

SPICA ANGELUS LOUDSPEAKER

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I remember when I first heard Spica's TC-50 speakers demonstrated at a Consumer Electronics Show. These little speakers with sloped front surfaces were on fairly tall stands, way out into the room. What I remember about the sound was that there was music in the room in three-dimensional space, and none of it seemed to be coming out of the speakers themselves.

I also remember reading about the introduction of the Angelus model, a good account of its theory, and a favorable review in another publication. My longtime friend and mentor, Gordon Mercer, who appreciates honesty of reproduction in speakers, has a pair of Angeli. I recently visited him in Prescott, Ariz. and was impressed with the sound of these speakers. A call to Spica's Claus Whiteacre got me a pair to evaluate.

The Angelus is a two-way system using an 8-inch woofer with a plastic rather than a paper cone and a 1-inch, impregnated-cloth dome tweeter. Price is \$1,275 per pair. I understand that the Angelus was conceived quite a while before its final design was completed, due to the research required to get a suitable woofer. Not surprising; since the woofer is handling the majority of the musical range, it is extremely important to get a good one. As on the TC-50, the front baffle is slanted backward to get alignment in time of the two drivers on the listening axis. The shape of the enclosure is certainly unusual—like some kind of modern sculpture. The large enclosure size allows a nicely damped low-end response down to 35 Hz. Tapered, nonparallel sides of the enclosure, in addition to making for interesting aesthetics, reduce coherent resonances within. The unusual baffle shape helps keep the woofer radiating into 4-pi space over its operating frequency range. This is because the panel is narrow where the woofer is



mounted. The larger panel width where the tweeter is mounted helps to keep the tweeter radiating into 2-pi space. Energy travelling along the baffle from the tweeter is absorbed by thick felt so that little energy is diffracted from the baffle's edges. Having such a large tweeter baffle carries the additional advantage of increasing the tweeter's radiating efficiency. All in all, this is an extremely clever and well-executed design.

The accompanying owner's manual, while not saying much about the design aspects of the speakers, is very informative about how to set them up and get the best sound from them. A nice sentiment in the introduction says

that the Angelus design is dedicated to the memory of Richard C. Heyser, inventor of Time Delay Spectrometry, and that it is on the fruits of his labor that the work at Spica rests.

I had heard that these speakers take quite a long time to break in, so I had the factory beat on them for a while before delivering them to me. The first sound I heard out of these speakers was from my video system. I was immediately taken in by the potential of the speakers in this setup. Bass quality was especially good in that room.

Next, I set them up in my main listening room. After fooling with positioning and such, I got a sound that was indeed spacious, with a wide and deep

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soundstage. Tonal balance was good, with a tendency to be bright in the high end. Herein lies a tale. I found myself going through power amplifiers to get the softest sounding ones in order to help ameliorate the bright high end. The speakers sounded quite good driven by a pair of Cary Audio CAD-50sL mono amps, giving a much more natural high-frequency balance.

I have set up the Angelus speakers a number of times since, and each time, the high-frequency balance has gotten better, to the point where I can more or less use most of the amplifiers that I have and get good high-frequency sound. Since it took a fair number of listening hours to get to this condition, I have to agree that they take quite a long time to break in.

What do they sound like after a break-in? Tonal honesty over most of the fundamental range of real instruments and human voice is definitely one of their strong points. A critical friend thought he could hear a mild "honk" in the woofer's upper range. I have not been particularly aware of this in my listening. Dynamic contrasts are well reproduced within the power capability of the drivers. Low-level details and spatial cues are nicely delineated. At one point in my listening evaluation, when using the very powerful Carver Silver Seven tube amplifiers, I was playing a cut on *Dáfos* (Reference Recording-12 CD) that I especially like, and I started turning it up and saying, "Wow, this sounds good! More level!" A horrible crack from the right woofer at a level that wasn't all that loud overall informed me that these speakers won't play real loud, and to do so with big amplifiers just invites woofer destruction. In this case, the one-time bottoming of the woofer voice-coil didn't seem to damage that driver. I would say from this experience that the speakers do a good job of playing classical music at close to realistic levels, but you shouldn't expect to play heavy metal loudly.

I am quite impressed with these speakers and have learned a lot by listening to them. For a modestly priced system, they do a very credible job of reproducing music. I would certainly recommend them to those whose priorities are in the music rather than the equipment. *Bascom H. King*