

Davone Ray-S Loudspeakers

At the outset I wish to state I am not a professional reviewer of audio equipment. Nevertheless, I have been an unabashed audiophile for more than thirty years. I have a passion for music and for audio equipment/components that have the capacity to bring beguiling and life-like music into my home. I have been blessed with opportunities to audition and/or own audio equipment ranging from the modest end of the affordability scale to the middle reaches of the high end. Although I am at a point in my life where I could afford to spend whatever I desire to acquire audio equipment that is capable of providing superlative sound, I am wise enough and parsimonious enough to recognize there is a point of diminishing returns and I let that recognition govern my purchases. My love for this hobby leads me to write about a speaker that every audiophile should find an opportunity to audition--regardless of his/her budget. I want to share with you my experience with a superlative speaker that the audio scribes thus far have failed to review. It is only due my good fortune in knowing Galen Carol of Galen Carol Audio, in San Antonio, that I had the opportunity to audition some speakers that have won my heart—the Davone Ray-S speakers. These speakers are the brainchild of Danish engineer Paul Schenkel.

When I first saw the Davone Ray-S speakers in the flesh (in the wood), I dismissed them as being a gimmicky speaker with a 1960's Danish modern appearance. The speakers were in static display and, frankly, I had no interest in auditioning them because their diminutive size and their Danish modern look told me all I needed to know—they were not serious speakers worthy of an audition. Boy was I wrong!!!

Before I share my thoughts regarding the Davone Ray-S speakers, let me tell you a little about my tastes in music and audio equipment. For over twenty years, I have been a fan of ProAc speakers, stand-mount monitors and floor standers alike. I love the way ProAc speakers totally disappear and present the music in all its glory. They are unfussy in placement; they are easy to drive; and they are not particular about their partnering equipment. The better the partnering equipment, the more rewards the ProAc's will offer; but it is tough to make them sound less than great.

Despite my being happy and content with my ProAc's, I love to sample other gear and thus have auditioned many other brands of speakers over the years. Thanks to Galen Carol at Galen Carol Audio in San Antonio, I have had the opportunity to audition in my home countless high-end speaker systems made by countless manufacturers. I have auditioned high end speakers manufactured by MBL, Wilson Audio, YG, Audio Physic, Sonus Faber, Dunlavy, Aerial Acoustics, and others. I have auditioned more modestly priced speakers manufactured by Spondor, Golden Ear, Totem...the list goes on and on. Until now, no speaker has been able to woo me away from my beloved ProAc's. When Galen Carol extended an invitation for me to audition the Davone Ray-S speakers; I had pretty much decided that I was going to purchase a new pair of ProAc D48R speakers. I was delaying my final decision on the ProAc's until I could audition the new Wilson Audio Sabrina. I was at this juncture in my search for new speakers when I auditioned the Davone Ray-S speakers.

I decided to give the strange-looking Ray-S a listen largely due to my respect for Galen

Carol and his ear for music. He told me I would be surprised--and boy was that comment an understatement.

When I initially installed the Ray-S speakers in my main system, my wife commented that they were strange looking. She did not call them ugly, but her initial impression suggested that they had little likelihood of finding a place in our home--much less their occupying center stage in our main audio system. My wife left the room with disinterest as I connected my Shunyata Anaconda Ztron speaker cables to the wonderful Cardas binding posts that Paul Schenkel has chosen for his Ray-S speakers. These high-quality Cardas binding posts are the same ones chosen by Jeff Rowland for his amplifiers. Their use on the Ray-S exemplifies the attention to detail that Paul Schenkel devoted to the design and manufacture of these speakers. The Ray-S's subtly hint that they are something special as you run your hand over their beautiful walnut finish, a finish that belies the strength and complexity of the sixteen layers of pressed beech wood that lies beneath the finish. The leather-covered front and rear baffles let you know this speaker's designer is interested in performance as well as style. As you install the speakers on their rock-solid stands—made from solid steel that has been precision cut using water jet technology—you sense these are serious speakers and that Paul Schenkel has put his heart and soul into their design. What you do not know until you start playing music is that these babies know how to sing a siren, full-bodied song that will win your heart.

While the Ray-S's are three-way speakers, they have the coherency of a single driver speaker and they disappear like the best of the minimonitors. They have prodigious bass that makes the use of a subwoofer superfluous. Each speaker has an 8-inch hard paper cone woofer, a 4-inch Egyptian papyrus midrange driver with a unique polyether foam surround, and a 1-inch silk dome tweeter. All three drivers are of the highest quality. I am sure the oval design of the speaker cabinet was chosen by their designer because it allowed him to place the woofers to the left of the vertically aligned tweeter and mid-range driver while also cancelling standing waves within the speaker's cabinet. The integration and coherence of this three-way speaker is superlative and unlike any speaker I have had the good fortune to audition in my home. These diminutive speakers sit only 2 ½ feet above the floor, but they throw an immense soundstage in both the vertical and horizontal planes. Musical instruments and vocalists have solid and pinpoint locations within that immense soundstage. The realism and spot-on tonality of instruments and vocalists is amazing.

In addition to my main system's being used for a broad range of music, it is also the centerpiece of my two-channel home theatre system. The digital output from my U-Verse "cable box" is connected to my Berkeley Alpha V2 DAC, which in turn is connected to my Herron VTSP-3A pre-amp and my Herron M1A monoblock amps. You would be amazed at the sound quality one can achieve by this setup. My Oppo BDP -105D blue ray player also plays DVD's through this system. Movies from U-Verse and movies on DVD are superlative through the Ray-S speakers. The detail and realism of movie sound tracks are unlike anything I previously have experienced.

These speakers will spoil you. The detail, speed, and impact of the Ray-S woofers and their coherence with the midrange and tweeter produce a realism that allows you to lose yourself in a movie or a piece of music. The sound of a door's closing or the sound of ice tinkling in a glass is so real that you forget you are watching a movie—you are there. It is hard to describe, but these

speakers provide all of the density, reverb, and decay that are part and parcel of real sound. Think of the sound of a car door's closing. Then think of the difference in sound between the closing of the door of a Mercedes Benz and the closing of the door on a 1998 Chevrolet with the windows rolled down. You could close your eyes and you easily could distinguish one from the other. The Ray-S's provide those same aural distinctions regarding every sound, instrument, or voice. They do so without their being analytical. They are too true in their reproduction of sound to ever be described as analytical. Their tonality is spot on. Their accuracy and agility in letting go of the musical notes or sounds is spooky in its accuracy. When I hear a telephone ring in a movie soundtrack, I find myself checking my own telephone to be sure I am not hearing the real thing. I have been in another room and have heard voices coming from the Ray-S's that have caused me to re-enter the room to be sure I was not hearing guests who had dropped in. That is how accurate these speakers are.

They are room friendly and easy to place. In my system they are approximately 34 inches from the front wall, approximately 8 feet apart (center of speaker to center of speaker), and they are toed in about 15 degrees. The Ray-S's sounded superlative where I initially placed them and I merely moved them a few inches for esthetic reasons. Unlike the YG Carmel, which demands careful placement and micrometer adjustments in positioning to attain their best sound; the Ray-S will provide superlative sound without hassle.

In case you have not already surmised the fact—I did purchase these wonderful speakers. Toward the end of my auditioning these speakers, I asked my wife whether their looks still bothered her. She surprised me by stating, "Frankly, I wouldn't care if those speakers grew hair; I love their sound." We ordered a pair from Galen Carol Audio the next day. Do yourself a favor. Search for the Davone Ray-S speakers and give them an audition. They more than deserve your consideration regardless what your budget may be.

Steve Lazor