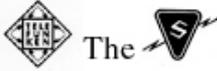




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audio physic

Tempo loudspeakers

as reviewed by John Acton



JOHN ACTON'S
SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS
ProAc Tablette
Reference 8 Signature
(primary) and Quad 11L

"No Loss of Fine Detail" has been Audio Physic's slogan since the introduction of the Tempo, its inaugural loudspeaker, in 1986. The company has since expanded its offerings into a comprehensive line of loudspeakers, from bookshelf monitors to subwoofers to home theater packages to no-holds-barred assaults on the state of the art. Despite the growth of the company over the years, its emphasis on the elements required to reproduce music's finest details—spatial realism, tonal accuracy, and dynamic tracking—have been retained.

The latest version of the Tempo (\$3999/pair) is the loudspeaker's fourth incarnation, but aside from the name, it shares little in common with its predecessors. The Tempo is a three-way, four-driver, floor-standing design that

I (secondary).

ELECTRONICS

Bryston B60 SST and Audio Zone Amp-1 integrated amplifiers.

SOURCES

SimAudio Moon Nova CD player.

CABLES

Analysis Plus Solo Crystal Oval interconnect (1 meter, RCA), Analysis Plus Oval 9 (bi-wire, 8 feet), Custom Power Cord Company HCF 2 Special (CD player), and Custom Power Cord Company HCF 2 (amp).

ACCESSORIES

ASC Tube Traps in front corners (5 feet tall; 16" diameter) and ASC Studio Traps (2) behind equipment rack on front wall.

features a seven-degree backward slant to the front baffle for time alignment of the midrange and treble drivers. Like its more expensive stable-mates, the Tempo utilizes side-firing woofers, placed back to back in a push-push arrangement. According to Audio Physic, the benefits to this are threefold. First, the arrangement allows for cancellation of woofer backpressure, which results in less cabinet resonance and its concomitant coloration. Second, it provides greater damping and control of driver vibration, and purer sound. Last, it allows for a narrow front baffle, which reduces diffraction and enhances imaging and soundstaging. In order to further reduce resonances and the propagation of standing waves, the cabinet sidewalls bulge out slightly toward the back.



Each Tempo is 39.37 inches high and 12.6 inches deep. Due to its asymmetrical sidewalls, the width varies from 5.8 inches at the front baffle to 7.3 inches at the rear of the cabinet. The speaker weighs 44 pounds. Because of its narrow profile and associated potential for instability, Audio Physic supplies outrigger feet and adjustable spikes. Adjustment of the spikes is performed from above, without the need to tilt the cabinets—a nice touch. The frequency response of the Tempo is 35Hz - 33kHz (+/- 3 dB). Sensitivity is 89dB, impedance is 4 ohms, recommended power is 20 to 150 watts. The warranty is ten years.

The Tempo's drivers are sourced from Peerless, SEAS, and ScanSpeak, and

are further modified by Audio Physic. The woofers are 7-inch drivers that operate up to 200Hz. From there, the critical midrange up to 2.7kHz is handled by a 5.9-inch aluminum driver featuring Audio Physic's proprietary Active Cone Damping technology to eliminate the ringing common to all metal drivers. The midrange driver is thus able to achieve outstanding speed, transparency, and neutrality without compromise. The treble region is handled by a 1-inch silk dome tweeter, which represents a departure from the previous Tempo, which utilized a ring-radiator.

The back of the speaker contains a large flared bass-reflex port for the two side-firing woofers and a metal panel containing single-wire WBT binding posts. This panel, dubbed the Vibration Control Terminal, is heavily damped with bitumen and neoprene to ensure that vibrations created by the speaker are not passed through the terminal block and binding posts back to the speaker cables, thereby obscuring detail.

The Tempos were shipped separately in well-packed double-boxed cardboard containers, and arrived in immaculate condition. The demo pair was beautifully finished in a natural cherry veneer, but numerous other finish options are available—light maple, dark maple, black ash, and (at a premium) rosenut. Each pair of Tempos comes with a comprehensive installation and placement guide. Based on sound acoustical principles, this guide contains a wealth of information useful to anyone seeking to maximize their speaker placement, regardless of make. You don't have to purchase



Audio Physic speakers to take advantage of this information, as the guide is available on their website (http://www.audiophysic.de/aufstellung/index_e.html).

Installing the outrigger feet was very easy, and took all of ten minutes. The Tempos are nearly full-range loudspeakers, and posed some placement challenges to avoid overwhelming my small room with bass. I finally settled on a near-field configuration, with the speakers placed well into the room, far apart and toed in almost directly to my listening position. Despite its nominal 4-ohm impedance and moderate sensitivity, the Tempos were not difficult to drive. I achieved good results with various amplifiers, both solid-state and tube. The synergistic match achieved with my Audio Zone Amp-1 and the Tempos surprised me. The Amp-1 is not a high-current design, and is not optimized for low-impedance, multi-driver speakers, but it didn't break a sweat when connected to the Tempos, even when playing challenging material at high levels.

As with most speakers, some break-in time was required to maximize the Tempos' performance. More than 100 hours was needed before the speakers awoke from their slumber and shed their dynamic reticence and tonal blandness. Once the Tempos were broken in and positioned properly, I was overwhelmed by their remarkable midrange transparency. Having been spoiled by the very musical midrange performances of the Almarro M2As and ProAc Tablette Reference 8 Signatures, I may have approached the Tempos with unrealistically high expectations, but they came very close to the proverbial ideal of neutrality, providing a clear window to the heart of the performance regardless of musical genre. There was very little coloration from the lower midrange through the lower treble. It was refreshing to know that I was hearing the recording, not the speakers. Despite their midrange neutrality, the Tempos were unfailingly musical, and never crossed over into sterility or blandness.

Voices were reproduced with consummate verisimilitude, and were simply thrilling when recorded well. John Miles' plaintive yet powerful vocal on "Shadow of a Lonely Man," from the Alan Parson's Project release *Pyramid* (Arista ARCD 8225), was beautiful and haunting. When I played The Sky Cries Mary's *Moonbathing on Sleeping Leaves* (Warner Brothers 46464-2), I was rewarded by the palpable presence and sheer emotion of Anisa Romero as she sang "An Ant, The Stars, The Owl and Its Prey." And so it went, with Roger Waters singing "Paranoid Eyes" on Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* (Columbia CK 68517) and Beth Orton singing the title track from her *Best Bit* EP (Dedicated Records 61702-44020-2). With each recording, I reveled in the purity, openness, and nuanced detail that the Tempos conveyed.

The midrange was also well served. The saxophone solo on "Doctor Wu," from Steely Dan's *Katy Lied* (MCA MCAD-11916), was vibrant and urgent, and the guitar on "Daddy Don't Live in That New York City No More" was reproduced with all the intended bitterness and mockery. There was no room for opacity or occlusion with the Tempos—I heard every breath and finger movement of Steve Howe as he played the acoustic piece, "Mood For a Day," on Yes' *Fragile* (Elektra/Rhino R2 73789). Notes were produced and released with remarkable celerity. There was no blurring or muddying of Howe's playing, and no overhang to the complex cacophony of instrumentation at the beginning of "Heart of the Sunrise."

Audio Physic designs are known for their imaging and soundstaging, and the new Tempos were no exception. They threw an impressively large soundstage, with excellent width, height, and depth. Equally as important, images were superbly delineated within the soundstage. The Mellotron flute at the beginning of the title track on Arcane's debut CD, *Beware of Darkness* (Neu Harmony NH010), floated above and between the speakers. When the sequencer and other synthesizer sounds joined the soundscape a minute later, I was unable to discern the locations of the speakers, and was instead treated to a wall-sized performance of astounding power and realism.



The Tempos' bass was deep and extended, and extremely powerful when the recording called for it. In the past, I have felt that Audio Physic's claims for the bass extension of its previous designs were overstated. Not so now—the Tempos played all the way down to their specified limits of 35Hz, although they had a definite midbass



warmth. My Audio Zone Amp-1 is a bit lean in this region, which made for a good match, but the other amps I had on hand could make the Tempos sound a bit plump.

The silk tweeters employed in the Tempos did an excellent job of mating to the speakers' superb midrange drivers. The crossover was seamless, and the tweeters easily matched the lithe quickness of the midrange drivers. Still, like the woofers, the tweeters possessed a hint of coloration. While they did a thoroughly adequate job, the tweeters did not possess the air and transparency that I have heard from other speakers. I heard a slight

emphasis to voices and cymbals on recordings like Genesis' *Trespass* (Virgin CASCD 1020), where the cymbal work on "Looking for Someone" and "White Mountain" sometimes sounded more like white noise than metal being struck by wood. As I say, this emphasis was slight, and only made itself apparent on certain CDs, but it was never objectionable enough to steer me away from those recordings.

When I compared the Tempos to the ProAc Tablette Reference 8 Signatures, I was concerned that the Tempos, at more than twice the price, would make short work of the Tablettes. This was not the case, and goes to show how much the law of diminishing returns kicks in at this level. Nevertheless, the Tempos excelled in a number of areas. For one thing, they were able to play louder and lower. This didn't surprise me, but what did surprise me was their ability to reproduce a larger soundstage, yet retain the otherworldly imaging precision of the Tablettes. The ProAcs have one of the most musical midranges around, but the Tempos equaled their performance in that regard, and bettered them in neutrality and transparency. Remarkably, the much larger Tempos were as quick as the ProAcs, and both speakers excelled at micro-dynamic expression. Both speakers also did very well in the treble, where both sounded sweet and listenable, but the Tempos pulled ahead slightly, with a greater sense of ease and cohesiveness.

At their price, the Audio Physic Tempos face stiff competition from many competitors. Like all other speakers, they're not perfect. They have a slightly warm midbass, which may complicate positioning and component matching. Listeners accustomed to ribbon, diamond, or beryllium tweeters may find that the Tempos lack the ultimate in treble purity and smoothness. However, few loudspeakers that I have heard, at any price, can match the Tempos' midrange transparency and neutrality, or their soundstaging and imaging abilities. These give the Tempos an uncanny ability to reproduce music with unforced detail. They make it easy to listen into the music, and to immerse one's self in the musical experience. The Tempos are superb performers, and an excellent value. **John Acton**

Tempo loudspeakers

Retail: \$4495/pair

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