

Peak Consult Sonora: a speaker that unlocks the music

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Peak Consult Sonora loudspeakers

When people say there's more to something than meets the eye, it usually turns out to be just a glib turn of phrase, but in the case of the Sonora from Peak Consult, it happens to be true. They may look similar to many speakers of their size, but their construction is more complex than their appearance would at first suggest. I will fill you in on the details shortly, but if you are unfamiliar with the Peak, I ought to explain that it is a Danish company set up in 1996 by Per Kristoffersen – a carpenter, music lover and audiophile, who firmly believed that the only way to get the best cabinet design was to make it himself.

Peak was acquired in 2021 by former Dynaudio co-founder Wilfried Ehrenholz, and Lennart Asbjørn, who is CEO in Denmark. Ehrenholz is based in Germany. Peak could be described as a bit of a passion project for Ehrenholz, who was looking for his next challenge after selling Dynaudio. He had admired Kristoffersen's cabinet designs and believed he could do something special by combining it with his own expertise in crossover and drive unit design.

Devil in the detail

With its attractive solid hardwood outer skin and inset black acrylic side panels, the Sonora is a feast for the eyes, but the good news is that its beauty is not just skin deep. All component parts are of the highest quality and exhaustively evaluated to verify their contribution to sound quality. Every crossover component, for example, is selected after exhaustive listening. But they don't choose parts purely because they are the most expensive, if they find that a cheaper component performs better, that is the one they will use. That said, the Duelund graphite resistors they use do cost something like £80 to £100 each apparently.

Retailing at £23,000, the Peak Consult Sonora is the entry-level point to their range, with the Sinfonia (£45,000), El Diablo (£60,000) and Dragon Legacy (circa £150,000) sitting above them.

The drive units in the Sonora are custom-made to Peak's specifications. The tweeter is a 25mm Scanspeak Illuminator soft silk dome, while the bass/midrange driver is a 150mm sandwich moulded cone with diecast magnesium chassis made by Danish company Audio Technology. The rear-mounted passive 200mm polypropylene ABR is also from Audio Technology. If, from that description, you are thinking you are beginning to get a handle on what makes the Sonora tick, think again!



Multiple layers

Cabinet design is an obsession with Peak. They say that one of the primary roles of a cabinet is to control the resonances and vibrations caused by the backward-firing sound waves from the drive units and they have gone to great lengths to achieve this goal.

Calling on Kristoffersen's expertise to achieve as inert a cabinet as they can, Peak use multiple layers of HDF (higher-density MDF). The Sonora has an interior monocoque that uses three 12mm layers. These are glued together using their own specially formulated hybrid glue, which is a combination of a hard carpenter's glue and thick acoustic glue. This is said to minimise any structural resonances and, because it is engineered to have a very small degree of movement, transforms any vibrations into heat.

The 14mm solid hardwood panels you see on the outside are bonded to that inner cabinet using a stable industrial grade adhesive. Meaning that the overall cabinet wall thickness is 50mm.

The front and rear baffles have a leather finish, and the area of the front baffle where the drive units sit is sloped backwards to time-align the tweeter and bass/mid driver. The baffle is also contoured to eliminate diffraction and improve imaging and sound stage.

The Sonora sits on sturdy metal bolt-on cross members with four round-profile metal feet. The feet are bolted securely in place with metal locking caps that screw down onto polymer isolating washers. Inside the feet, they use internal decoupling and captive ceramic ball bearings. I was given a demo of how the Sonora performed with those locking caps removed and I have to say I thought they sounded better, so that was how I used them. I will say though that once mounted on their bases, the Sonora had a very solid stance on the floor and there was no movement in any direction, and the rounded feet should not do any damage to wooden floors.



Hidden secrets

Before I get down to the nitty-gritty and describe how the Sonora actually sounds, they have one last hidden secret. To all intents and purposes they appear to be normal, reasonably large (113cm tall) floorstanders. But when you look at the spec, you might ask, why are they so heavy? They weigh 68kg. Compare that with a KEF Blade Two Meta (which is 30cm taller) at 35kg or a Spondor D9.2 (2.4cm taller), also 35kg. OK, so the Sonora has very thick cabinet walls, but there is another reason.

As part of Peak's quest to make the cabinet as inert as possible, the Sonora has an internal shelf that slopes down from just below the bass/mid driver on the front panel to just below the ABR on the back panel. This shelf completely divides the cabinet in two, so effectively, the Sonora is like a large standmount/bookshelf, with the lower part of the cabinet filled with sand. Not any old sand, mind you. Peak experimented with, and listened to the effects on sound quality of, different types of sand, and ended up with a grade that is used in sandblasting and has a grain size of between 0.3 and 1mm.

This is also said to help reduce microphony in the crossover, which is hard-wired and the components are secured with a damping glue. I understand that Peak have found that isolating the crossover from the acoustic energy generated by the drive units improves the overall sound of the speaker. The fine-tuning of this crossover was done by ear, with assistance from Fink Audio Consulting and their measurement tools. The crossover is said to provide an exceptionally flat impedance curve that makes the Sonora an easy load for an amplifier to drive.

So how did they sound?

I was very happy that the guys from Peak volunteered to deliver the Sonoras. With them weighing 68kg each, it was good to have someone to help lift them and we took our time to find just the right spot for each in my listening room.

I have over many years gained a good idea of where works best in my room for speakers of various sizes, and generally around 17-18in from the rear wall and 16in from the side walls generally works best for a speaker of the size of the Sonora. We did not end up far from that, but they took the time to make fine adjustments to the toe-in and levelling of the speakers, all the while achieving small but worthwhile improvements, until we were completely happy.

Importer Musicworks have had good experiences using Accuphase amps to partner Peak speakers at shows and it so happened that I still had one of the new E-700 Class A integrated amps to hand that I had recently reviewed. So I pressed that into play, driven by my usual Audio Note CDT-Five CD transport, DAC 5 Special, with vinyl played on an Audio Note TT3/PSU3 turntable with Arm 2 and Io1 cartridge through an AN-S9 transformer. As the E-700 has no phono stage, I also used a Gold Note PH-5/PSU-5. Speaker cables were the QED Supremus Zr, while the mains distribution block and cables were from Musicworks.

To kick things off in style, I played the gorgeous instrumental Being with You from George Benson's In Your Eyes CD. The first thing to hit me was how well the Sonora conveyed the

Peak Consult Sonora

ringing, bell-like quality of the Fender Rhodes piano on the intro, which was clean and had great presence and leading-edge attack. Then, when Benson's Ibanez guitar joined in, the Sonora really captured its rich tonality and lush voice, while keeping up with the fast-moving fingers of the guitar legend to provide excellent insights into how each note was played. The Sonora captured well the contrast between the bright, incisive keyboard and the gorgeously rich sound of the guitar and the signature style and sound that is uniquely and unmistakably him.



Next up was the track Minute by Minute from guitarist Larry Carlton's superb Discovery album. This track is a masterpiece of interplay between Carlton and his world-class backing musicians, and is driven along by a wonderfully sinuous bass line that really pumps the track along. The Sonora conveyed the weight and power of the bass, while capturing the twists and turns of its quirky rhythms and letting you hear when it is joined by the kick drum to give it added bite. Carlton's guitar was also nicely voiced with great insights into how he played each note. I loved how the track moved on the Sonora and how they captured the dynamics and power while still sounding sweet, balanced and musical.

I turned next to Sunny Side of the Street from jazz pianist/singer/songwriter Ben Sidran's Enivr   d'Amour CD to see how the Sonora would perform on vocals. His vocals were sharp, clear, articulate and expressive. The staccato driving bass line from Billy Petersen, who really works with the drummer to give the track its rhythmic energy, was also nicely handled by the Sonora – weighty and deep, but articulate and fluid. Meanwhile Sidran's Yamaha DX7 synth was well captured with its characteristically incisive sound signature.

One of my favourite sax players is Dave Koz and I just had to see what the Sonora could do with his excellent Saxophonic CD. I chose the first track, Honey Dipped, and was impressed at how it captured the voice of his alto and the power, skill and effortless virtuosity of his playing. The bass line drove the track along well and the Sonora kept it tight while conveying the twists and turns of the drummer's contribution. And when Jerry Hey on his trumpet joined in with Koz, the Sonora preserved the sound and presence of both instruments. As I flitted from track to track on this album, I was also impressed at how well the Sonora conveyed the different voicing of the alto, tenor and soprano saxes that Koz plays.

I was in the mood for more vocals and could not resist Luther Vandross's So Amazing from his Give Me The Reason album. The Sonora let me enjoy his unique vocal style and technique, while also conveying the emotion and delivery. Marcus Miller's bass line was deep and agile and the Sonora kept a tight grip on even the lowest notes. Drums and percussion were also clean and dynamic. The track is masterfully performed by Vandross and a host of top-class

musicians and the Sonora lets you appreciate and follow the contribution each of them is making.

Finally, I played the track Westward by saxophonist Eric Marienthal and guitarist Chuck Loeb. First thing to say is how well the Sonora captured the rich tonality of Loeb's Sadowsky guitar and the skill with which he plays it, conveying all of its nuances and twists and turns. Marienthal's soprano sax was also beautifully voiced, capturing the plaintive beauty of its sound and Marienthal's deft, fleet-fingered play. On top of that, is a tapestry of delicate, filigree, syncopated percussion work that the Sonora let me listen into and enjoy. With a tight bass line from John Patitucci underpinning it all, the track was a joy to listen to on these speakers.

I also briefly tried my Audio Note Meishu Tonmeister single-ended integrated valve amp with the Sonora. With only a notional 10W-ish, would it cope with the 85dB sensitivity of the Sonora? Well, it was no surprise to me that the Meishu drove the Sonora well and they sounded great together. However, if you have a huge room and like to listen really loud, you may like to consider something more powerful.

It's all about the music

From the first few bars of the first few tracks I played on the Sonora, I knew I was going to like them. A broad smile spread across my face as they laid out in front of me an eminently musical tableau, where I could listen into what each musician was playing and how, and how that all dovetailed together to produce a coherent, enjoyable whole. This the Sonora did without fuss or flourish, undue distractions, colourations or quirks.

Many speakers just fire random bits of the music at you that, at first, may seem impressive, but which in fact contribute nothing to your appreciation of the whole. Not so the Sonora, they are dynamic, fast, detailed, with a very sharp sense of timing and rhythmic integrity and they allow you to listen into the music in ways most speakers simply don't. They present the character of each instrument with a pleasing precision and take in their stride the most complex rhythmic twists and turns.

The Sonora simply unlocks the music for you to immerse yourself in. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with them and can recommend them wholeheartedly.

