

MORE THAN A BIG SPEAKER

ISRAEL BLUME'S THIRD GENERATION TOTAL VICTORY SPEAKER IS A DECLARATION OF SUPERB SOUND

BY ERNIE FISHER

ISRAEL BLUME IS a fellow who's passion for audio borders on obsession. In business since 1988, Blume's earlier efforts included a number of loudspeaker models in the lower price category. However, he soon found that inexpensive designs have to incorporate shortcuts, such as less expensive parts, limited R&D, etc. Never one to be content, Blume headed for the high-end, knowing that a really great design was going to be expensive. His experience helped him to develop a number of great loudspeakers, such as the models Victory (Vol. 14, No .2) and Total Victory (Vol. 15, No .2). The Total Victory III is (obviously) a third generation design with a few upgrades. The ribbon tweeter has been significantly improved both sonically and structurally; the front face plate is now made of solid, non-resonant, 1/2 inch thick brushed aluminum, which is said to render the high frequencies in a purer, more transparent and better extended fashion than Blume's prior model; the crossover now features, among other improvements, the expensive and superb Mundorf capacitors. Wiring changes include upgrades to more costly materials.

The new model is the result of countless hours of labor and, I suppose, thousand of tests and sleepless nights. If you read Rod Nattrass' piece on loudspeaker development, (Vol. 17, No. 1) you'll know that, in order to get it right, months of R&D, weeks of selecting parts and many days of auditioning are only part of developing a great loudspeaker.

Appearance

TALL, SLIM, SOLID and immaculately finished the TV IIIs can not be overlooked. Oh, yes, they are heavy and difficult to move around, but once positioned properly (see below) they are securely anchored, though decoupled from the

floor via solid cones attached to the standard extended feet. Although large and imposing looking, the enclosures are refined, making them a great addition to almost all listening environments.

The Sound

ALL LOUDSPEAKER manufacturers have ears just like the rest of us and what we hear is the designer's concept of good sound. What we don't know is how the design was "voiced"—that is, what amps, preamps and cables were used during its development. To eliminate the ambiguity, I go to great lengths to ascertain loudspeaker characteristics by connecting them to as many amplifiers/preamplifiers as possible. Consequently, I used two power amps, two preamps and one integrated amplifier for my auditions of the TVs, beginning with the Musical Fidelity KW500 amplifier (reviewed in Vol. 17, No .1). The 200-watt MF amp proved to be a synergistic partner with the TVs, especially when connected with the JPS Labs super Aluminata cables, reviewed in this issue. Smooth, refined highs, detailed midrange and full-bodied bass made listening to the system downright delightful. The absence of "rough edges" throughout the frequency spectrum provided that desired touch of refinement. Noteworthy here was the loudspeakers' ability to deal with and reveal the various tonal attributes of instruments.

For most of my loudspeaker tests, I include some piano material and I listen for distinguishing characteristics. Over the years I have learned to recognize the "voices" of Steinway, Baldwin, Graf, Bechstein, Yamaha and Boesendorfer pianos. Of course, different models within a line display different sound attributes, but there is a distinct family resem-

FACTS

MODEL

Technology Total Victory III

MANUFACTURER

Coincident Speaker Technology

WEIGHT

200 lbs

FINISH OPTIONS

Red Cherry,
Natural Cherry,
Black Lacquer

DIMENSIONS

52 (h) 9 (w) 22 (d)

RATING

♪♪♪

PRICE (US)

\$13,000

CONTACT

Coincident Speaker
Technology
905.660.0800
coincidentspeaker.com

blance for each manufacturer which is quite noticeable to me. When I put the TVs to the test, they allowed me to “hear” the aforementioned “voices,” suggesting that the loudspeakers do not introduce a strong signature of their own but rather allow instruments to present their characteristics without noticeable colouration.

For my second series of listening tests, I connected the TVs to the single-ended Wyetech Labs Opal preamp (reviewed in Vol. 10, No. 2) and Topaz power amp (reviewed in the last issue). This system configuration had generally been the best-sounding with the Coincident models I had reviewed for previous issues. As before, this test showed that a good tube job with limited power (18W/ch) is what the Total Victory IIIs were made for, and I’m not referring to anything other than their efficiency rating. With the Topaz, I was able to “blast” my neighbors, generating sound pressure levels of 110dB—without distortion, no less. What else? Lots of the good things reviewers like to talk about. The TVs’ sonic foundation is 100% resolute, conveying fundamental musical notes without sounding hard. This is noticeable throughout the audible frequency range and—here is the Blume trick—it’s done effortlessly smoothly, clearly and with that essential transparency that allows listeners to

enjoy the subtleties in musical works. Despite the loudspeakers’ size and multiple bass drivers, they manage

imaging with the three-dimensional precision and coherence I’d expect from very small enclosures (another Blume touch, as this can be attributed to his claim of electrical and acoustic phase coherence). I hesitate to call the midrange “sparkling,” but I’ll call it translucent because the speakers permit a see-through refinement, the feeling of not listening to reproduced music.

For the final listening tests, I used the Simaudio Evolution Series W-8 amp, P-8 preamp and Andromeda CD player (reviewed in this issue). With all kinds of music, including some well produced rock, the TVs’ response to the Simaudio electronics was synergistically sound; but, more important, I thought the sound was musically correct and very pleasing. I expected a bit of hardness on the top frequencies, but the loudspeakers “liked” the amp and the results were refined highs with plenty of harmonics, amazing transparency in the midrange area and some of the best bass I have ever heard. Resolution throughout the frequency spectrum, awesome multi-dimensional imaging and absolute focus on instruments and voices made my listening sessions very enjoyable.

Large orchestral works were handled with the same proficiency as music by small ensembles.



You need help to move this 200lbs monster.

Almost any low-powered amp will get these speakers excited enough to play back ear-bleeding volumes

With the Total Victory III speakers, the art of reproduction is evident

I couldn't help but think about the amplifier choices available. Though made for tube gear, the TVs complemented the Simaudio electronics like salt and lemon with tequila—not a sour note to be had.

Synopsis & Commentary

FOR THE PAST 10 years or so, Blume has produced winners—all designed to be part of very sophisticated systems. The impedance and (high) efficiency rating of the speakers under review result in a design made for some of the best tube amps on the market. The in-house Wyetech Labs Topaz amp, with only 18 watts/channel, proved that it's possible to create sound pressure levels to entertain, oh about three houses—the one you're in and the two adjoining ones as well. However, listening test, using the Simaudio Evolution Series components proved that a powerful, quality solid state amplifier—200 watts/channel—produced even higher sound pressure levels. Volume should never be the criterion by which one judges quality; it is the art and science of reproduction that counts. With Coincident

Technology's Total Victory III loudspeakers, the art (of reproduction) is evident and the science is the system used to accomplish the art form.

These speakers are one of Blume's statement products—and a declaration of superb sound. If listening to systems for a living is a labour of love, I love this kind of labour, although I could sometimes do without the labour of writing the review.

A final note: Make sure that the backup components are of the same superb quality as the loudspeakers, and use super speaker cables (single wiring). In a narrow room, such as many of today's living rooms, place the loudspeakers with the subwoofers inside (facing each other), and don't worry as you will never hear those "woofs," which blend effortlessly with the upper frequencies. Have a wide room? Try the woofers facing away from the centre—this approach will work well, though I prefer the other set-up. I suggest you listen to these fine loudspeakers before you make a buying decision—you won't be disappointed.

TECHNOLOGY

EACH ENCLOSURE HOLDS four 8-inch woofers on one side panel, while the front baffle holds two 3-inch midrange drivers, two 6.5-inch midbass drivers and a planar ribbon tweeter. The tweeter is a new version of the isodynamic unit used in previous designs. The midrange drivers are silk dome, midbass drivers are paper-treated, while the woofers are made with paper-treated fibre. The drivers are arranged in a D'Appolito configuration. As in most other

models, Blume has employed a minimalistic first order crossover with only one Mundorf capacitor and a couple of proprietary inductors (for midrange and bass drivers) in the signal path. It is, in actuality, a tricky arrangement, only possible when the various drivers are of the same efficiency. Coincident claims that the impedance curve is as flat as it can be, and that the speakers are absolutely phase coherent—electrically and acoustically.

If you have a great single-ended or push-pull tube amplifier, these TVs are made for you. If you don't own a good amplifier, try a transistor radio: It will drive them! With a sensitivity rating of 97dB watt/metre and a stable impedance of 8 ohms, almost any low-powered amplifier will get these speakers excited enough to play back ear-bleeding volume levels. However, my listening experiments indicated that these loudspeakers can handle powerful solid-state

amplifiers just as well.

Frequency response is from 24Hz to 35kHz; impedance never drops below 6 or exceeds 10 ohms; power requirements are from 3 watts to 500 watts (I drove them well with the 1000 W/ch Bryston 28B-SST power amps reviewed in this issue).