

Aurum Cantus V2M

ROBERT J. REINA

LOUDSPEAKER



Aurum Cantus V2M loudspeaker

DESCRIPTION Two-way, reflex-loaded, stand-mounted loudspeaker. Drive-units: 2.34" (60mm) by 0.56" (14.5mm) by 0.01mm aluminum ribbon tweeter, 5.2" (130mm) carbon-fiber/Kevlar-cone woofer. Crossover frequency: 2500Hz. Frequency range: 50Hz–40kHz. Sensitivity: 87dB/2.83V/m.

Impedance: 8 ohms nominal, 6.4 ohms minimum. Recommended amplification: 50–200W.

DIMENSIONS 14.6" (370mm) H by 8.1" (205mm) W by 12.2" (309mm) D. Weight: 28 lbs (12.8kg).

SERIAL NUMBERS OF UNITS REVIEWED 0095 (both).

PRICE \$1890/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 48.

MANUFACTURER Penglai Jinlang Audio Co., Ltd., 1 Xianqiao Street, Beiguan Road, Penglai, China.

Tel: (86) 535-5643360.

Fax: (86) 535-5610809.

Web: www.aurumcantus.com.

US distributor: VAS Industries, Inc., 1 Bethany Road, Building 1, Suite 5, Hazlet, NJ 07730. Tel: (732) 888-3288. Fax: (732) 888-2988.

Web: www.vasindustries.com.

In the March 2008 *Stereophile* (Vol.31 No.3), I wrote favorably about the A-50T integrated amplifier from the Chinese company Cayin Audio. I was very impressed with its sound, appearance, and construction quality for the price: \$1295. This positive experience led me to look into what other products Cayin's importer, VAS Industries, distributes here. More often than not, when a keen ear imports an interesting product into the US, that ear has also heard the good sounds of other products, as attested by the diverse product lines of distributors such as Music Hall and Sumiko. It turns out that VAS distributes Chinese loudspeakers made by Aurum Cantus, including seven two-channel models. I chose the entry-level design, the two-way V2M bookshelf speaker (\$1890/pair), which combines a ribbon tweeter with a dynamic mid-woofer cone.

My first listening session was a bit delayed. After I'd unpacked the V2Ms, I spent some time staring at and, yes, fondling their gorgeous cabinets. The sleek, side panels of curved MDF are finished in a gorgeous, deep-gloss maple veneer (rosewood, cherry, and piano black are also available). I couldn't take my eyes off them. I can't remember when I've seen an affordable speaker this beautiful.

The Aurum Cantus V2M has a ribbon tweeter of pure aluminum. Although the tweeter is shielded, Aurum Cantus warns that its magnet still has a strong stray field, and recommends placing the speaker a minimum of 35" from any TV screen. The woofer has a composite cone made of Kevlar and nonwoven carbon fiber, a copper-clad aluminum voice-coil, and a magnet system with a Faraday ring. The cross-

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over employs M-Cap Supreme MXP and Aurum Cantus MXP capacitors, milspec metal-oxide film resistors, and high-purity OFC-wound inductors. The shape of the cabinet—a truncated cone of MDF with a parabolic structure—was chosen to minimize resonances.

I sat the V2Ms on my trusty Celestion Si stands, which are loaded with lead shot and sand. I listened to the bi-wired V2Ms with their grilles off as well as on. Although the tonal balance didn't change, leaving the grilles on resulted in significantly less detail. So off they stayed during my listening sessions—as VAS Industries recommends.

Listening

The detailed and uncolored midrange reproduction of the Aurum Cantus V2M incited me to mine my collection of well-recorded vocal performances. On "Round Midnight," from Ella Fitzgerald's *Clap Hands, Hear Comes Charlie!* (LP, Verve V-4053), every silky, voluptuous inflection of Fitzgerald's voice was so captivating that I scribbled: "She's talking to me. She's singing to me." The V2M reproduced every low-level phrasing inflection of

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

ANALOG SOURCE Rega Planar 3 and VPI TNT turntables; Immedia pickup arm; Syrinx PU-3 tonearm; Koetsu Urushi, Clearaudio Virtuoso Wood & Aurum Beta S cartridges.
DIGITAL SOURCE Creek Destiny CD player.

PREAMPLIFICATION Vendetta Research SCP-2D phono preamplifier, Audio Valve Eklipse line stage.

POWER AMPLIFIER Audio Research Reference 110.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS Creek Destiny & 5350SE, Simaudio Moon i-1.

LOUDSPEAKERS Amphion Helium², Epos M16, Monitor Audio Silver RS6.

CABLES Interconnect (all MIT): Magnum M3, MI-350 CVTwin Terminator, MI-330SG Terminator. Speaker: Acarian Systems Black Orpheus.

ACCESSORIES Various by ASC, Bright Star, Celestion, Echo Busters, Salamander Designs, Simply Physics, Sound Anchor, VPI. —Robert J. Reina

Joni Mitchell's voice as she sang "Urge for Going," from *Hits* (CD, Reprise

46326-2), the speaker's ribbon tweeter flawlessly rendering her pristine and extended sibilants.

The V2M's ability to resolve detail let me listen far enough into many familiar recordings to hear them anew. Listening to Roger McGuinn's solo on Rickenbacker 12-string guitar on the Byrds' "Turn, Turn, Turn," rather than focus on his superb picking, I was drawn to Gene Clark's delicate tambourine counterrhythms way down in the mix, which were very clear, without a trace of smear. On *Jesu*, from Timothy Seelig's recording of John Rutter's *Requiem* (CD, Reference RR-57CD), I had never heard soprano Nancy Keith's solo line so boldly separated from the massed voices of the Turtle Creek Chorus. Nor had I ever before noticed the melodic, call-and-response interplay of oboist Dennis Brickman and flutist Michael Sullivan.

The V2M's ribbon tweeter was a big contributor to the speaker's superb resolution of detail. Normally, with speakers that combine a ribbon tweeter with dynamic drivers, and especially at such a low price, I'm wary of the risks that either the tweeter will be too bright or its

MEASUREMENTS

The Aurum Cantus V2M's voltage sensitivity came in at an estimated 84dB(B)/2.83V/m, significantly lower than both average and specified. Alleviating the speaker's needs for volts, however, is the fact that its impedance magnitude remains above 8 ohms at almost all frequencies, and that the electrical phase angle is generally low (fig.1). Though the impedance traces are free from the discontinuities that would suggest the presence of cabinet resonances, investigating the panels' vibrational behavior with a plastic-tape accelerometer did uncover some modes (fig.2). These are high enough in frequency that they will probably not muddy the speaker's reproduction of the midrange.

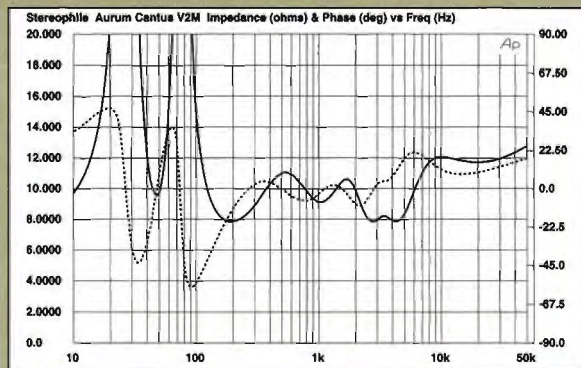


Fig.1 Aurum Cantus V2M, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed). (2 ohms/vertical div.)

The saddle at 48Hz between the twin bass humps in the impedance-magnitude trace suggests that this is the tuning frequency of the reflex-loaded woofer, and indeed, the woofer's response, measured in the nearfield (fig.3, blue trace), has the expected minimum-motion notch at that frequency. The port's output (fig.3, red trace) peaks between 35 and 70Hz and has a well-controlled rolloff above that region—at least until the upper midrange, when a sharp spike appears at 910Hz, this due to a pipe resonance of some kind. Fortunately, the port faces to the rear of the speaker, which will reduce the audibility of this mode. The black trace below 300Hz in fig.3 shows the complex sum of the nearfield woofer and port responses, taking into account both acoustic phase and the different distance of each radiator from a nominal farfield microphone position.

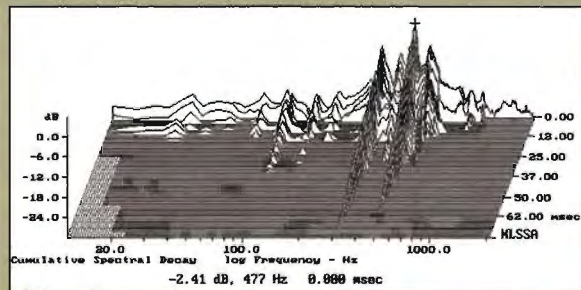


Fig.2 Aurum Cantus V2M, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from output of accelerometer fastened to center of side panel (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz).

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sound will be disconnected from the rest of the frequency spectrum. That was not a problem for the V2M. With all recordings I played, the high frequencies were pristine, extended, and detailed, and provided an entirely coherent sonic presentation with the rest of the frequency spectrum. The massed string passages of Laurence Leighton Smith and the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra's recording of Tchaikovsky's Symphony 5 (LP, Sheffield Labs RP-25) were silky, extended, realistic, and reminiscent of a live orchestral performance in the pre-renovation Carnegie Hall.

The V2M's tweeter was quite fast as well. On works with well-recorded, densely textured transients, all details were reproduced without a trace of smear or edge. On Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos, the composer and Jacques Février man the keyboards to execute some very difficult rapid passages with significant high-frequency content (UK LP, EMI ASD 517). Through the Aurum Cantus, the upper-register

sparkle of the pianos was light, airy, delicate, and lightning-fast. The tweeter even sparkled with electronic rock. Listening to "Man/Machine," from Kraftwerk's *Minimum/Maximum* (CD, EMI ASW 60611), I was able to analyze the high-frequency filtering content of every rapid synthesizer patch on this deceptively simple-sounding work.

The V2M also effortlessly reproduced wide dynamic swings without smearing or obvious compression, behaving in this regard much more like a large floorstander than like a bookshelf speaker. The forceful dynamic swings of the spectacular Tchaikovsky symphony recording were reproduced in a precisely linear and organic fashion (from my notes: "the boom, the drama!"). The Kraftwerk track also produced an effortless sense of slam, aided by the speaker's ability to produce realistic bass transients (I'm curious to see John Atkinson's measurements of the V2M's low-frequency performance), which shook my listening room. Bookshelf

speakers rarely do that.

The V2M's clean, uncolored mid-bass was quite impressive with all recordings I listened to. Scott La Faro's double-bass solo on "Gloria's Step," from the Bill Evans Trio's *Sunday at the Village Vanguard* (LP, Riverside/APO RCP 9376), was light, woody, and vibrant, with just the right amount of richness and warmth, but without a trace of overhang or coloration. It was Art Dudley who first pointed out to me how melodic a bass player Paul McCartney is. In "One After 909," from *Let It Be . . . Naked* (CD, Apple CDP 5 95713 2), his bass line was very clear and easy to follow in this late recording of an early tune by the best punk band to ever come out of Liverpool.

The Aurum Cantus V2M did one very impressive thing that no other speaker I've reviewed has. Its sound was so realistic, detailed, and coherent that, with every recording I tried, the music grabbed me and forced me to focus on it. I found it very difficult to use the

measurements, continued

There is only a faint trace of the expected nearfield boost in the upper bass, suggesting that the V2M's reflex alignment is somewhat overdamped. As Bob Reina describes in his auditioning comments, this gives an optimal balance of midbass weight and low-frequency definition.

Higher in frequency in fig.3, the black trace shows the far-field response, averaged across a 30° horizontal window on the tweeter axis. It is basically very flat, but with the mean level in the tweeter region 2dB or so hotter than that in the upper midrange. In addition, a broad, shallow suckout is evident between 3 and 6kHz. I at first thought this was due to a suboptimal crossover topology, but as the crossover point is set somewhat lower, at just above 2.5kHz, it must result from something else. However, this suckout does

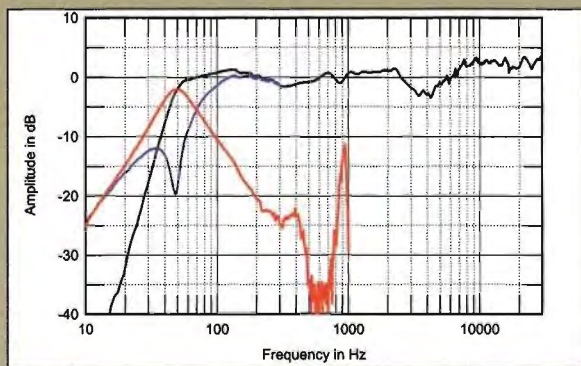


Fig.3 Aurum Cantus V2M, anechoic response without grille on tweeter axis at 50°, averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with nearfield responses of woofer (blue) and port (red), plotted in the ratios of the square roots of their radiating areas below 300Hz and 1kHz, respectively, with complex sum of woofer and port responses plotted below 300Hz (black).

contribute to the V2M's low measured sensitivity. Interestingly, the Aurum's plot of lateral dispersion (fig.4) suggests that this suckout fills in somewhat to the speaker's sides, which is probably why BJR was not bothered by the speaker sounding too polite or laid-back. This behavior also explains why he didn't find the tweeter to sound disconnected from the speaker's lower-frequency presentation. However, the ribbon tweeter does offer reasonably wide dispersion in its top two octaves, which, in combination with its rather "hot" level on-axis, will correlate with Bob's feeling that the V2M's treble was "airy" and "sparkling" compared with that of speakers with conventional dome tweeters.

In the vertical plane (fig.5), a large suckout develops at the crossover frequency almost immediately below the

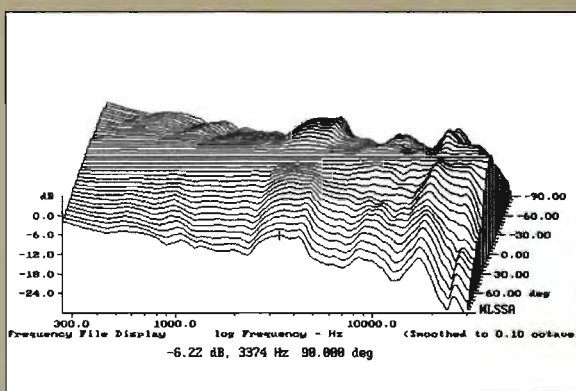


Fig.4 Aurum Cantus V2M, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90°-5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5°-90° off axis.

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Fig.5

dB
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-6.0
-12.0
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-24.0
Frequency

Fig.7

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V2Ms for background listening—they kept slapping me in the face, demanding that I pay attention. “Fruit Forward,” from my jazz quartet Attention Screen’s *Live at Merkin Hall* (CD, Stereophile STPH018-2), opens with a pensive solo on fretless bass guitar by Chris Jones. Although from many hearings of this disc I knew every note that Chris was about to play, I found myself stopping what I was doing to stare at the aural image of his bass between the speakers, as if I were hearing him improvise this solo for the very first time. Toward the end of the track, I go off into a neoromantic piano cadenza. With the Aurum Cantuses, I marveled at the dynamic bloom of the reproduction of the Steinway D concert grand I was playing that night, and focused on the stunning realism of the speakers’ rendering of the delicate sound of the instrument’s top three octaves. When listening to “Melting”—from *Of Mist and Melting*, by my favorite guitarist, Bill Connors (LP, ECM 1120)—I normally focus on the dynamic

counterhythms drummer Jack DeJohnette sets up on his ride cymbals. This time, I was intoxicated by saxophonist John Surman’s rendition of Connors’ engaging melody, which the leader later repeats on acoustic guitar.

Comparisons

I compared the Aurum Cantus V2M (\$1890/pair) with the Amphion Helium² (\$1200/pair), the Monitor Audio RS6 Silver (\$1200/pair), and the Epos M16 (\$1998/pair).

The Amphion Helium² had silkier, more delicate highs than the Aurum Cantus V2M, though they weren’t as extended or as detailed. However, the Amphion’s bass extension and dynamics were inferior to the Aurum Cantus’.

The Monitor Audio RS6 Silver had deeper bass and more powerful dynamic contrasts. Its highs were as extended as those of the Aurum Cantus V2M, but not as clean or as delicate. The RS6 Silver also seemed just a touch brighter than the V2M, though its inner detail,

retrieval of ambience and decay, and ability to render low-level dynamic inflections were just as good.

The Epos M16 has a wonderfully rich midrange and high frequencies that are as clean, delicate, and sophisticated as the Aurum V2M’s, though the Epos is perhaps a touch less airy and “sparkling” on top. Its bass is deeper and tighter, however, and its midbass a touch cleaner, if not as warm. I also felt the dynamic capabilities of both the Aurum Cantus and the Monitor were better than those of the Epos.

Payoff

Aurum Cantus should be applauded for brilliantly integrating a ribbon tweeter and moving-coil woofer into so rugged, attractive, compact, and affordable a package. The V2M has no meaningful flaw to speak of, and has several desirable features that I’ve never come across in a loudspeaker of this size and price. Anyone looking for a stereo pair of speakers for \$2000 and under should give the V2M a listen. ■

tweeter axis, which fills in for listening axes 5–15° above that axis. Short stands will work better than tall ones with the V2M, though the ribbon’s very restricted vertical dispersion will give a somewhat airless balance if the listener sits more than 10° above the tweeter axis.

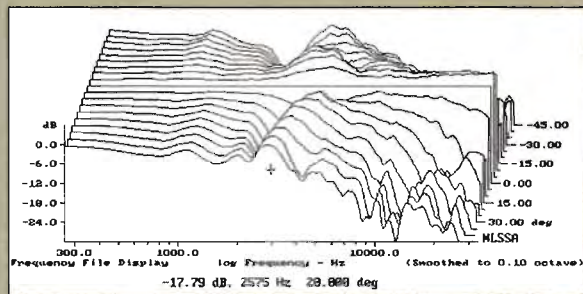


Fig.5 Aurum Cantus V2M, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 45–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5–45° below axis.

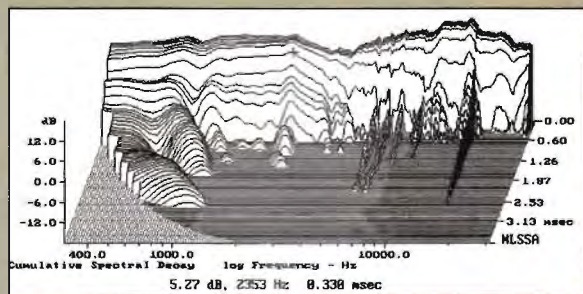


Fig.7 Aurum Cantus V2M, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50° (0.15ms risetime).

Turning to the time domain, the V2M’s step response on the tweeter axis (fig.6) reveals that both the tweeter and woofer are connected in positive acoustic polarity, and that the decay of the ribbon’s step is nicely integrated with the leading edge of the woofer’s step. This confirms the optimal crossover topology, which is why I conjectured that some other factor must be responsible for the octave-wide depression in the mid-treble region of the tweeter-axis response. The Aurum’s cumulative spectral-decay plot on the tweeter axis (fig.7) is superbly clean, which will go some way toward explaining BJR’s very positive feelings about the speaker’s clarity and resolution of detail.

I was impressed by the Aurum Cantus V2M’s measured behavior. There is already plenty of competition in the high-performance, \$2000/pair bookshelf market, with models from AAD, Monitor Audio, and Harbeth taking the lead. Even so, the V2M is a worthy contender. —John Atkinson

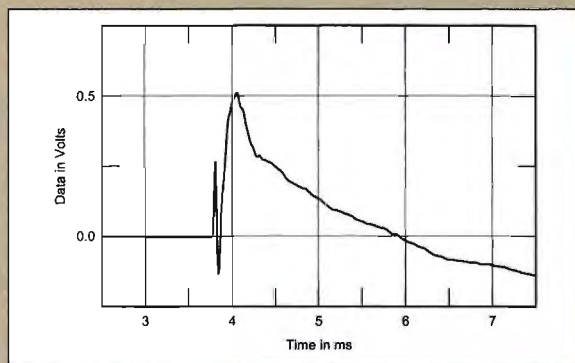


Fig.6 Aurum Cantus V2M, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).