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AWARDS SPECIAL!

EXCLUSIVE! MAGICO'S INNOVATIVE M3 JOINS OUR BEST OF THE BEST



EXCLUSIVE! FOCAL BUILDS A NEW UTOPIA FOR HEADPHONE LOVERS!

Magico M3 floorstanding loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

It's a harsh truth of the audio business, but a truly honest loudspeaker is as rare as a truly honest politician. The Magico M3 is a truly honest loudspeaker. And it's only when you hear what the M3 can do with music – all music – that you realise not only how big a paradigm shift underlies that simple statement.

The Magico M3 is a direct result of the company's M-Pro; a limited edition, 50-loudspeaker, six-figure thank you to Magico's most loyal supporters over the first ten years of the company from the company boss, Alon Wolf. But more than that, the M-Pro (more accurately, M-PROject) was effectively Magico's 'concept car'. It was the project that developed ideas and concepts that would form the next generation of loudspeakers from the brand. We hear that a lot, but the reality is few companies walk the walk. Magico is one of the rare exceptions: the research that went into the M-Pro helped create the M3 in a clear trickle-down effect, and it's likely that trickle-down effect will just keep on going through the Magico line. It's also possible that the M3 is the start of a new M-Series line for the brand, one that could ultimately unseat the Q-Series in its position of King of the Magico Hill.

The talked about changes that the M-Pro brought to the Magico brand were all about the drive units, for good reason. The M-Pro was the first speaker to sport that combination Beryllium and diamond tweeter, the 28mm MBD28, and the first loudspeaker to use graphene in its midrange and bass cones. This forms a core part of the second generation S-Series models, and it now begins to permeate the upper echelon in the M3, with its single 153mm MAG6004RTC Graphene Nano-Tec midrange unit, and trio of 178mm MAG7012RTC Graphene Nano-Tec bass drivers.

It's worth reflecting on those drive units before moving on. There are diamond tweeters, and there are Beryllium tweeters. Making a Beryllium coated diamond tweeter is rather like trying to make an alloy out of iron and cookie dough. It's not a 'done thing' in the audio world, even if the individual properties of each material in combination would make for a driver that combined the tonal honesty and reliability of Beryllium tweeters with the speed and precision of diamond. Most people – when faced with 'can't be done' try a few times and give up, if we're being honest about this. Alon Wolf didn't give up, he just broke a lot of tools finding how to do it!

Graphene is a more 'doable' thing, with only the one caveat. At the moment this genuinely new material (invented in Manchester, UK 12 years ago) is extremely hard to source, and not – by any stretch of the imagination – cheap. It would be slightly cheaper to make those drive units out of Hermès scarves than it would choosing graphene at this time. But once again... Alon Wolf.

But now we come to the bit everyone forgets about the M-Pro. Magico's loudspeakers are made of sheets of aluminium, hanging off an aluminium spaceframe that forms the loudspeakers 'skeleton'. Magico hasn't always been a conspicuous consumer of aluminium, as its first models all featured layers of raw birch ply. But in recent years, it's been aluminium all the way... until we get to the M-Pro, and now the M3. With these designs, the loudspeaker becomes *mainly* aluminium, but with carbon-fibre sides, which allow you to create the curvature in an easier way than if Magico made it from pure aluminium. The carbon-fibre also adds a fair amount of damping: it's basically a carbon wing, having a core of foam, which itself also acts as a good damping material to the aluminium enclosure. You still get to tighten the loudspeaker from the rear with a precise torque wrench adjustment to get the level of internal force just right.

The loudspeaker itself sits on a three-footed plinth, with oversized at the front of the M3 to aid stability. Although previous designs used four feet on individual outriggers, three is the magic number for optimum stability... just ask any photographer with a tripod, like Alon Wolf. There seems to be a theme, here!

At the base of each of these three corners is an 'M-Pod'. This is essentially Magico's Q-Pod constrained layer, low-pass filter foot used for audio equipment, built to a scale capable of supporting the M3. M-Pods are available separately for loudspeakers, and the Q-Pod remains for equipment, but the best place for the M-Pod is under the M3, naturally!

Similarly, every last aspect of the M3's design is treated to the same uncompromising gaze. Whether that's the selection of high grade parts for the crossover, the use of the unique and proprietary Elliptical Symmetry Crossover technology, nothing is built down to a price, but instead up to a standard. Of course, a loudspeaker of this calibre deserves, demands, and gets partnering electronics of commensurate performance.

Yes, you could run these loudspeakers from a single-ended triode amplifier, but the M3 is at its best when it hangs out with the best. You'll likely hear the M3 on the end of systems that sport names like 'Constellation Audio', 'dCS', or 'Soulution', and it's that performance grade that allows the Magico M3 to show precisely what it can do. Scrimp on the equipment, or the room, and the M3 won't expose weaknesses like some kind of audio tyro, but it will Clark Kent its powers. Instead, let it be Superman!

There's a medical condition known as 'White Coat Syndrome', where a person's blood pressure increases simply because they are having their blood pressure taken. The parallel in audio reviewing is 'White Page Syndrome', where the process of writing up listening notes in audio are compromised by the listening test. In other words, you are too busy listening to write. This is a rare condition and only happens when you are sitting in front of products that push the envelope of what is possible in audio. Sitting in front of the Magico M3, I had to force myself to write notes between tracks. It's a sign of the quality of the M3 that the drive was not to make more notes, but play more tracks. When you have gone through the fourth track in a row where the only time your pen sees action is to act as baton for a spot of air conducting, you know you are on to something really special.

How special? Whatever you play through the M3 sounds like you selected it specifically for the Magico M3, as if it were playing to its strengths. When you realise that you've looked at the same loudspeaker as being the ultimate Roots Reggae loudspeaker, the ultimate choral music loudspeaker, the ultimate soft jazz club loudspeaker, you realise that either someone's been secretly swapping loudspeakers in front of you, or that the M3 is capable of playing everything, and playing it well.

A lot of this starts from the top down. That tweeter that changed the game in the M-Pro is back, and this time, it's even better than ever. This tweeter manages to be at once extended up into the bat-eared regions, super accurate, and yet not ascerbic, sharp, or 'etched'. And although practically every disc highlights this, it was playing 'The Lover of Beirut' from Anouar Brahim's *The Astounding Eyes of Rita* [ECM]. This atmospheric track, is always a room filler and a crowd pleaser, but here the interplay between oud and bass clarinet ►



“One of the truly remarkable things about the M3 is just how undistorted it is.”

- ▶ was both profoundly captivating and absolutely sonically focused. The combination of materials shines through here, although ‘here’ seems to apply universally to anything played on the M3; the mid and top end of this loudspeaker have the great mix of openness, extension, and just the right amount of richness and authority

One of the truly remarkable things about the M3 is just how undistorted it is, unless you are *really* caning the volume control. You can happily sit back, play ‘Georgio by Moroder’ from Daft Punk’s *Random Access Memories* [Columbia] relatively loud at the outset, then as the volume level of the track increases, you don’t notice it getting louder because it’s a ‘clean loud’. Pretty soon, you are playing at well over 100dB and don’t care. A lot of this comes down to that incredibly dead cabinet. Here’s a test: play something fairly loud, with deep bass and strong dynamic shading. The usual earth-mover stuff. Now walk up to the loudspeaker and gently rest your fingertips on its flank. In ‘most’ cases (practically every loudspeaker I’ve ever tried, and I’ve tried a lot), you will feel some degree of cabinet movement beneath your fingers. Sometimes, you’ll feel the cabinet resonance so profoundly, you could put your less sensitive palm down on the side of the loudspeaker and still feel the music pulsing through the cabinet like bone conduction. But not with the Magico M3; nothing, nada, bugga all. If you are careful, you can balance a coin on the top of the M3 (it’s a curved top, so it’s not easy), and it will stay in place no matter the sonic output.

It’s not just about playing impressively loud. In fact, that cabinet coupled with the drivers make this a deceptively subtle loudspeaker at all volumes. The tonality of the M3 doesn’t change whether you are playing at a whisper or at the point where you should be considering your hearing. Magico loudspeakers have always been good at delivering a consistent sound across the volume levels, but there was always a roll-off point where at very late-night levels, you began to feel like the bass drivers were in their ‘resting’ phase. Not so here, and this loudspeaker is outstanding even playing at a whisper. All the subtle textures and interplays between musicians that you usually hear at higher listening levels hold at more quiet levels.

But when it comes to ‘interplay’, you can’t get much better than King Curtis *Live at Filmore West* [ATKO]. recorded ▶



“The combination of a seeming point source imaging, electrostatic-like clarity and openness, and dynamic loudspeaker energy and scale.”

▶ just a few days before his tragic death, the opening track ‘Memphis Soul Stew’ is a firm favourite of mine. It is a simple, untampered mix straight off the live listening desk, it starts relatively subtly (with just a bass line) and builds to a full touring funk band sized contingent taking the stage. The M3 takes this in its stride, to the point where the electronics and transducers simply melt away. This still isn’t the real thing, but it gets closer than most.

As mentioned before, the M3 is derived from the M-Pro, and precisely what do those lucky 50 owners get that edges out the M3? Simply this; bottom-end authority. The combination of a sealed box and a trio of 178mm drive units makes for a tight, ordered bass in the M3, but the M-Pro brings that tight, ordered bass into the bottom octave. Those used to the sort of grunt a ported cabinet with a 250mm paper cone driver will find that sort of air movement wanting in the M3, but equally, those used to more refined, dry, and precise bass control would find that kind of ‘phat’ sound flabby and uncontrolled. And yes, those obsessed by full-range demand sub-20Hz frequency response, and the M3 sets its lowest point at 24Hz, but if they thought about it a little more, many would rather have a more precise and controlled roll-off (because it tends to create less problems in room, and can be augmented by a good subwoofer) than something deeper but more wayward. Personally, I’d take that elegant midrange, effortless top end, and precise bass over deeper, but less well controlled bottom end any day. Is it possible to get both? I’d say yes (up to a point), but to get to yes doesn’t come cheap, and as we are already looking at a loudspeaker that costs £99,998 per pair, the term ‘doesn’t come cheap’ takes on some pretty heavyweight financial considerations.

The aforementioned ‘up to a point’ is key, though. Because what the mid and top of this loudspeaker does is near impossible to replicate in other loudspeakers. It has the combination of a seeming point source imaging, electrostatic-like clarity and openness, and dynamic loudspeaker energy and scale. In other words, the best of all possible worlds from about 35Hz on up.

My time with the M3 was all too brief, but it had a profound effect on me, and it should be heard by one and all to make that effect more commonplace. It was clear from the first bars that this is one of the most important loudspeakers I’ve

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Three-way, five driver, sealed cabinet floorstanding loudspeaker

Driver Complement: 1x 28mm MBD28 tweeter, 1x 153mm MAG6004RTC Graphene Nano-Tec Midrange, 3x 178mm MAG7012RTC Graphene Nano-Tec bass units

Sensitivity: 91dB

Impedance: 4ohms

Frequency Response: 24Hz-50kHz

Recommended power: 20-500W

Dimensions (HxDxW): 120x49x34cm

Weight: 145kg per loudspeaker

Price: £99,998 per pair

Manufactured by: Magico, LLC

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reviewed recently. OK, so an almost £100,000 loudspeaker limits the significance of that statement, in the same way as what happens in the most important Ferrari isn’t as significant to most people as what goes on in a new Fiat. But, another way of looking at this is a product like the Magico M3 throws down a gauntlet to the rest of the audio industry. It says loudspeakers can be made with lower distortion than hitherto thought possible, and shows a way it can be done. Right now, those who benefit are those who have the depth of bank balance to cope, but it sets a standard that extends above and below that lofty price tag. It means, loudspeaker makers don’t have the excuse to dismiss distortion-laden designs anymore. And that will have a trickle-down effect, both within Magico’s own line, and without. Other makers will be forced to rise to the challenge. And that makes the Magico M3 deserve the highest recognition and recommendation! +