the effect that the depth of the tweeter is varied too. By having these two separate compartments, the upper drivers are effectively isolated from any vibration created by the pair of woofers in the bottom section, which are set at 90 degrees to one another in a bass-reflex design. Furthermore, the essentially triangular shape of the enclosures means that there are no parallel surfaces and, consequently, no nasty internal resonances. The marble-based composite material that the enclosures are made from is exceptionally stiff anyway, so vibrations are negligible to start with.

#### **BETTER AGAIN**

The Mk II model updates include a selection of two-tone, high-gloss finishes called Midnight Opera (black/red), Bronze Royale (black/bronze), Lunar Eclipse (white/black) and Nordic Emerald (white/green). Now, we wouldn’t bet on any of these looking anything less than

impressive, but the red-on-black scheme that sat before us was especially smart.

Internally, there is a much-revised crossover network with improved inductors, capacitors and resistors, and both the tweeter and midrange driver have been upgraded. The former is now a 25mm diamond membrane unit while the latter is a 168mm ceramic membrane driver. As before, both are manufactured for Estelon by Accuton, as are the 25cm aluminium sandwich mid-woofer and twin 25cm woofers. The low-range drivers are custom designs.

For our audition, each Extreme Mk II was driven by a Karan Acoustics Master Collection POWERa monoblock amplifier which can, if it needs to, deliver 3,600 watts into four ohms. There’s a nice little geographical tie-up here as the amp is made in Serbia and the Extreme in Estonia. The amps each sit on Bassocontinuo Ultimate Line racks that, incidentally, come from Italy. The pre-amplifier is Gryphon’s Pandora, and the source is the dCS Vivaldi One CD/SACD transport, DAC and network streamer. Transparent XL cabling links it all up.

Audio Connection’s David Rizzolo is on hand to conduct the audition. Indeed, it is he who suggested we would likely be moved to tears. He’s

▽ ESTELON’S EXTREME MK II IN THE NEW MIDNIGHT OPERA (BLACK AND RED) HIGH-GLOSS FINISH. THE LISTENING ROOM IS AUDIO CONNECTION’S ‘THE GALLERY’ AT ITS SYDNEY SHOWROOM IN LEICHHARDT.





The Extreme MK II handle low frequencies with the same aplomb as they do higher ones, so there's definition, separation... dynamism and depth that go straight through you

been listening to the Extreme MK II for a while now, but he confesses that the sheer precision of the reproduction still gets him every time. We kick off with a Deutsche Grammophon DDD recording of renowned mandolinist Avi Avital playing J. S. Bach, which we selected due to the clarity of the instrument across its register. It turns out to be an inspired choice because auditioner Rizzolo also happens to be an accomplished player who has actually performed some of this

music. As the Bach Concerto in D minor quickly progresses to the first mandolin notes, we immediately become a bit misty-eyed due to the absolute purity and tightness of the delivery. It's the music and nothing but the music. We're also immediately struck by both the width and depth of the soundstage. We're seated in what's traditionally the 'sweet spot', but you can be positioned well off to one side and still enjoy very convincing and wide stereo imaging. With orchestral music, the clear definition and separation of the instruments and their frequencies make for an immersive 'being there' experience that is as much down to the engineers' skills as it is the players' abilities.

#### REVEALING THE TRUTH

If there is a downside to such exacting management of driver control and the crossovers, it's that there is nowhere to hide when it comes to poor technique in either the performance or the recording.

Rizzolo describes the Extreme Mk II as "brutal" in that they expose everything, both the good and the bad. Indeed, we both jumped at a slight slip on a guitar

string in one of the tracks on Steve Hackett's 'Tribute' album, which is also all Bach pieces. A former member of prog rock band Genesis, Hackett is today an accomplished classical guitarist, but the Estelon loudspeakers reveal that even masters aren't perfect! It is telling that on all prior occasions listening to this German DDD recording through other extremely high-end systems, we had never noticed the missed note.

Hackett's arrangement of *Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desiring* for solo guitar is always sublime, and the Extreme beautifully relay all the richness and depth of his playing. It's important to note that for all their uncompromising precision and tightness, the speakers are never clinical or soulless: if there is warmth and character in a performance that has also been preserved in its recording, you'll hear it.

This was the case when we moved on to Madeleine Peyroux's 2006 album 'Half The Perfect World'. The American singer and songwriter has a wondrous voice — both languid and lyrical, expressive and emotional. It can be a challenge to capture all these elements in a recording

and then reproduce them truthfully, but the Mk II Extreme impressively relayed all the colours and nuances. Not once did we feel as though something was missing.

These Extreme Mk II are revelatory on many levels, but perhaps the most remarkable one is their bass performance. We never thought we would use the words “crisp” and “bass” together, but that is the only way we can describe it. With their longer throws, bass drivers are the hardest to keep under control, so quite often bass can sound mushy and nobody really notices because it’s only the support act. However, the Extreme MK II handle low frequencies with the same aplomb as they do higher ones, so there’s definition, separation and clarity, not to mention a powerful dynamism and depth that go straight through you.

A true test is Elgar’s Cello Concerto in E minor, the seminal recording of which is a young Jacqueline du Pré’s passionate performance with the London Symphony Orchestra by EMI in August 1965. The energy and enjoyment of her playing, not to mention her distinctive technique and unique interpretation, make this one of the greatest classical music recordings ever — it has now been digitally remastered, of course — and the wonder

of it is rarely conveyed so faithfully and compellingly as it is by these Estelons.

**EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE**


To finally show off the speakers’ deft handling of layered frequencies, we listen to the main theme from Hans Zimmer’s dramatic *Interstellar* movie soundtrack. It’s fabulously multi-layered. For one, it used the four-manual pipe organ in London’s Temple Church to create a complex and dense bass foundation. The soundtrack was actually recorded in the church with the organ accompanied by 34 strings, 24 woodwinds, four pianos and a mixed choir of 60 voices.

Needless to say, the reproduction can get muddy — especially at those very low frequencies — without exceptionally responsive and tightly controlled drivers. But the Extreme Mk II delivered both the composition’s power and its glory. The bass was powerfully solid, but it wasn’t overwhelming and the character of the pipe organ’s tonality was wonderfully persevered. Everything else was distinctly layered over the top to create the intense aural impact that Zimmer intended. He actually delayed the soundtrack album’s launch until the movie’s theatrical release because he “wanted people to really hear

it for the first time with the movie on really big speakers in a theatre”. There’s little doubt he’d be impressed by how the Estelons can deliver “the visceral experience” he wished for.

**CONCLUSION**

Listening to these loudspeakers is indeed an experience, even though their sublime accuracy renders them ‘invisible’ in terms of a performance and its production. Of course, they are very much right there physically — it’s hard to take your eyes off them. But force them closed and you will realise that the Extreme MK II are all about the music and the emotions it inevitably stirs. Tears? It was hard to hold them back.

At this lofty price, Estelon’s Extreme Mk II are only going to be enjoyed by a small and exclusive group of audiophiles, but after a mere several hours immersed in their magnificence — and even though they cost \$350,000 per pair — we are extremely glad they exist. 

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**Estelon Extreme MK II**

- Price:** \$350,000 (pair)
- Warranty:** Five years
- Design:** Four-way bass-reflex
- Frequency response:** 25Hz-60kHz
- Sensitivity:** 91dB/2.83V
- Nominal impedance:** 4 ohms
- Tweeter:** Accuton 25mm CELL diamond membrane inverted dome
- Midrange driver:** Accuton 168mm CELL ceramic membrane inverted dome
- Mid-woofer:** Accuton 25cm CELL aluminium sandwich dome (custom)
- Woofer:** 2 x Accuton 25cm CELL aluminium sandwich dome (custom)
- Dimensions (HWD):** 177-207 x 69 x 82cm
- Weight:** 250kg
- Finishes:** Two-tone with black: Midnight Opera (black/red), Bronze Royale (black/bronze), Lunar Eclipse (white/blue), Nordic Emerald (white/green)

**Contact:** Advance Audio  
**T:** (02) 9561 0799  
**E:** sales@advanceaudio.com.au  
**W:** www.advanceaudio.com.au

