

ProAc Tablette 8

Good things come in small boxes By Brent Burmester

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A good two-way stand-mount loud-speaker takes a lot of beating, and ProAc's Tablette 8 is a fine example of the breed. A high quality mid/bass driver and tweeter combination in a dense and compact ported enclosure ensures an extremely communicative sound that should work to good advantage in almost any system. Note the 'almost'.

At 86 dB/w/m, the Tablettes are not the easiest drive for low wattage amps, and while I'm sure good valve amps will make them sing, it may be at the expense of satisfying volume levels. Even with 100 watts of solid state power behind them, the little ProAc's proved to be a speaker that demanded an open throttle – late night listening at snoozer-friendly levels isn't really their thing. At medium to high volumes, however, the Tablettes are a good deal more convincing.

It's understandable if you're looking at the mid-bass driver in the accompanying photo and wondering what I mean by 'high volume'. Four and a half inches across is definitely on the small side.

Nevertheless, the ProAc's make a lot more noise than you'd expect, and they stay clean at volumes that should satisfy most music lovers. Still, these won't suit those two-stroke engine tuners who like to spanner away in the shed with a musical accompaniment from the lounge (you know who you are).

"And what about bass extension?" you ask. The Tablette is rated to 40Hz and, although that may be within a minus six decibel margin, rather than the customary minus three, these little guys are quite capable of generating a good portion of the low-end wobble on Leftfield's *Leftism*, and they gave an excellent account of bassist Stanley Clarke on his eponymous LP. There are a number of floorstanders on the market that would be hard-pressed to

play as low and as tunefully as the Tablette Eight.

In fact I have no qualms about recommending the wee ProAc's as front speakers in systems geared primarily to stereo, but with a secondary home cinema application. Of course, miracles will not be performed: there is a slight rounding of leading edges on bass transients compared to some similarly sized speakers in their class, and the really floor shaking stuff is ultimately



beyond them, so don't chuck out your active subwoofer.

At the other end of the audio spectrum, good though the bass and mid are, the treble may be the ProAc's strongest asset. Its quality is evident in my first assessment of the ProAc sound as slightly recessed. However, once I adjusted to the more distant soundstage, I realized no detail was missing from the music, rather the tweeter integrated seamlessly with the mid, drawing no attention to itself.

If there is any 'smallness' to the Tablette's sound, it is in the tendency for the soundstage to end at the speaker cabinets, and in less attack in snare drums and rim-shots than a conventional six inch midrange driver might deliver. Perhaps predictably, these speakers shine most brightly with well recorded acoustic music, but only because this shows off their strengths, for they are not a delicate "chamber music-only" transducer by any means.

It should be stressed that these speakers require a good set of stands to deliver their best. If you use them as bookends you'll be rewarded with lumpy bass and compromised imaging. Despite their size, the Tablette's like a bit of space around them. This must be taken into account if you're tossing up between the ProAc's and a pair of competent floorstanders, such as Tannoy's Eyriss 2.

Good stands will push the package price of the smaller speakers comfortably into the \$3000+ range. That's a hefty wad for boxes this size, but the wood veneer is good, if not outstanding, and the ProAc name has a certain resonance amongst those in the know.

All up then, the ProAc Tablette 8 pretty much lives up to its advertising copy. Extremely easy to live with and visually unassuming, once they're connected you can forget about them and focus on the music.

If the exchange rate and freight costs make them seem like poor value for money, don't be deterred: as air movers they more than hold their own against the bulk of their taller rivals.

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