



# Two 99s – No Flake

Providing top quality components and design practices for a reasonable price, Paul Rigby finds the XTZ 99.26 MK.2 loudspeaker a long way from flaky.

**W**hat's in a name? Plenty, if you look at this pair of speakers. According to Olle Eliasson, President of XTZ. "The '99' is good enough for the 99% of the population. Of the '26': the '2' is for 2-way speaker using two drivers. The '6' is the latest mark. The model number; the next update will be the 99.27".

For the 99.26, Eliasson decided to use "...the best SEAS driver available, the Excel, normally found in expensive speaker designs such as

the \$100,000 Steinway-Lyngdorf".

When it comes to a unit that has good bass performance "...you're looking at a driver that is stiff, made from magnesium, aluminium and the like, working like a piston. The problem, though, is that when you rise to a certain frequency via the mid-bass cone, you get the high peak of a resonance frequency".

"This is where the problems arise and the compromises begin. When you design a two-way speaker, you cannot run the tweeter too low before you decide to crossover; otherwise you will have high

distortion within the tweeter. On the other side, your mid/bass unit cannot operate too high, otherwise it will have a peak and you will hear that instead".

The new cross-over in the 99.26 helps to reduce distortion. "Even with the lower efficiency, which requires more amplification power, the lower distortion and flatter frequency response results in a better sounding speaker".

The ribbon tweeter, a Fountek from China, is XTZ's driver of choice. According to Eliasson, "this particular tweeter has a balanced frequency

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## REVIEW



to keep the plug in to prevent a woolly, disorganised mess that revealed itself when the plug was out.

Spinning compressed chart CDs via the Densen B-475 CD player, I compared the XTZs with the similarly priced Spondor S3/5R2 bookshelf speakers. Configuring the XTZs to the preferred -4dB treble, my immediate impression was that the XTZ found it tough to keep control of the nasty midrange frequencies, producing elements of mid bloom, even at -4dB, whereas the Spondors produced a more open, controlled and mature output. What the XTZs excelled in, however, was the sheer bass power which offered weight, slam and heft. Although the Spondors provided a superior low frequency focus, the XTZs were peerless in their ability to party. The XTZs were most definitely 'alive', offering a presentation with a large, epic feel the proved both involving and forceful.

Switching to the Skunk Anansie track and 0dB on the XTZ treble output, the XTZs found the lower bass area a bit of a challenge in terms of focus and control but the lead guitar rendition gave the instrument plenty of room, providing a broad soundstage. Detail was plentiful while secondary percussion, via the tambourine, was notable in its insightful nature, as was the subtle acoustic guitar. The presentation for the XTZ was nothing if not bold.

Flicking to vinyl

and Horace Silver's 'Cape Verdean Blues'. Via the XTZ, Woody Shaw's trumpet introduction showed a midrange that was energetic with sonic boundaries pushed to the edge, with a freeform style that, even though it lacked some of the tight organization exhibited by the Spondors, showed an easy style. Similarly, the XTZ's vocal tracking was arguably more emotive. Yes, the Spondors nailed Shaw's delivery on the soundstage more accurately but the XTZ did present an infectious freedom and a sonic skip through the daisies.

Onto rock matters and Kansas' 'Monolith' LP. This slightly compressed album resulted in a measure of upper mid life which prompted my lowering the XTZ treble down to -4dB which helped to tame the harsh vocal crescendos. The multitudinous and delicate elements of 'On the Other Side', including wood block percussion, was well tracked with the XTZs digging deep into the mix. Bass was also exuberant, big and hefty.

### CONCLUSION

There is nothing trim and prim about the XTZs. This is the sort of speaker that will be the life and soul of your party. It's a lively listen and a whole heap of fun.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The XTZ 99.26 measured almost ruler flat when set to 0 (zero), removing both response-adjustment links revealed, our analysis shows. It is supremely accurate on-axis in the forward plane. The ribbon had good lateral dispersion but vertically the picture changed somewhat according to listening height, as is common with ribbons. How much impact this has depends upon distance from the loudspeaker and is best assessed by listening. Adjustment using a link gave a perfectly controlled +/-4dB lift or cut so the 99.26 can be set to sound a little brighter or obviously softer, a neat touch well engineered, our measurements showed.

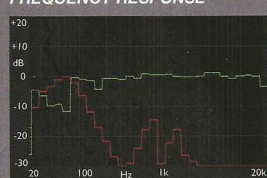
The port is tuned to 55Hz, both the red port output trace and the impedance curve show. It isn't especially well damped so bass will likely have a bouncy and obvious quality, especially as port output measured +8dB above the drive unit at 80Hz, a high value. The 99.26 reaches down to 40Hz and has some subsonic output too, so bass should sound hefty. Unfortunately, 83dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input is low, not helped by a bass unit with a 6 Ohm d.c.r. giving the 'speaker a high overall impedance of 7 Ohms. As a result, an amplifier of at least 60 Watts will be needed for high volume and 100 Watts might be

preferable.

Our 200mS decay spectrum showed the bass was hot at 80Hz, to be expected from a big driver in a small cabinet, but otherwise the 99.26 lacked overhang and should sound uncoloured.

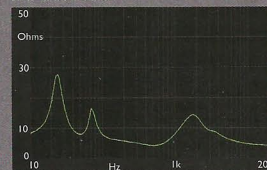
The 99.26 majors on accuracy and adjustability our measurements show. It should give a very smooth, fast and clean sound with obvious bass. NK

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

### IMPEDANCE



### VERDICT

The XTZ 99.26 Mk.2 speakers provide a vivacious and spirited sound, that is enjoyable.

**XTZ 99.26 MK.2 £760**

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### FOR

- high-spirited presentation
- passionate mids
- exuberant bass

### AGAINST

- limited focus
- bass control

response that sounds good and exhibits low distortion. We just had to cap it at the right point".

Eliasson also likes that the off-axis dispersion angle is quite narrow. "We picked the ribbon because I like the sound and the directivity which means less influential room interference. We claim that a flat frequency response is the best compromise".

Weighing in at 10kg and spanning 244x379x352 mm, "the speaker cabinet uses 25mm MDF with a piano black finish which I claim is thick enough to be stable. We also use lots of damping material. It's a pretty expensive cabinet to make – for the price point. The shape is another reason too, it involved lot of processing".

Before I dived into the general sound testing, I decided to take a closer look at the treble tweaking facility. This, after all, would set the 'tone' for the rest of the review. Using two sturdy bridging plugs for each speaker (filling four sockets per speaker), they can be plugged and unplugged to tweak the treble performance to cater for your room shape, music type and personal likes and dislikes. The treble begins flat at 0dB but then can vary between plus and minus 4dB which results in quite a dramatic tonal variation.

### SOUND QUALITY

Selecting a range of compressed chart CDs, played on my Densen B-475, selecting the +4dB option produced upper frequencies that were uncomfortable to experience, necessitating a quick change to 0dB. Even at this setting, the compressed CDs were rather offensive so I reduced the level down to -2dB which was far more acceptable. Moving to -4dB was even better, however, offering a perfect balance between detail retrieval, insight and those unruly upper frequencies. Compressed music is most enjoyable at this setting.

Moving to the better recorded and wholly more superior mastering of Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism', the -4dB setting proved to be dull, lacking in dynamics and sheer joy de vivre. Plugging in the +4dB option was actually an ideal situation for low volume play in small rooms, acting as a pseudo-loudness switch, accentuating detail that would normally be missed at low volumes. In the end, I decided on 0dB for my room for general play, using decently recorded music and high volume.

The only other tweak to consider was the rear bass port and the included foam bass plug. I decided