



KALYA

Country of Origin



Reviewer: Srajan Ebaen

Financial interests: click [here](#)

Sources: Retina 5K 27" iMac (4GHz quad-core with Turbo boost, 32GB RAM, 3TB FusionDrive, OSX Yosemite, iTunes 12.2), PureMusic 3.02, Qobuz Hifi, Tidal Hifi, Fore Audio DAISY1, COS Engineering D1, Aqua Hifi La Scala MkII, Fore Audio DAISy1, Metrum Hex, AURALiC Vega,

Preamplifier: Nagra Jazz, Esoteric C-03, Vinnie Rossi LIO (AVC module)

Power & integrated amplifiers: Pass Labs XA30.8; FirstWatt SIT1, F5, F6; Crayon Audio CFA-1.2; Goldmund Job 225; Gato Audio DIA-250; Aura Note Premier; Wyred4Sound mINT; *AURALiC Merak* [on loan]

Loudspeakers: Albedo Audio Aptica; Sounddeco Sigma 2; EnigmAcoustics Mythology M1; soundkaos Wave 40; Boenicke Audio W5; Zu Audio Submission; German Physiks HRS-120; Eversound Essence

Cables: Complete loom of Zu Event; KingRex uArt, Zu and LightHarmonic LightSpeed double-header USB cables; Tombo Trøn S/PDIF; van den Hul AES/EBU; AudioQuest Diamond glass-fibre Toslink; *Black Cat Cable redlevel Lupu*; *Arkana Research XLR/RCA and speaker cables* [on loan]

Power delivery: Vibex Granada/Alhambra on all components

Equipment rack: Artesania Audio Exoteryc double-wide 3-tier with optional glass shelves, Rajasthani hardwood rack for amps

Sundry accessories: Acoustic System resonators, Verictum Silver X block on preamp and amplifier

Room: Rectangular 5.5 x 15m open floor plan with two-storey gabled ceiling, wood-sleeved steel trusses and stone-over-concrete flooring

Review component retail in France: €9'900/pr



Though the only monitor in their 7-deep speaker catalogue, Apertura place their Kalya third down from the top. They don't position it at or anywhere near the bottom. That explains its sticker to signal ambitions. Those are further illustrated by 35-30'000Hz ± 3 dB bandwidth with decent 88dB sensitivity as a nominal 8 Ω load. This is promised from a 20kg enclosure no bigger than 31.7 x 44.7 x 42cm WxDxH, i.e. with depth its longest dimension. Being down-ported, the 20kg aluminium/wood stand with strategic opening in its top plate is integral.



Apertura at the Munich Highend show 2015, with Lumin and Playback Design.

Where things start taking unique shapes—considering how the 2-way monitor genre is the most populated of all speaker types—is with the physical form factor. To undermine boxiness, only the top and bottom plates are parallel. The outward-curving sides are of dissimilar length and bow to set the narrower back at an angle relative to the broader front. If you orient the speakers with their rear baffles parallel to your front wall, the fronts will be naturally toed in at the listening seat. The tweeters should sit on the inside, with their crescent-shaped foam inserts facing the side walls for reduced reflections.



Deviations from the norm continue with the driver complement. It combines a 2" composite-membrane Fountek ribbon tweeter with an 8-inch isotactic mid/woofer which designer Christian Yvon sources from Seas of Norway, then modifies in-house. This choice of diameter parks the Kalya right between *modern* where 5.25 to 6.5 inchers are most popular; and *vintage/retro* where 2-ways were/are built with 10 to 12 inchers. Think Tannoy, DeVore Fidelity and Heco's Direct for the latter. Moving right along, a downfiring port for a monitor isn't exactly common though Wilson Benesch for example do have a number of models doing exactly that. The perhaps most unusual aspect is Yvon's signature compound DRIM filter. It stacks 6dB, 12dB and 24dB/octave slopes on either side of a high 2.8kHz hinge frequency for progressively attenuated steepness. This promises 1st-order phase coherence in the critical overlap window but shrinks the width of it with 7th-order flanks, i.e. far steeper than the norm. I'm aware of only Gauder Akustik with their >50dB/oct. filters doing something similar though I'm not clear on whether their networks are progressive or not.

As I wrote in my review on Heco's 11-inch 2-way Direkt, "there's something about tone, pressure and density which 3-inch mids simply won't do, no matter the most hi-tech of diaphragm materials like graphene, diamond or coated ceramics. Only big paper has that number." Using an 8-inch mid/woofer to 2.8kHz and beyond since no analog filter acts as a brickwall, the Kalya should pursue more tone density and meatiness in the vocal range than the half-sized or smaller dedicated units popular with more complex multi-ways. Simultaneously its natural bass reach is lower than smaller mid/woofers which, whilst they can be forced to go low, will lose efficiency and/or mandate a bigger enclosure. When used in large rooms or for truly bass-heavy fare, the Kalya's F3 of 35Hz makes it an ideal candidate for subwoofer assist. Unlike the THX 80Hz handover frequency which can be problematic for critical music listeners, here a 40Hz or lower pass to a true infrasonic sub makes it non-directional and has the main speakers support vital bass cues in stereo, not mono. Such a music not movie threesome provides the lowest bass with its own dedicated plate amp, adjustable filter and volume control.

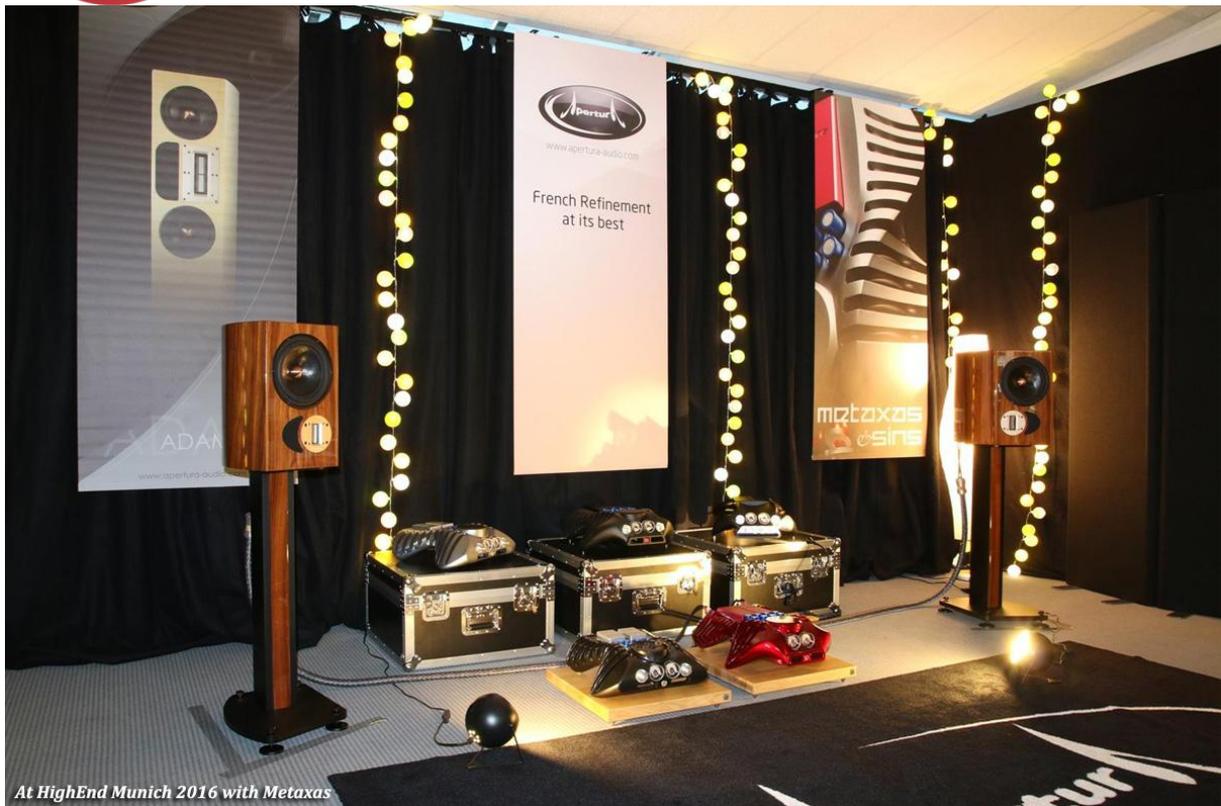


The range topper Enigma makes just 5 more cycles to 30Hz. It does however double ribbon/cone surface and drives up efficiency to 94dB.



Munich Highend 2013 showing with Kalya which then still used a different mid/woofer and more basic stand.

Nearly invariably such a setup does lower better integrated LF than a passive stereo speaker that's priced like a 3-piece monitor/sub alternative. For example, the combination of €9'900 Kalya and \$5'000 Zu Submission would still come in below Apertura's flagship Enigma but deliver a true 20Hz flat. Whilst true that continuing a stand-mounted speaker to the floor with a tower model of identical footprint takes up the same real estate, many consider the cosmetic impact of a monitor less objectionable. What's mostly beyond debate? Eliminating first-octave coverage from a passive speaker removes its most expensive and resonance-contributing parts. Then it gives the monitor more setup freedom. It doesn't have to go in just the one spot where its bass interferes least with the room. If needed, the lowest bass may be handled separately. All this by way of explaining why I fancy über monitors of the calibre of a Kaiser Acoustics Chiara. Having been very impressed by two prior Apertura floorstanders [[1](#) & [2](#)], I was curious whether in their Kalya our French team had another one of those ultra standmounts which I'd consider more than enough for 95% of all well-to-do listeners.



Here we see the Kalya not in the Santos but more traditional Rosewood finish for a redder less honey-coloured tint as the second stock colour.



Making the universal 'up yours' more useful than rude, here we see how the Kalya's downfire port mandates this stand. What other top plate would sport the correct \varnothing hole in exactly the right spot? Contemplating the stand's considerable 20kg mass leads to speculation. Won't its inevitable earthing of physical resonances be superior to what even the stablemate floorstanders can muster whose wood-based cabinets replace the monitors' heavy metal sections? True, the 8" two-way Edena tower brings more cubic inches aka air volume to bear on back loading the same driver.

Yet the Kalya with stand matches its 35Hz reach. Then it out-muscles the Edena's 33kg by a solid 7kg. That's nearly 20% more weight. Included in this surprising math are smaller cabinet panels. Those suffer less flex potential to begin with. Could all of this, er... *stand* on its pointy head the usual wisdom that floorstanders with the same drivers are innately superior to their smaller monitor brethren?



Three long bolts secure the speaker to its stand so that even a drive-by shooting aka inadvertent bumping won't topple it.





Lower internal volumes also create more air pressurization inside the cabinet for higher resistance to driver in-strokes. This makes for more challenging amplifier drive but could also mean the snappier more damped mechanical behaviour. In short, there are a few things to perhaps ruminate over on a rainy day as one allocates speaker funds to a future purchase to weigh the pros and cons of smaller versus bigger speakers when the same drivers are on the menu. On matters of box talk and having a cabinet become a physical object that occupies parts of the soundstage and acts as a source of reflections, smaller could be better.

To kick off, Gryphon's mighty Diablo 300 in on assignment with its stablemate Pantheon floorstanders fronted the French monitors. Now the Kalya exhibited such righteous bass and did so with even fewer room mode excitations than the rear-ported Danish towers or our usual EnigmAcoustics Mythology M1 monitors that in our large 90m² space, I categorically had no use for the Zu Submission subwoofer. With obviously less cone surface for the bass than the Pantheon, the presentation wasn't as massive on LF displacement but on extension, left very little to the imagination. Right after crossing the bass bridge came admiration for the richly developed glowing nearly glossy *tone*. Instead of metallic overtones which some have come to expect from ribbons, the Kalya was slightly sweet instead. Massed violins on Claude Chalhoub's neo-classical albums were splendidly free of scratchy stridency to sing not saw even in angled spiccato mode. Baroque music including period ensembles were equally served without unduly playing up the brighter or more nasal timbres and metronomic gestalt which in the hands of lesser transducers can get trying. The color richness of an 8-inch midrange coupled to a masterfully implemented ribbon tweeter struck a truly gorgeous balance with only a pair of small-signal valves in sight.



With ancillaries tuned for as vibrant and intense as the Fore Audio DAISy1 DAC and Diablo 300 integrated, this became the sound of sun-ripened tone fruit. Had I secretly worried that the Danish muscle amp with its low output impedance might overdamp and dry out gestalt, I did so without due cause. The presentation was buoyant and elastic, not sewing-machine mechanical and uptight.



Classical listeners with regular concert experience would find the Kalya a very informed tour guide indeed. Its bandwidth proved fully equal to power piano salvos from Hiromi, Michel Camilo, Dorantes or Chano Domínguez. Whilst infrasonic ambient chicanery goes occasionally even lower, I felt far from shortchanged with Cheb i Sabbah, Mercan Dede, Bob Holroyd and assorted other ambient wizards. Sneaking the Zu sub in at 30Hz proved impossible without too much overlap above despite a 10Hz 4th-order low-pass. For success I would have needed a DSP-programmable interface to select a steeper filter slope. Again, for all reasonable purposes and the vast majority of material, I had no urge to bother pursuing that route.



The intended takeaway from these first impressions should really be the Kalya's generous tonal qualities. Whilst there are other aspects worthy of discussion to give us an additional page, in my book they all slot in below. The headline act is radiant rich tone bursting with juice. Risking a sexist remark, I'd call it a decidedly *feminine* slightly voluptuous sound. In more proper terms again, some speakers build their presentation from the bottom up. Others do it from the top down. With the Kalya, it's clearly a presentation that starts in the middle and works its way outward from there.

That this means a lot more than bandwidth-challenged vintage valve amps was brought home as though with a sledge hammer when I revisited the Kalya after an interlude with the Fostex widebander-fitted Czech RDacoustic [Evolution](#) speakers. The upper harmonic fire inside even male Flamenco vocals by singers David Barrull and Diego El Cigala resurfaced with the Kalya's premium ribbon tweeters. It's a dimension the whizzers had closed the drapes down on to render things drier and more stunted. Far and away, superior treble isn't only about cymbals, triangles, piccolos and violin flageolet. It's essential to capturing all of the overtones which, Jacob's ladder like, rise above the fundamentals to add gloss and air. Figuratively, that connects heaven and earth. It adds snap and pizzazz also to the leading edge of percussive sounds, be those actual drums or plucked strings where one wants to distinguish between fleshy finger tips, hard nails and a plectrum; between steel and nylon strings; and unusual tunings.



Speaking of unusual tunings, our resident EnigmAcoustics M1 super monitors with monopole ESL super tweeters go even further in sculpting 3D tangibility. Given that these Sopranino units are retrofittable—they may augment other speakers on the very top just like subwoofers can do on the bottom—I sat ours atop the Kalya for a detour. Voilà. This grafted instant extra *spatialization* and air on the French. Because their strong low end was fully amenable to counterbalance this addition, I had no undesirable side effects. This shouldn't suggest that the Kalya were incomplete as is. It only illustrates that the M1's 'maxi treble' trick can be hijacked and transplanted. The effect is similar to putting uncooked lemon juice into a savory potato dish. Done right, it punches up or *lifts* the salty melange. Too much and it telegraphs as an identifiable acidic intrusion. At the right dose, the lemon enhances contrast without adding its own flavour to give the game away. Au nature, the Kalya's ribbon tweeter was sweeter and less graphic. As such, it was one tell-tale difference to our EnigmAcoustics monitors.





Interconnected perhaps, the French monitors felt not quite as grippy and articulated to pursue instead a bit more flow and laissez-faire elasticity; a bit more feminine than masculine flair. Bass reach went just a bit lower and the downfire port missed the occasional minor room-mode bloom which the rear-firing port of the M1 hit. It was at this juncture that I came across Vance Hiner's [review](#) on *TheAudioBeat.com*. It's a quite unabashed love letter at the Kalya which ends on this note: "The Kalyas' ability to convey both the three-dimensional space of vocal music, as well as that subtle fourth dimension I call the *soul* of a performance, is unsurpassed in my experience... When taut and textured bass notes hit your chest *hard* and there's no subwoofer in sight, you have a right to shake your head in admiration of Christian Yvon's design skills. Nonetheless, for those who need serious vibrations at the butt level, the Kalyas fall a bit short. It would be very interesting to hear the Kalyas with a subwoofer designed by Yvon. Should he ever decide to undertake such a project, I'd certainly stand in line to hear the result. During my four months with the Apertura Kalyas, I was reminded of the feud among British blues fans about whether Eric Clapton or Peter Green is the better guitarist. While I think both musicians are amazing, their styles are distinctly different. Clapton is clearly the more popular, and his technical chops are unassailable -- "perhaps a little too perfect," some critics say. Green's solos, by contrast, have a spooky, emotional quality that Clapton has only occasionally matched. In fact, B.B. King once said that Green was the only one of the young British guitar slingers who actually made him sweat -- made his "spine tingle." The Kalyas are like that..."



Measurement freaks tend to give short shrift to reviewer poetry. They either believe that love shows up as a chemical in a laboratory blood test and that emotional persuasiveness is mappable on a scope; or they don't think that emotional conviction matters at all. Measurements are of course essential during R&D, to track down errors and distortion and to insure production conformity with a golden sample. Post purchase in the listening seat, it only matters that a reading go under our skin.

So what if we can't quantify the why or how? It's enough to notice when it happens. Whatever special *ne c'est quoi* sauce the Kalyas were dipped in after birth, it's something both I and Vance noticed. I would also add that despite the Sopranino's FX being more spectacular from a hifi perspective, the Kalya magic not only wasn't reliant on it, it was arguably a bit stronger without the add-ons. What to make of that? A very experienced and gifted designer I'd say. It's what makes "The last Sultan" cut of The Secret Trio's *Three of us* album so soulful; or the opening track of Erkan Oğur's *Dokunmak*. Recognizing it is so easy. Creating it is far from!

Given that for our final maxi-monitor ownership, my wife and I had settled on the M1 over the Kaiser Acoustics Chiara or Crystal Cable Minissimo; and that the M1 is about 50% dearer than the Kalya - the French clearly moved straight into my top tier of ultra-performance monitors. On visual sex appeal, I'd give the Enigmas with their aluminium baffle, black glass panels and gold accents the nod. Viewed from certain angles (especially at 45° when the baffle faces toward you), the Kalya can look just a bit odd.



On hifi spectaculars, the smaller Mythology with its hi-tech mohawk gets the nod, too. On deeper colour saturation with quasi tube textures plus spatial grandeur just as expansive as the Taiwanese, then higher efficiency, the French step forward. Incidentally, their mix of qualities makes them *perfect* mates for fast DC-coupled slightly lean Job 225 amplifier types. To fully mine the 1st octave does require a subwoofer. The efficacy thereof came home with our Zu Submission as long as I was gentle on its dial. Even in a 90m² room, not much fill was needed to cross off 'complete bandwidth'. On 90% of all material, it wouldn't even be required. Like Enigma's super tweeter, it'd throw perfume on a violet for that excessive ultra deluxe treatment which those with the necessary funds might pursue just because.

This returns us to my opening. After hearing them, *everyone* in our social circle would call the Kalya all they'd ever need, want or (cough!) aspire to. Let's face it, any €10'000 expense on a hifi item is well out of range for civilians. The Kalya's 'enuffity' must really be aimed at hifi crazies who not only have the requisite dosh but wouldn't hesitate to spend it on something bigger and uglier just because it flogs more drive units. It's those folks who might broaden their aim, then set it on an end-of-life compact speaker like Apertura's. Eliminating a hi-pass filter on a midrange—having one is what happens to 99% of all 3-ways—is a benefit. Using a smaller enclosure for less box talk and to become a lesser reflective object is a benefit. Using a very heavy metal stand as a grounding rod for resonances is a benefit. Not dispersing too much low bass into a standard-sized room is a benefit. Finally there's the lower visual impact on the domestic environment. Let's call it a lower not carbon but discord footprint*. Hifi owners should be legally obliged to reduce it for all the obvious reasons under threat of prison sentence. The way I see it, for a mature customer who has moved long since beyond youthful experiments into overkill for their own sad sake, a pair of Kalyas could be lasting friends with *lots* of benefits!

Srajan Ebaen

** On the subject of which, the Kalya has magnetically attached grills for those allergic to nudie drive units. I didn't use them because our household doesn't suffer that particular allergy.*