



*The SP100R2s  
12 inch woofers  
promise  
prodigious bass.*

**Spendor's updated Classic SP100R2 is big and bold – and also makes a beautiful sound according to Jon Myles.**

# Bass classic

**T**ake one look at Spendor's SP100R2 and you may think it's been beamed in from the 1970s. Not for this model the current vogue for flat front baffles popu-

lated by a vertical array of physically challenged drive units. Instead this is a big, bulky cabinet which is almost the size of a small fridge and features a recessed front baffle carrying big, purposeful drive units.

Those looks are no accident – the SP100R can trace its lineage all the way back to 1973. Its direct descendants include the well-regarded BC3, S100, S100P and SP100. But while the looks might



seem resolutely traditional the engineering is bang up to date owing much to lessons learned in the development of Spendor's rather more svelte models.

It is the largest of Spendor's re-engineered Classic range and as such features much of the company's latest design and sound quality improvements. Nominally, it's a standmount – one of the biggest you'll ever come across!

First off that 70x37x43cm (HWD) veneered cabinet. Unlike most rivals Spendor uses a thin wall construction which is heavily damped rather than the ultra-rigid technique used by most other manufacturers (see box-out).

Take off the baffles and it's soon clear why the cabinet is so big. Taking pride of place is an in-house produced Bextrene woofer clocking in at 30cm – a full 12 inches. When you consider most other speakers at this price will have bass units of around half that size it certainly makes a statement.

Allied to this are a new 18cm ep38 polymer cone mid-range and 22mm tweeter. All the drivers are new or improved and the cabinet construction has also been revised using a combination of advanced computer measuring techniques and extensive listening tests. The crossover has also been upgraded while high-grade silver-plated cables have been employed for the internal wiring.

Twin reflex ports complete the front baffle while round the back are a pair of high-quality gold-plated bi-wire speaker posts.

Minimum impedance is quoted at 5.5 Ohms with an 89dB sensitivity, suggesting these should be relatively easy to drive with any decent amplifier. The review samples also came in a new dark walnut finish which is an alternative to the standard cherry finish as a special order.

Spendor also supplied a sturdy pair of stands which raise the tweeter to seated ear height, which was a must to get the SPR100 sounding right; just bear in mind it takes two people to get the speakers into place.

They also need space, working best well away from side walls and placed a reasonable distance out into the room, although the front-firing reflex ports give a degree of flexibility here.

Once in place there's no doubt

it's an imposing package in which form undeniably follows function. You can tell the Spendors are engineered to do a job and do it well. That 12in bass unit and hefty cabinet suggests this is a speaker designed to give plentiful bass and room-filling sound while Spendor's heritage automatically brings the promise of a smooth mid-range. So, all the ingredients are there – but do they deliver?

## SOUND QUALITY

The short answer is yes. Massively. First of all, there's no doubt about it – when it comes to reproducing

good, clean bass there's little to match a well-engineered 12 inch woofer. While smaller, multiple drive units can do a good job they just don't have the overall heft offered by one larger cone. Spendor claims an in-room response down to 35Hz and that seems about right.

Play anything with some low energy and you are met by a weight and depth that few other speakers can match. It's a quality that gives orchestral music the feeling of scale and authority you'd expect to hear in a concert hall while rock music has real grunt and drive.

What that bass quality does as well is provide a solid platform for the upper frequencies to work. Mids seem sweeter and the highs float better as the SP100Rs are providing a much fuller range of sound. It's a beguiling effect and one that can bring new insights into even frequently-played pieces.

Take Kraftwerk's 'Minimum-Maximum' for example. It's a legendary well-recorded album but through some other speakers you'd be hard-pressed to know it's live, bar the audience applause.

Not so with the Spendors. Suddenly the ambience of the concert halls is palpable – to the extent that you can tell different tracks were laid down in different

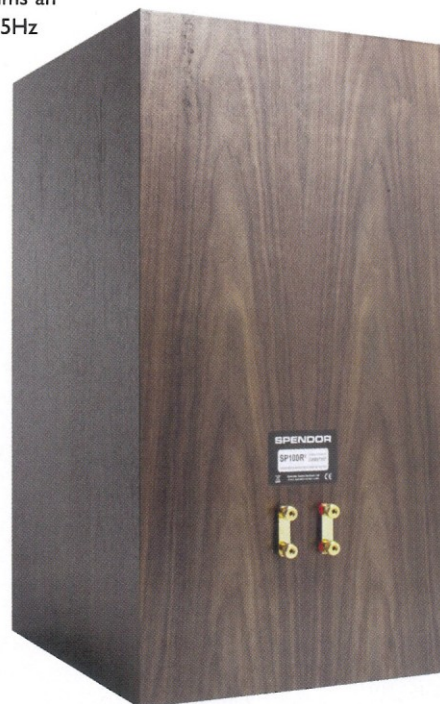
locations. You are simply getting closer to the music in its atmosphere.

Try Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Orchestra's recording of 'The Rite Of Spring' and the crescendos are simply stunning in their intensity. And as for Led Zeppelin's 'When The Levy Breaks' – well, John Bonham's drums sounded truly visceral.

But don't run away with the idea the Spendors are all about power. They don't pound you into submission with swathes of uncontrolled low-frequency sound but rather order all the elements into a musical whole. Above that bass

"supremely musical, deeply satisfying listen which allows music to flow as intended"

unit the midrange is crisp, clean and detailed while the tweeter is similarly sweet and open. They may not have the bite of some metal-domed units but they never sounded too mellow



**Each cabinet features high-quality bi-wireable speaker posts.**

or syrupy and nor do they lose any of the musical information.

Play anything with a pronounced top end and you'll soon know about it although they won't draw more attention to it than is needed. And anything with a well-recorded mid-range comes across with aplomb.

Eleanor McEvoy's 'Out There'





**A new tweeter and revised mid-range feature throughout the updated classic range**

album sounded deliciously fleet-footed and spry – with yet again that extra bass extension only adding to the overall definition of the music.

That's helped by the fact that the drive units are also extremely well integrated. There's never any sense that you are listening to three different units. Instead they blend seamlessly into each other.

Image placement was good too. Despite their size music is projected away from the boxes with excellent width and depth. Music flows into the room and stays firmly placed in space and time.

Another plus point to the Spondors is they were also happy working with a wide variety of amplifiers. Some potential 350 Watts of Chord power courtesy of its new SPM 1200MkII power amplifier certainly had the room shaking (as well as the neighbours' fists!) but they were equally happy with a Naim SuperNait or a 50 Watt Arcam FMJ A19 (see review this issue). Yes, you could tell the difference between the three amplifiers but all could drive these monsters. I'd also hazard a guess that some beefy Icon Audio valve amplifiers would match too.

## CONCLUSION

Any basic design that's been around as long as the Spondor SP100R has to have something going for it. And listen to this update and you'll realise just what that is. They are a supremely musical, deeply satisfying listen that allow music to flow as intended and are effortlessly musical.

That 12 inch bass unit allows them to breath scale and authority into the most demanding music while the midrange and highs are gloriously

## SPENDOR MANAGING DIRECTOR PHILIP SWIFT SAYS:

"The challenge was to incorporate new technology without changing the basic attributes of the loudspeaker. So what we have with the SP100R2 is a loudspeaker which stays true to the original but improves on it in certain key areas. We have a new tweeter, revised midrange, re-engineered crossover and the cabinet construction has been improved. That cabinet construction has been a crucial element in Spondor designs since the company's formation in 1971.

Unlike most other designs which aim for an ultra-rigid cabinet, Spondor uses a thin-wall construction which is then damped at critical areas to control rather than totally eliminate resonances.

The secret is knowing how the cabinet reacts to the music. We know all cabinets will move to some extent and also store energy. So we construct them with this in mind but ensure any movement is in sympathy with the music. In the Classic this helps ensure a warm sound but avoids the smearing you can get. It works very well and certainly everyone who has heard the SP100R2 has been extremely enthusiastic about the sound".

sweet and open.

There are loudspeakers that will give you more leading-edge definition (think ribbon tweeters) or drive units crafted from more exotic materials but whether they'll give you the sense of ease and overall musical integrity that the Spondors deliver is open to question.

You can also easily find speakers which are undeniably a lot more domestically-friendly than the SP100Rs. But that's really missing the point. These units are designed to do a job and it's one they do

astonishingly well.

Obviously, at this price range you're not exactly short of impressive loudspeakers to choose from. But it is hard to think of any that could better the Spondors for sheer musical enjoyment and grin-inducing sonics.

If you've got the room (and they do need plenty of space to sound at their best) and have a yen to really hear what's in your music collection in all its glory then you really owe it to yourself to give them a listen. You won't be disappointed.

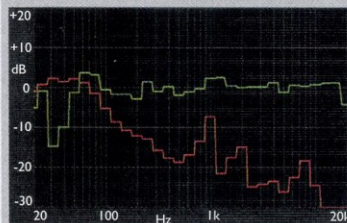
## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The big 12 inch bass unit of the SP100 R2 gets forward response right down to 40Hz (-6dB), unlike smaller drivers. The ports impose broad acoustic damping, our impedance trace shows, supplementing output from 80Hz down to 20Hz. Port output was -5dB lower than that from the drive unit, at 80Hz, where most ports are +6dB up in SPL terms, so the ports have less influence, but the SP100 R2 has strong output below 100Hz, goes low and is well damped in the bass. It may be overpowering in smaller rooms, but it should suit larger lounges at least 18ft long.

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output

Red - port output



### IMPEDANCE



Frequency response was broadly flat and even across the audio band our pink noise analysis shows, so basic tonal accuracy is good. A slight treble lift will ensure there is no dullness, but treble is smooth and peak free - always a good sign.

The Spondor is relatively flat from 2kHz up to 20kHz and compares well with the best, although a peculiar peak at 1kHz in all our responses and a phase rotation in the port here suggests an internal resonance of some sort. The result is to bring the midrange up a bit, adding a little artificial presence.

Our 200mS decay analysis shows coloration around this cabinet resonance at 1kHz, but otherwise the SP100 R2 exhibits low coloration from its drive units and even the bass unit is well controlled and not too 'hot' in our decay map, nor are there big box overhangs.

Impedance was high, measuring 10 Ohms with pink noise, largely because a 7 Ohm DCR bass unit has been used; it is common to use 4 Ohm units nowadays. Sensitivity was still high, measuring 89dB from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input, so the SP100 R2 still goes loud from little power and 40 Watts should suffice.

The SP100 R2 is fundamentally accurate and will have powerful bass that should be of good quality. There is a midband cabinet effect that also may add character. **NK**

## SPENDOR CLASSIC SP100R2 £6,995



### VERDICT

Oodles of bass, room-filling sound and a delicious midband add up to a thoroughly musical experience. 1970s appearance, but a sound fully up-to-date.

### FOR

- bass
- driver integration
- easy to drive

### AGAINST

- looks may not appeal to all
- need a big room.

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