

5TH ELEMENT

**Audio Physic Tempo IV
loudspeaker: \$3995/pair**

Audio Physic's Tempo IV loudspeaker is a handsome, slim floorstander with a suggested retail price of \$3995/pair (www.audiophysic.com). Its cabinet design is unusually sophisticated for a speaker at this price. Over and above the faultlessly applied, high-quality, bookmatched cherry veneer, the 39"-tall cabinet is raked back 7° to time-align the midrange unit and tweeter.¹ The cabinet sides gracefully flare in and out in asymmetrical arcs from front to rear and meet at the rear panel, which is flat and parallel with the front panel. The rear and top panels are veneered as well. The rear panel includes the terminal block, which includes high-quality single binding posts and is mounted on a compliant suspension to minimize the influence of structure-borne vibrations on the crossover. The rear panel also includes a moderately large, flared port. Nominal impedance is a claimed 4 ohms.

Near the top edge of the front panel is mounted a conventional soft-dome tweeter (not a ring-radiator, as found on some other AP models) and, immediately below that, a 5" metal-cone midrange, the sides of its basket cropped to allow the front panel to be as narrow as possible. The rest of the front panel is empty, save for an unobtrusive logo badge close to the bottom. One particularly welcome and sophisticated touch is that three of the bolts that hold the midrange to its compliant suspension are also the mounting points for the front grilles, which cover only the midrange and treble drivers. Neat! This avoids the unsightly appearance, when a speaker's grilles are removed, of the receptacles for the usual plastic grommets. (I listened with all the grilles off.)

Each side of the Tempo IV holds a 7" bass driver positioned close to the floor, apparently to minimize the Allison Effect: irregular bass reinforcement and cancellation from floor reflections. These drivers are mounted back to back and wired in positive phase, which I suppose makes the speaker's bass configuration "push-push." Given its narrow grille and the fact that its woofers are in the same phase on both sides of the cabinet, the Tempo IV is not made in "handed" pairs. This may be of interest to that small number of devoted listeners who wish to reproduce the Golden Era three-channel recordings (such as Mercury Living Presence) now



"Shall we dance?" Audio Physic's Tempo IVs.

floorloudspeakers/147/.)

My initial setup was with the Audionet SAM V2 integrated amplifier driving the Tempo IVs, the speakers at the 1/3 points of the room's width and about 7' from my listening position, toed in so that their cabinet sides were not visible. I felt there was an unquestionable excess of energy in the range of the middle of the violin's E string and upward (about 1320Hz and up). This caused the overall presentation to be a bit too intense. I had intended the setup to have adequate breathing room, but even with the Audionet's ever-so-slightly *zaitig* contribution, the sound was far too forward.

Audio Physic's US importer, Gabby Amram of Soundquest LLC (212-731-0729), revealed to me the error of my ways. The Tempos are designed to be

THE TEMPO IVS' ABILITY TO CREATE THE CONVINCING ILLUSION OF A SOUNDSTAGE LIVED UP TO THE FOLKLORE ABOUT MICHAEL FREMER'S WATER-HEATER REPAIRMAN.

appearing in multichannel SACD form with three Tempos.

To lend stability to this rather narrow and top-heavy design, two lateral braces bolt on to each speaker's bottom, at front and rear. These, in turn, hold spikes. Again, clever design touches are in evidence: The spikes are adjustable from above, and, after final adjustment, plastic inserts cover the ends of the braces.

The Tempo IV lives up, in spades, to Audio Physic's motto: "no loss of fine detail." I can't recall ever having heard the action noises of Joni Mitchell's piano at the beginning of the title track of *Court and Spark* with more clarity from any speaker costing less than \$10,000/pair.

The Tempo IVs' ability to create the convincing illusion of a soundstage also lived up to the folklore about Michael Fremer's water-heater repairman. That chap walked right past the Audio Physic Virgos Michael had just played a Roy Orbison track for him on, thinking that the panel speakers behind them were the sources of the music—some speakers really can "disappear." I believe a quote from the repairman featured for some time in Audio Physic's US advertising. (See *Stereophile*, September 1995, Vol.18 No.9, p.121; www.stereophile.com/

listened to positioned rather far apart, close to the sidewalls, and not toed in at all. Ah. Moving things around as suggested resulted in a smoother treble balance, a more relaxed overall sound, and a much wider soundstage. Midrange textures were still on the light and agile side of the ledger, and the bass was ample but well integrated.

In essential sound, the Tempo IV is an interesting contrast to Spendor's S8e (\$2995/pair), the last speaker in that general price tier that passed through here. The S8e delivered an updated version of the traditional, polite, British studio-monitor sound. The Tempo IV is more of a crisp, clear Riesling to the Spendor's velvety Châteauneuf-du-Pape. If the Spendor S8e strikes you as insufficiently detailed and lively, the Tempo may be just the ticket. Given the \$1000 difference in their prices, I think that both speakers are cases of getting what you pay for.

To sum up the Audio Physic Tempo IV: Pros: Lively timbres, detailed and dynamic presentation with superb imaging, handsome looks, excellent design and build quality. Cons: Careful attention to setup and associated equipment required to prevent this speaker's virtues from turning into vices.

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