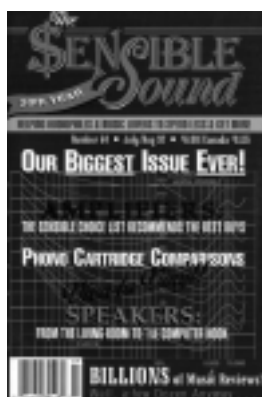


The \$ensible Sound

from issue #64

Helping Audiophiles and Music Lovers Spend Less and Get More out of Music.



Reviewer: Tom Lyle

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I hope that KWN doesn't mind my quoting from one of his reviews, because in just about every case the sonic character

of the Legacy Classic mirrors his description of the sound of the Legacy Focus. It was back in Issue 54 that he reviewed the FOCUS which ended up becoming his new reference. OK, I've never heard the FOCUS, and I may never have the chance unless I visit Legacy's Springfield, Illinois factory, or an audiophile who lives near me orders a pair of these factory-direct-only speakers. Yet, by the way Karl describes them, they sure sound like the Classics, because in just about every case the sonic character of the Legacy Classic mirrors his description of the sound of the Legacy FOCUS.

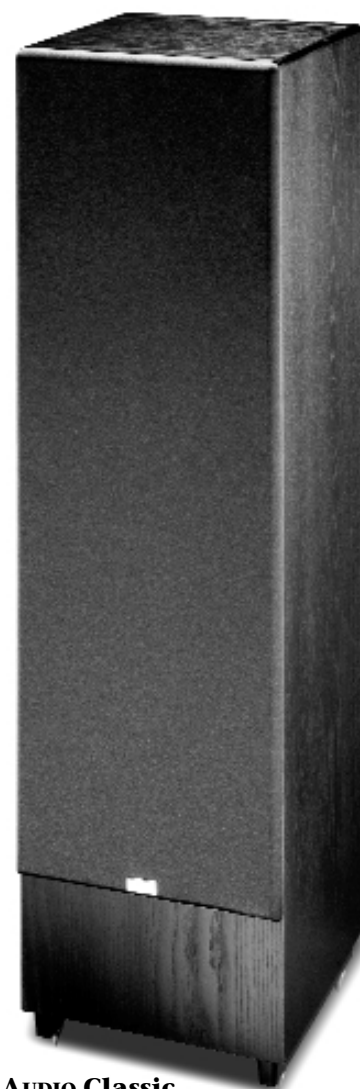
Yes, the Classics are smaller than the Foci, and have a different driver complement, but my listening room is not as big as KWN's. At 18' x 14' x 8' my listening room would by most standards be considered only a small to medium room. It is reasonable to think that the 55" high Focus would be too big - and three 12" woofers would be overkill. The 44" x 12" x 12" Classics are the perfect size for my room. The dual 10" woofers, 7.5" Kevlar lower midrange driver, and the three tweeters (a 1.25" lower treble linen dome, 4" ribbon upper treble, and a rear-firing titanium dome) provide plenty of air moving and power handling capacity. Combined with a sensitivity of 92 dB, it pretty much guarantees there will be plenty of dynamic headroom regardless of almost any power amp used.

For more than two years my reference speakers have been the Snell C/Vs. I chose these \$2,600 six-driver speakers over dozens of contenders. Their subtractive faults dwell mostly in the frequency extremes. Nevertheless, their missing deep bass and highest upper treble are more than made up for by their extremely transparent midrange. Plus, if you put as great an importance on being able to handle many different types of music as I do, including rock and elec-

tronica, they were unbeatable in their price class. Don't get me wrong, I think it's very important that a speaker be able to render a lifelike sonic picture of a full orchestra or jazz combo, but if they can't pump out the multi-tracked close-miked rock, they need not apply for a position in my system.

So, enter the Legacy Classics. I already stated that they were the perfect size for my room, and had a driver complement that promised to move a generous amount of air. What I didn't mention is that they do this in a very handsome package. My review pair were finished in a cherry walnut veneer. There are at least seven other finishes available, including mahogany, rosewood, and four shades of oak including the requisite black. Even with the grilles off (I've never had the grilles on since they were set up in my listening room) they look good because the front of the cabinet is in the same finish. And, as KWN stated in his Focus review, their fit and finish gave the appearance that they were carefully crafted by a fine furniture maker.

On the front of the cabinet are mounted all the drivers except two. One of the two 10" woofers and the titanium domed tweeter are located on the rear panel, along with two pairs of heavy duty five-way binding posts. On the same plate as the binding posts are a set of five (count 'em, five) switches to tailor the sound of the speakers. Four of these switches, says Legacy, are to correct for acoustic irregularities in one's listening room, the fifth turns off the rear-firing tweeter for listeners who wish to do so. However, Legacy says that the rear-firing



LEGACY AUDIO Classic

tweeter offsets the illusion that louder high frequency sounds are placed further to the front of the sound-stage. By some quick testing, I determined the same, so I left that tweeter switched on.

Because my listening position is relatively close to the speakers, about eight feet or so, and the speakers themselves were about three feet from the rear wall, none of the switches brought about an improvement in sound. The Legacy Classics in other listening rooms may behave differently, so these switches may come in handy. One switch shelves information above 400 Hz by 2 dB, another gently notches the 60–85 Hz when room boundaries are a problem. Another lessens the edginess of bright program material by reducing frequencies in the lower treble, and the last is a low-frequency impedance contour when using amplifiers with high current capability. This reduces distortion in the octave above system resonance when using these amplifiers.

Legacy designer Bill Dudleston realizes that many potential owners of the Classics may have rooms or personal tastes that might require tailoring of the speaker's sound greater than what the rear panel switches can accomplish. The owner's manual has a section on how Legacy is willing to work with their customers to reach a satisfactory solution to their particular problems entitled "For the Tweakers." It states that rather than take the close-minded position that this customer is wrong, they would prefer to offer their assistance. They say at the customer's request Legacy will exchange or modify the drivers, or employ passive resonance trap circuits that can attenuate certain frequencies. They also offer their Steradian Environmental Processor, which connects to either the tape monitor of the preamp, or can be inserted between the amp and preamp. This component further tames aberrant frequencies due to room interaction. Again, I don't think there would be any benefit to using this device in my room, although KWN has stated in his review that it made an improvement in his system, with no detectable loss of transparency with the Steradian engaged.

The explanations of the effects of the toggle switches on the sound of the speakers were part of an extremely complete owner's manual (or the Listener's Guide, as Legacy titles it). Sections on Legacy design philosophy, specifications, speaker placement, a lengthy discussion on speaker cables, amplifiers, and

even a more lengthy section on bi-amplification and bi-wiring. An entire page is dedicated to power, titled "How Much PEAK Power Do We Really Need?," and "The Ear Itself." Whew!

Listening: This is where I'm really tempted to plagiarize KWN's article. As I said in my introduction to this review, the sonic character of the Legacy Classics seemed to match almost word for word his review of the Legacy Focus. However, the sound of these speakers caught me by surprise. I wasn't expecting them to be this good! They were superior not only to my Snells, but ANY speaker I've heard ANYWHERE near their price range.

KWN said he was expecting to be bowled over by

the bass of the Legacies because the Focus has three 12" woofers per speaker. This was to be expected, and it was nice that instead he became pleasantly surprised that he was instead enticed by their transparent midrange. But in regards to the Classics, it didn't seem

"The Legacies have midrange qualities
I previously thought impossible via
dynamic speakers,"

like the difference in my system would be that great - the two 10" woofers in the Classics versus the two 8" woofers in my Snells. So, I wasn't expecting that the Classics would have that much better bass than the Snells. Boy, was I wrong.

I have never, I repeat never, experienced this class of bass in my listening room. I have had bass this low in my listening room before (Legacy claims the Classic's bass response goes down to 22 Hz), but never combined with this quality. It was extremely pitch stable, tight, full, and natural. It was also appropriately balanced - it didn't distract from the other frequencies contained in the music program.

It wasn't only because of this bass superiority, but because they were better than the Snells in every other area I think it is unfair to continue comparing them to the Legacies. As good as the Snells are (and I still think they are fine speakers), they are just not in the same league.

The ease with which the Classics reproduced any bass information that I threw at them was very, very impressive. During one listening session I would pump some ridiculously deep and inflated electronic bass from the Excursions in Ambiance 4 sampler on Astrelwerks Records that was so deep and powerful that it could loosen the fillings in one's teeth. Then I would switch to the classic version of L'Orchestra de la Suisse Romande playing Stravinsky's Rite of Spring led by Ernest Ansermet, an

orchestral disc with a generous sprinkling of bass drum whacks that rattled the window frames in my listening room. And in both cases cited above, no matter how prominent the bass, it would never overpower the other frequencies contained in the recorded material. But don't let these examples lead you to think that the Legacies can only reproduce bass at high volumes. If I put on an album featuring the talent of an acoustic bassist such as Ron Carter or Paul Chambers, the bass was so natural as to have a "woody" tone not only added to the mids and highs but I could sense it in the low frequencies as well. No subtleties in the playing were lost.

The Legacies have midrange qualities I previously thought impossible via dynamic speakers, not only because of their transparency, but because this transparency led to a

naturalness that was extraordinary. I expect at this price range to be occasionally drawn to a

piece of music because an instrument or two will jump out of the mix and sound more authentic than the others. Yet, the Classics sounded realistic throughout all the instruments in an ensemble.

The soundstage, too, was extremely convincing. This further added to the separation of instruments that was able to sort out the instruments in the most complex of recordings. They were laid out before me - and whether it be a jazz combo, rock band, or an orchestra or chamber group, I was drawn into the music. I would put on CD after CD, LP after LP, and whether the material was familiar or new, because of the midrange transparency and palpable soundstage I was able to hear every nuance of the music. The sound was never etched, but focused and natural. I started to compare these speakers not to my Snells, but to speakers in some of my audiophile friends' systems that cost thousands more than the Classics.

On the fantastic album by Cassandra Wilson, Blue Moon Daughter, her voice was centered between the two speakers with smooth, uncolored effortlessness. I could close my eyes and picture her there in my listening room, accompanied by the unusual instrumentation that makes up her backing band.

The treble from the Classics was also equal or superior to that from any speaker I have not only reviewed, but ever heard in or anywhere near their price range. It was a natural treble that rather than calling attention to itself, called attention to the music. I keep wanting to use the terms "appropriate" and "natural," and for

fear of over-using these terms have resorted to other phrases, but in reality that's what I got with the Legacies. These frequencies judged on their own were admirable, but what was even more impressive was how the speakers managed to integrate them all into a seamless whole.

As I write this I'm at a loss for words to further describe the Classics' sound. Yes, they are tonally correct, they sound like the real thing, and they can handle every genre of music I played through them. But for fear of repeating myself - "the (insert frequency range or tonal quality here) was natural and didn't call attention to itself" - I think I should stop here. It's almost as if I were trying to describe the sound of an instrument or of a human voice to someone who's never heard one before. How does one describe the sound of a sym-

phony orchestra?

How does one describe the sound of a rock band bashing it out at full tilt?

Although some have described the sound

of John Coltrane on his album Giant Steps as "sheets of sound," does that REALLY describe the sound of his sax, not to mention the rest of his band? I don't think so.

The only way I can truly and accurately describe the Classics is with live music as a reference. Have you ever heard the sound of an orchestra, chamber ensemble, or recital from the 10th row? Or have heard the sound of a live, unmiked jazz combo? Or heard your friend's rock band in rehearsal, or gone to the studio to hear their master tape on the deck it was recorded on? If the answer is yes to any of these, then you will be able to imagine the sound of the Legacy Classics.

I'm not saying that their sound is indistinguishable from the real thing. It's not. But these speakers render so many important elements of the sound of the actual performance that I previously thought only possible with speakers costing thousands of dollars more.

I have yet to hear the "perfect" speaker. But with the Legacy Classics, I feel as if they coax every bit from the recording and the source components possible, and then transform the signal into a realistic representation of the recorded event. As I switched from one record to another, one CD to another, and swapped components upstream, I never felt I was missing anything that either the recordings or components had to offer.

Unconditionally, unhesitatingly, and with my utmost confidence and sincerity - recom-

"The only way I can truly and accurately describe the Classics is with live music as a reference."

from issue August 1998

Reviewer: John Gatski



In 1983, engineer Bill Dudleston, owner of Reel to Real Designs, introduced a speaker line that sold factory-direct, offering high-end speakers at lower than high-end prices. Thus, the Legacy speaker line was born, with the original Legacy-1 as its flagship.

Today, the company-now called Legacy Audio-still sells factory-direct,

with a dozen audition locations scattered around the country and one in Canada. The line has grown to 12 speakers, including the well-received Focus, Signature III, Accent, and Whisper models; the pint sized Studio; a variety of center-channel speakers; a couple of subwoofers; and the most popular speaker in the line, the \$2,695-per pair Classic.

“...depending on your amp, the Legacy can play as clean and loud as desired without strain.”

The Classic is a floor-standing four-way column system that exudes quality, especially for its price range. Available in standard finishes of black, walnut or medium oak (as well as in a variety of optional premium finishes), the Classic contains a front-mounted, 10-inch polypropylene composite woofer, a 7-inch Kevlar midrange driver, a 1 1/4-inch titanium-dome tweeter, and a 4-inch ribbon super-tweeter, which are said to augment the bass and enhance ambience. The front drivers are covered by a removable grille, the rear drivers are bare.

The Classic's factory specifications list a frequency response of 22 Hz to 30 kHz, ± 2 dB, sensitivity of 90 dB/ 1 watt / 1 meter, and crossovers at 120 Hz, 2.8kHz, and 10 kHz. The recommended amplifier power is from 25 to 300 watts continuous.

The Classic is 44 inches tall, 12 inches wide, and 12 inches deep. At 110 pounds, it is no lightweight. The hardwood cabinet is extremely dense: Rapping it with bare knuckles yielded no hollow ringing. On the bottom rear panel is an array of five toggle switches that engage passive internal filters and control driver selection for fine-tuning the speaker to the room. The switches for the passive filters become active only in their down positions, yielding a flat response when toggled up, according to Legacy's informative owner's manual. When you toggle it down, the first switch is said to reduce the level of the speakers midrange and treble by 2 dB, which is "passively equivalent to bass boost," the manual states. The second switch notches the bass output by 3 dB at 70 Hz. The third reduces output in the lower treble region, while the fourth changes the speaker impedance from 4 to 6 ohms-the latter to make the load easier on smaller amps. The fifth switch defeats the rear-firing tweeter.



**LEGACY AUDIO
Classic**

The two pairs of binding posts are linked by heavy copper jumpers for use with a conventional stereo amp, or the terminals can be used separately for biamping. On the bottom are factory-installed, gold-plated spikes.

I auditioned the Legacy Classics for several months with a variety of amps, pre-amps, and program material. Eventually, I settled on a pair of 100-watt Pass Aleph 2 Class-A MOS-FET amps, a Pass Aleph P MOS-FET pre-amplifier, a Denon CD transport with a Parasound D/AC-2000 HDCD D/A convertor, and Alpha-Core Goertz speaker cables and line-level interconnects. I also did some rudimentary room measurements with an AudioControl R130 realtime analyzer (RTA) to see how the speakers interacted with my listening room.

After using a lot of muscle to move the 110-pound speakers into the

room, I positioned them as recommended by the factory.

When placed at least 3 feet from the front wall, the Classics are designed to yield flat frequency response at

far-field listening positions 10 feet or more away. I found that at least 3 feet of space from the side wall was necessary in order to prevent audible heaviness around 80 Hz in my listening room. On some material rich in upper-bass energy, I used the bass-reduction switch to light the bottom end. For the most part, though, I preferred the flat settings for these switches. With the aid of the RTA, I got the Classics to produce fairly flat response at the listening position and noted that the speakers had substantial bass output at 20 Hz. That's not too shabby for two 10-inch woofers.

My initial impressions of the Classic were quite good. The speakers produced an excellent soundstage with an openness and uncolored midrange and treble that I am accustomed to hearing only from high-quality ribbon-driver speakers. The bass was deep and tight, and the rear dome added an ambience that audible collapsed (the degree depended on the source material) when I switched it off. I ended up keeping it active. I listened to some of my favorite audiophile discs, representing a range of musical styles. I first tried out the western-swing country music of Wylie & The Wild West Show's *Get Wild* (Cross Tree Records 9405). This CD contains classic, reverb-soaked Telecaster twang and pedal steel embellishments ("Devil Woman" is a prime example) that can be clearly heard with a high-quality speaker. These characteristics were duly delivered by the Legacy. Bass and drums

were deep and tight without strain at high levels. Depending on your amp, the Legacy can play as clean and loud as desired without strain.

On Johnny Frigo's *Debut of a Legend* (Chesky JD119), the violin tone was about as good as I have heard. Recording engineer Bob Katz's selection and careful placement of microphones for this performance made nuances of Frigo's violin playing (e.g., plucked strings) stand out with the Classics. The liveness of the room was also preserved with those speakers.

I also listened to numerous recordings of orchestral works, solo violin, guitar, and lute, dating from the 1960's to present-day. They all sounded strong. I especially liked the precision of the plucked lute in Ronn McFarlane's *The Distant Shore* (Dorian DOR-90242).

Again, I really just cannot say enough about the sound

of a well-implemented ribbon tweeter. It just adds that small degree of extra treble articulation without undue edginess.

On the other hand, the one liability of the Classics ribbon is its somewhat narrow vertical dispersion. If your listening position is above or

below the ribbons' ideal transmission path, high frequencies can sound a bit muted. Consequently, you need to sit in the sweet spot. I obtained the best sound with my ears about even with or just a few inches below the ribbon.

As an aside, I recently had recording/mastering engineer Tom Jung visit my house, and we sampled some of his just completed audiophile jazz CDs, using the Legacy Classics as monitors. His general opinion, without having other speakers on hand, was that the Classic was in good company with more expensive Thiels and B&W's. I agree. You would have to spend a lot more money to eclipse the performance of these speakers. I suppose that qualifies them as a genuine bargain.

As I mentioned earlier, Legacy sells factory-direct. You call them up, give them a credit card number, order a pair of speakers, and try them out for 10 days. If you're unhappy, you can return them and your account is credited. While I don't mind shopping that way, others may feel safer auditioning speakers in a showroom. I have bought gear from Legacy in the past, and the service was quite reliable. If you can live without the tire-kicking ritual of the retail hi-fi buying process, the savings can be substantial.



"You would have to spend a lot of money to eclipse the Legacy Classic's performance."
