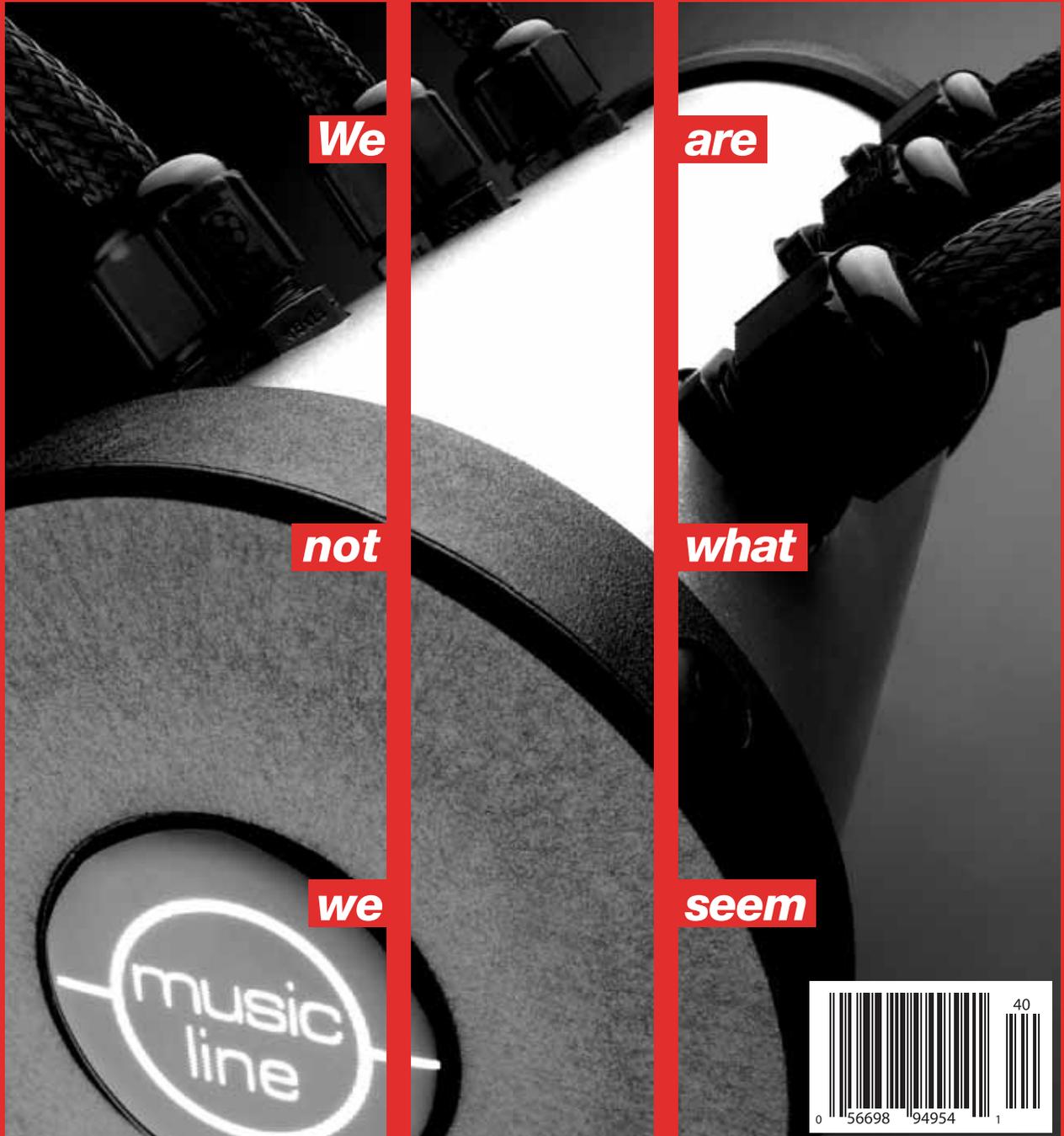


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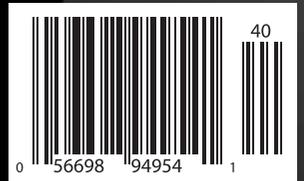
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The Audio Physic Tempo Loudspeaker

by Paul Messenger

Over the best part of twenty years of loudspeaker reviewing, covering something close to a thousand models, it seems slightly incredible that I've only previously encountered two models from Audio Physic, both back in the mid-90s. This is one of Germany's most respected speaker specialists, and has been doing the business around the world for the past twenty years, so how have its products evaded my clutches for so long?

The reason is probably that UK distributor Aanvil Audio simply chooses not to tout for reviews, which I actually find rather refreshing. Bill is presumably happy with the dealers with whom he does business, and they're presumably happy that they have a product that can be sold on demonstration, with no need to thrust review reprints under the noses of prospective purchasers. There's a sort of quiet confidence associated with Audio Physic that was equally evident when I visited its room at the recent High End Show in Munich, met main man Manfred Diesterich, and was shown the latest developments.

The product range is extensive, encompassing some 19 models in the current brochure, and while there's a nod towards multi-channel home cinema oriented designs, two-thirds are stereo pairs. They're also relatively upmarket: this latest version of the Tempo costs £2,199 per pair, yet there are five larger and more costly models further up the range.

The Tempo is therefore well below the state of the Audio Physic art – it's a bit on the small side to challenge for

top honours, to be frank. But compactness is its own reward, and within the modest dimensions there are a number of unusual and intelligent ideas, the most obvious being a backwards tilt of seven degrees that serves to time-align the mid and treble drive units.

The Tempo name goes all the way back to 1986, soon after the company was founded, though there have been several substantial changes along the way. The original Tempo reviewed in 1995, for example, was a two-way design, with a curiously constructed enclosure that used an

front panel. It also had the backwards tilt, an unusual but characteristic feature that continues through to this latest version, and which is also found on Audio Physic's slightly smaller Spark model (which I also tried out at around the same time).

The Spark and Tempo have a great deal in common, certainly from the outward appearance of what look like almost identical enclosures. However, the Tempo is a little larger, heavier and some \$700 more expensive. It's also a full three-way design with four drive units, whereas the smaller, simpler three-driver Spark operates as a two-and-a-half-way.

As the photography shows, it's a very pretty little speaker, notably slim when viewed from the front and attractively finished all round in real wood veneer – cherry, American maple, light maple or black ash are the standard options, with alternatives available on request. The shape is interesting, not only for its backward tilt but also because both sides have asymmetric convex curves, which will probably aid stiffness and should certainly help de-focus standing waves, along with its plentiful internal chambers and braces.

To enable the front to be kept ultra slim, the Tempo places its bass units on the sides. More than that, the twin 180mm units are mounted magnet-to-magnet, operating in the sort of 'push-push' mode that cancels reaction



► forces and helps avoid cabinet resonances. Mounted on the front, the 150mm midrange driver has a 110mm cone and a protruding pole-piece extension, while the tweeter uses a 25mm soft fabric dome.

One potential problem with slim loudspeakers is that they can easily be accidentally knocked over if steps aren't taken to enhance lateral stability. The Tempo is equipped with metal stabilising rods which significantly increase the lateral spike footprint and also provide secure sockets for mounting the chunky 8mm spikes, the hardware disguised under little cylindrical ends.

The rear panel houses the bass reflex port, and a newly developed aluminium terminal panel. Equipped with just a single pair of high quality WBT terminals, this panel is bitumen damped and fitted with a neoprene suspension, to avoid the sonically adverse effect of uncontrolled vibrations.

Audio Physic has long favoured sitting speakers well clear of walls, and this is amply confirmed by the room based measurements, which show a full and relatively even output through the bass and lower mid-band (sub-200Hz). Above that point the response is exceptionally smooth and flat right across the band, though sensitivity through the mid-band using our far-field, in-room technique is a couple of dB lower than the specified 89dB. That modest sensitivity is further compromised by a load that hovers around 4 Ohms across most of the band, though that in turn should be taken in context with the solid, strong

and even output through the bass region below 200Hz. This does average 88-89dB, and thanks to low port tuning of 33Hz shows good extension to around 24Hz (-6dB) in-room.



That flat, smooth mid-band is something that the Tempo shares with its smaller Spark sibling, though it's interesting to note that the character of the two speakers is actually very different, despite the similarity of the drivers used. Whereas the Spark leads with its broad mid-band, lacking a little relative output at the frequency extremes, the Tempo is much more laid back above 200Hz, and relatively significantly stronger in the top and bottom decades.

Sound quality is truly impressive, partly because of the delightfully smooth and even tonal balance, but also because of this speaker's superb imaging and a very impressive lack of

boxiness. Indeed, although those seated on the central stereo axis naturally get the most precise image, few if any speakers in my experience create a more convincing stereo image at the seats located away from the central stereo axis.

In the ultimate analysis, the Tempo is a relatively small loudspeaker, and that translates into a mild lack of weight and scale, and also somewhat limited dynamic punch and grip when compared to larger and more costly designs. That in turn softens contrasts a little and slightly weakens the power to resolve the fine detail in a complex mix.

An album like Arcade Fire's *Funeral* is notably rich in texture, with very dense instrumentation and voices, and while it sounded very open and thoroughly enjoyable through the Tempos, there wasn't the degree of analysis here that's available from a full size monitor. Likewise it wasn't easy to get grips with an album as maniacally intense and complex as System of a Down's

Mezmerize, but few speaker systems can.

And that's only to be expected. After all, this is one of the junior models in the Audio Physic portfolio, and in that context it does an awful lot of things very well indeed. Even though loudspeakers as a breed have been improving steadily over the years, few can match the Tempo's smooth and open neutrality and notable freedom from 'nasties', which makes this a particularly easy speaker to live with over the long haul.

The combination of solid and warm low frequencies with a very open presence zone and bright ►

▶ top end is somewhat unusual, yet also very persuasive. Most speakers show rather more restraint through the presence and treble than the Tempo, and this seems to help one play the system loud without the sound getting too aggressive. Much more than expected, the Tempo somehow managed to avoid most aggressive tendencies without sounding in any way 'shut in' at the same time. Even a particularly nasty recording, like the Chemical Brothers' *Push the Button*, which has a particularly aggressive



top end (possibly due to its copy protection coding) could be played at a reasonable level without too much distress. The Tempo might be a little brighter than average, but it seems to combine this with an inherent sweetness that helps keep sibilants and consonants well in check, while vowels remain open.

Orchestral music too manages to sound rich and sumptuous, while at the same time possessing the sort of

incisiveness that helps highlight the skill and vigour of a solo violin. One afternoon Radio 3 was broadcasting Coleridge-Taylor's *violin concerto*, featuring the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra with violinist Anthony

Marwood. It's not a piece with which I'm familiar, but I soon found myself sucked into the work and captivated by the delightful balance that the engineers were achieving between soloist and orchestra, and the clarity with which the speakers were handling a fine performance.

As much as its elegantly slim and laid-back appearance, the elegantly evenhanded overall sound balance is what really singles this speaker out from the crowd. It seems to play any kind of material, from heavy rock to solo folk performances via speech and chamber music, with equal aplomb and without ever letting its own character impose itself on the sound. Indeed, attempting to define its own character is the hardest part of trying to review this speaker, just because 'character' in this case is just so downright elusive.

A slight thickening in the lower mid-band is occasionally audible, on male speech for example, and there is some lack of dynamic grip and punch, which means the sound can be a little too soft and gentle and lacking some bite and drama. One might, in short, wish for a little more incisiveness and a wider dynamic range, especially through the bass region. The Tempo does a superb job of portraying the total impression of a piece of music, without providing quite the level of analysis that reveals the fine detail of

how a mix was put together.

It also supplies brilliant stereo imaging – just about the best I've heard in its ability to create convincing out-of-the-boxes images across a wide seating area – with superior positioning and finely layered depth perspectives on appropriately recorded material. Focus might have been tighter, but that factor actually seemed to help in creating an impression of spaciousness on more artificial pan-pot studio recordings.

Though by no means the last word in dynamic tautness and grip, the Tempo does an awful lot of things very well, especially in its beautifully balanced neutrality, fine bandwidth, freedom from boxiness and superior imaging. These are backed up by a fine lab performance, albeit with modest sensitivity, in what is also a very elegant lounge-friendly package. ➤

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	3-way, reflex loaded loudspeaker
Drivers:	1x25mm tweeter 1x150mm midrange 2x170mm bass
Bandwidth:	35 Hz - 33 kHz (-3dB)
Impedance:	4 Ohms
Sensitivity:	89 dB / 1 W (1m)
Power Rating:	20 - 150 Watts
Dimensions (WxHxD):	18.7x100x32 cms
Weight:	20 kg
Finishes -	
Standard:	Cherry, dark maple, light maple, black ash
Optional:	Ebony, rosenut
Price:	£2199

UK Distributor:

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Manufacturer:

Audio Physic GmbH
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