

A Perfect Blend

The ProAc D48R

By Jeff Dorgay

In a somewhat trance-like state, enjoying Neil Young's recent Blue Note Café performance, eyes closed, it's like someone either swapped the Tablette Signatures for bigger speakers or snuck a subwoofer in the room, adding more top end resolution while they were at it. This is the perfect balance that ProAc achieves with their latest creation, the D48R: full-sized floorstanding speakers that disappear like their famous mini monitors but with the additional might that only big woofers can provide. The D48Rs have a retail price of \$10,900/pair.

Thanks to a 90dB sensitivity rating, the big blue meters on the mighty Pass Xs300 amplifiers aren't even budging, tracking through the Afghan Whigs' *Gentlemen*. These speakers definitely play loud, not clogging up at high volume for those who like to rock, yet are equally engaging at low volume – proof of their incredible linearity. The delicate intro of John Mellencamp's "Sweet Evening Breeze" opens with guitar in the far left channel as his voice swells and the Hammond organ waltzes in. At this moment, the massive soundstage and distinctive spatial cues feel as if I've swapped the floorstanders back to the Tablettes – with eyes closed, there is no hint of a cabinet anywhere, like a large ESL. As the rest of Mellencamp's band chimes in, the heft of the performance sets me back in the chair like the Maxell guy.



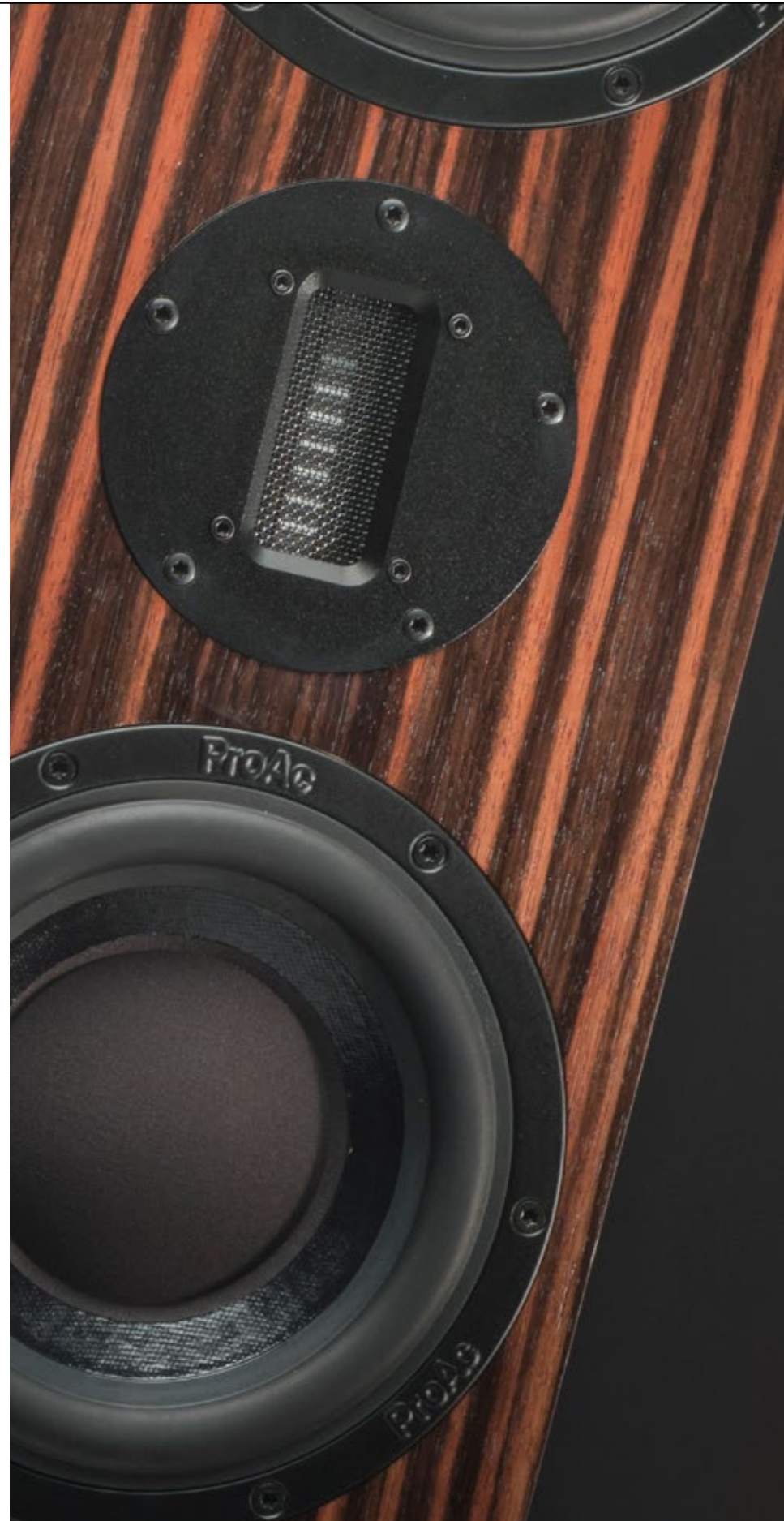
Ribbonlicious

These are not speakers that only excel with a few chosen audiophile favorites, and it only takes about half a dozen familiar tracks to determine that the magic of the D48Rs lies in their ability to deliver an incredibly rich, deep portrayal of any musical material.

ProAc does a better job at integrating the ribbon tweeter than most manufacturers who have attempted this daunting task. Though I normally spurn the ribbon, ProAc has done their homework here, integrating woofers with said tweeter to perfection. HF extension is tasteful and highly resolving without being harsh or overly forward. This is indeed a ribbon tweeter design that can be enjoyed for long listening sessions without fatigue.

Whether mastering an LP, adjusting images in Photoshop, or performing cosmetic surgery, the best work comes across as if nothing has been done. The same can be said for voicing a speaker, and for most the D48R delivers the sonic goods. However, those with a system that is already on the forward, revealing side might find the "R" a bit too much of a good thing. As always, we suggest a good demonstration with material you are highly familiar with.

This is not the classic British sound you might be used to or expect. Where Harbeth and Spendor's current offerings are more like driving a mid-'80s Jaguar – posh, comfy and coddling – nothing sounds bad, mind you, but nothing sounds exciting and nothing pulls you into the presentation. Sacrificing engagement for comfort is fine, as long as you don't crave engagement.



The D48R is like stepping up to a current Jaguar TYPE-R, with the big V-8, always maintaining a solid connection to musical fundamentals, but providing a much more visceral experience. These are very engaging speakers.

Great houseguests

Unlike most slim-footprint floorstanders with side firing woofers that have always proved fussy to set up, the D48R is an incredibly easy speaker to place in the room, thanks to the downward, side-firing woofer ports. This is one of those rare speakers that sounds fine just "thrown in the room," yet it rewards with an even larger soundstage when you can spare 30 minutes to optimize speaker placement to finesse the integration of the low end and midrange response. At 89 pounds each, you might need a bit of help to avoid back strain.

On the short wall in my 16 x 25-foot listening room, a wide sweet spot is achieved with the speakers about 8 feet out in the room and four feet from the wall, with my listening chair 11 feet from center soundstage. The ribbon generates enough HF energy to not require any toe-in in an untreated or slightly live room, but in my listening room with GIK absorption panels at first reflection points, three degrees of toe-in made for the best balance overall.

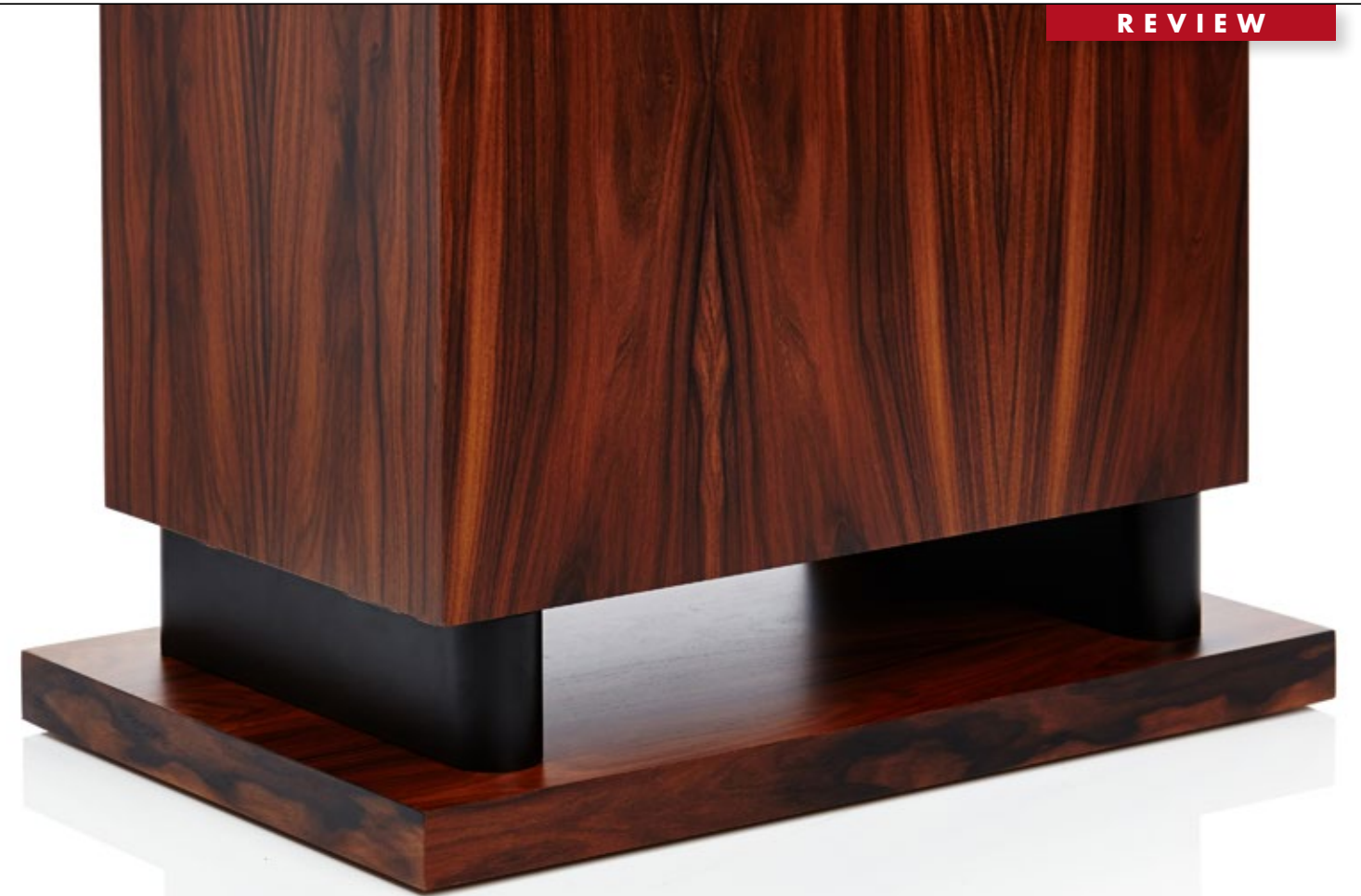
The two 6 1/2 inch woofers provide plenty of heft, possessing no upper mid bass hangover, bloat or other anomalies, mating perfectly to the ribbon tweeter. *(continued)*



Listening to the combination of Kurt Vile's husky voice and acoustic guitar riffs on his latest album, *B'lieve I'm Goin Down...* the D48Rs almost feel like an ESL. Quickly switching back and forth between the ProAcs and the new pair of Quad 2218s directly behind them for comparison, the ProAcs are mighty impressive in the coherency department.

As easy as the D48Rs are to place, they are even easier to drive, with one caveat. Because of their high resolution, they will reveal whatever is upstream, so a vintage Pioneer receiver will not provide top sonic results. However, their relatively high sensitivity doesn't mean you need a ton of power.

Playing the D48Rs through everything from a 2 watt per channel 2A3 SET to the big 300 watt per channel Pass Xs monoblocks, all with excellent, but different results. I had a particularly good time with Nagra's 300i integrated producing 20 watts per channel. This exquisite amplifier uses 2 300B tubes per channel in push-pull mode, but sounds more like an SET than not, and the silky smooth yet extended top end of the Nagra is a sumptuous match for the ProAcs. Should you be a vacuum tube lover, their relatively benign 4-ohm load will work well with whatever amplifier you have on your rack, but experiment with output taps for the best result; we did find a few that worked better using the 8-ohm tap, like the ARC GS150. You'll know you have it right when you have the maximum amount of bass extension and control. A little wrong, and the bass gets whumpy – don't blame it on the valves!



Big bottom

ProAc lists the LF frequency limit at 20Hz, but without a +/-dB qualifier. In a 16 x 24-foot room this proves ever so slightly ambitious, but test tones reveal solid output at 30Hz diminishing rapidly after this. Real-world music listening proves that unless you are listening to a consistent diet of EDM tracks, you'll never need a sub, as the D48Rs offer plenty of low frequency oomph. Whether listening to the heartbeat at the beginning of *Dark Side* or your favorite Dr. Dre cuts, these speakers deliver.

Because the pair of 6 1/2-inch woofers are so fast, those not familiar with these speakers might misinterpret the lack of mid bass bloat for lack of output. A nearby pair of vintage JBLs appeared to have a warmer, fuller bass response until we started playing tracks with real bass information. Immediately the tables were turned in favor of the D48Rs, with impressive results. *(continued)*

A good look at the top of the mountain

Like a few other great speakers we've auditioned in the \$10k–\$20k range in the last year, the ProAc D48R in a moderately sized room delivers so much of what you'd expect from a \$40k–\$60k pair of speakers, there's hardly a reason to spend more, unless you just have to play music in a massive room at headbanging levels. For all but the most well-heeled audio enthusiast, these will provide a fantastic upgrade from someone currently listening to speakers in the \$3k–\$5k range and will prove an excellent anchor for a system in the \$20k–\$80k range. Even when we paired the D48Rs with considerably more expensive electronics, they deliver a command performance.

Our European readers are well aware of ProAcs full range of loudspeakers, but many here in North America only know ProAc for the (excellent) Tablette. The D48Rs small 8 ¾ inch wide by 13 ½ inch deep profile takes up precious little more floor space than a pair of Tablettes on stands, so they should fit anywhere with ease, and a wide range of finishes are available. Those concerned with aesthetics will love the high degree of fit and finish that these speakers present, so they will complement any décor.

The ProAc D48R \$10,900/pair

MANUFACTURER

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PERIPHERALS

Digital Source Gryphon Kalliope DAC with Roon Server

Analog Source AVID Acutus Reference SP/SMEV/Koetsu Jade Platinum

Preamplifier ARC GS PRE

Power Amplifier ARC GS150

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