

The \$ENSENIBLE Sound

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Soliloquy Model 6.3 Loudspeakers

Manufacturer: Soliloquy Loudspeaker Company, 2613 Discovery Dr., Bldg. A, Raleigh, NC 27616; 919/ 876-7554; www.solspeak.com

Price: \$3,199, extra for custom finishes

Source: Manufacturer Loan

Reviewer: Tom Lyle

When I first saw a photograph of the Soliloquy Model 6.3s, I thought they didn't look very special, and figured that they would probably sound much like the other two-and-a-half-way medium-sized floorstanding speakers that I've heard in my home and other places. They also seemed a little pricey considering their size and driver complement.

My time spent reviewing these speakers taught me two things. The first is that I shouldn't "judge a book by its cover," because these speakers exceeded my expectations. The second is to not judge. I strongly suggest that if you are not also very impressed likely because they have not had system playing music. The 100 hours. I recommend more.

The Model 6.3 is currently the top of their "6" line, surpassed only by the Model 6.5, which sells for \$6,399 a pair. The 6.3 was designed by Phil Jones (formerly of Energy, Boston Acoustics, and Acoustic Platinum Audio). He also designed and manufactures the Soliloquy. The cabinet panels and MDF stock with real wood veneer grade veneers on the inside. both sides prevents possible panel high humidity.

The material that results from baffle are glued into the cabinet inch thick wall portions in line. This is where the cabinet is most "extreme" cabinet density and unusual weight/size ratio of the cabinet resonance.

The innards of the tweeter chamber are clad in SoundCoat™. These are self-adhesive sound absorption panels used in the mobile audio industry to shield car passenger compartments from engine noise. The woofer chambers are lined with BassLiners™, absorptive/diffusive panels that prevent sound leakage through the cabinet walls and minimize internal reflections and standing waves of the driver rear wave. BassLiners™ are made from a squishy rubber-type material and use irregular surfaces for diffusion.



definitely didn't sound as I that I shouldn't be too quick to considering an audition of the they are fully broken in. After impressed by these speakers. If during your audition — it is most sufficient time hooked up to a manufacturer suggests about Soliloquy's second model from only by the Model 6.5, which designed my Soliloquy's chief with Wharfedale, Acoustic Platinum Audio). He also drivers, which are exclusive to internal bracing are from 1-inch on the outside panels and lower-Soliloquy says that veneering warping, especially in areas of

the driver cutouts from the front behind the woofers to create 2- with the woofers' rear radiation. likely to flex. They say that this inertness makes for both the speaker and the absence of

Soliloquy claims that as in all their designs, the 6.3 exhibits very narrow electrical phase response that can easily be driven even by low-powered amplifiers (Soliloquy says that an amplifier with as little as 10 wpc can drive the speaker, though the speakers can also handle an amp with as much as 400 wpc). The binding posts, which are spaced to allow the use of very substantial audiophile cables, are set up for bi-wiring. They go on to add that bi-wiring isolates the woofers' back-EMF from the tweeter circuit for better transparency and is recommended (this is how I did all my listening for this review).

The speaker's metal base plinth was designed to make leveling via the custom spikes as easy as possible. The lock screws for the spikes go above, not below the metal plate. They are meant to be tightened down onto the plate after the speaker has been sited and leveled front-to-back and side-to-side. The spikes are available in black or silver, and matching floor protectors are available if the speakers are to be placed on anything other than carpet.

Soliloquy claims the frequency response of the 6.3 to be 25Hz to 20kHz, their impedance to be 8-ohm nominal, and the in-room sensitivity to be 90dB. The speakers have two woofers and a single tweeter on the top half of the front of the cabinet. The woofers measure 6.5-inches, and are made of a "rigid" poly-fiber cone in a diecast magnesium basket with a vented magnet system. The tweeter is a 1.125-inch double-chambered silk dome with proprietary coating. Both the woofers and the tweeter are magnetically shielded. The drivers cross over at 2.7kHz @ 12dB/octave, and the lower woofer is equalized at 3dB/octave @ 100Hz for a 2.5-way configuration (only the upper woofer hands over to the tweeter, the lower one merely augments in the bass). The woofers' crossovers were redesigned a couple of years ago, and Soliloquy says that this overhaul has made improvements in the speaker's bass response.

There are four heavy-duty 24-carat-gold-plated 5-way binding posts on the bottom rear of the cabinet. There is a roughly 2-inch fluted port located above its binding posts on the same large black metal plate. The grilles are claimed to be acoustically transparent, but I did all my listening with them removed. The dimensions of the cabinets are 9" W x 44" H x 13" D, and they weigh 100 pounds each. The finishes available are Curly Maple, Cherry, and Rosewood. One can also have them finished in automotive lacquers by special request (plus a surcharge). The Soliloquy Model 6.3 has a five-year warranty.

I set up the speakers in the usual spot in my room for floor-standing, rear-ported speakers—along the long wall of an 18' x 14' x 8' listening room (my wife charmingly calls this space the "living room"), about 6 feet from the side walls, and between 2 and 3 feet from the rear walls. This made my listening position alongside the opposite damped wall about 8 or 9 feet away from the center of the two speakers. After some experimentation, I found that I preferred the speakers with only a very slight amount of toe-in to get the best sound from them (but more on this later).

The audition system has remained pretty much the same since my last review, with only a few changes. The analog front end consisted of a Basis Debut Mk. V turntable with a Lyra Helikon phono cartridge mounted on a Tri-Planar VI "Ultimate" tonearm. The digital front end was a Pioneer DV-525 DVD player used as a transport feeding a Perpetual Technology P-1A/P-2A upsampler/DAC combination. The majority of the time the speakers were powered by the tubed Atma-Sphere S-30 amplifier, and from time to time the solid-state Krell KAV-250a or PS Audio HCA-2. The preamplifier was an Audible Illusions Modulus 3a with a moving coil phono stage.

My first month with the 6.3s was a very pleasant experience mainly because I thought their tonal balance was nearly perfect. Moreover, the bass was surprisingly powerful and went far deeper than what I would expect from drivers this mounted in such a relatively small cabinet. I sometimes augmented the 6.3s' sound with a Velodyne HGS-2b subwoofer—and often listened for quite a while before I noticed it was not powered! Their specified bass response of 25 Hz seemed just about right, which I found very hard to believe when I first lies eyes upon the speakers.

Their mids were very transparent, and the treble seemed to go higher than the Legacy Classics, but the sound was otherwise very similar with no harshness or spittiness. Since it was a soft-domed tweeter it was a little "smoother", but just a bit—otherwise, it behaved as if it was just a good-quality driver.

When performing an audition on a brand-new pair of speakers I usually observe an improvement in sound over a period of time, and after a while I feel the speaker has been used for a sufficient amount of time to consider it broken in. I thought I was approaching this time with the Model 6.3s. Then one day it seemed as if someone had secretly replaced the speakers in my listening room. The change was sudden, and *very* positive.

The first piece of music that I played after the speakers crossed this imaginary line was David Bowie's *Hunky Dory*. The first cut, "Changes," had the one of the most realistic-sounding snare drum sounds that I've ever heard in my listening room. Its loosely tuned metal snares and the crack of the top skin combined perfectly to produce its convincing character. Plus, the rest of the drumset also had the most true-to-life presence I've experienced, especially the cymbals. The kick played its eighth notes with a driving mid-bass thud in unison with the piano, its growling low notes sounding deeper than the bass drum and setting the tune in motion. Mr.

Bowie's reverb-soaked voice was as if I could picture him singing into the microphone in a well-padded vocal booth, the distance from the microphone compensated by the very slight amount of compression that kept the volume steady. He provided his own background vocals with the same timbre, and their arrangement was spellbinding. Bowie's saxophone entered at the end of the tune, perfectly centered between the speakers with nary a hint of artificiality. I've heard this tune a thousand times before, yet it was as this performance was the first.

Of course I've heard electrostatic speakers in showrooms and other people's homes that had better midrange, but they could not handle rock music with the same proficiency as the Soliloquys, and it wasn't just because the 6.3s' bass was better. There was a certain amount of separation of instruments and transient speed that is missing in many speakers that have this kind of instrumental realism when rock is played, and the 6.3s made listening to rock as enjoyable as any other type of music that passed through them. I'm tempted to say it was the best I've heard from dynamic speakers anywhere near their price, but I've heard dynamic speakers *well beyond* their price that couldn't emulate this type of sound on rock. Most surprising was their ability to reproduce electric guitar with the same realism as acoustic instruments — as if one were listening to an actual guitar amplifier rather than just a recording of one.

Naturally, classical music was handled well. So well, I do not even know where to start — perhaps a good example would be Holst's *The Planets* with the Montreal SO conducted by Charles Dutoit. The opening "Mars" came through with as much power as was needed to suggest the semblance of war. Bass drum and tympanis pounded and horns blared with utmost precision under Maestro Dutoit's baton. The bows hitting the strings of the cellos in the introduction were startlingly realistic, as was the lone snare at the rear of the stage that didn't get lost in the battle. As the piece progressed, I couldn't help but be caught up in the combination of the accuracy of the sound fused with the superb interpretation. This CD also demonstrated the Soliloquy's *huge* soundstage. It was substantial from both front-to-back and side-to-side, and each instrument within the stage occupied its own sonic space. Although, this was dependent on the instrument — deep tones from the right side of the orchestra and the lower percussion were more expansive, while solo strings, winds, horns, and percussion such as the aforementioned snare drum's images were pinpoint.

The 6.3s' huge soundstage width was dependent on the positioning of the speakers. A substantial toe-in made the center image more pronounced and sharply outlined, but the soundstage was made narrower. Facing the speakers straight ahead caused the soundstage to widen to its fullest at the expense of the center image. I found that a very slight toe-in was a good position. This way the center image was still fairly defined and the soundstage still seemed to fill the room. However, there was a very slight softening of the treble with the speakers in this arrangement. But it was barely noticeable and the speakers still sounded great, so I left the speakers pointed inward a couple of degrees for the bulk of my listening.

I had a great time comparing Fritz Reiner's late 1950s version of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste* on a Classic Records reissued RCA LP with the Pierre Boulez's 1994 (released in 1996) recording on DG. Both conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Either version was a showpiece for the 6.3s. Both recordings showed the speaker adept at reproducing the nuances of the orchestra, such as the details of the percussion and plucked strings even while the orchestra was in full swing. Also revealed was its adeptness at reproducing the forceful battle between the two halves of the orchestra and the resounding percussion. Ultimately, I was undecided. As much as I like the older version, the more distanced multi-mic'ed recording on the DG gave more of a sense of the air around the instruments, and even the sound of Orchestra Hall. There was also more overall detail in the sections of the orchestra. At the same time I felt as if the older recording gave me more of feeling as if I was present at the recording session — the almost physical presence of each instrument and each section of instruments was enthralling.

On my favorite '60s jazz album, Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch* on Blue Note, each instrument was not brought into the listening room, but as viewed through a see-through sonic window. Rudy van Gelder's old-fashioned engineering practice of hard panning each instrument to one side was hardly a shortcoming — the sonic bleed to the other microphones in the live session combined with the abundant air around each instrument made it sound like it was recorded yesterday. Mr. Dolphy's sax and bass clarinet, Freddie Hubbard's trumpet, and Bobby Hutchinson's vibes are recorded with their respective microphones at close range, but still, the ambiance of the studio was clearly heard. I've heard this recording a thousand times, and I felt as if it was being presented in a whole new light — one that revealed the subtext of Eric Dolphy's genius.

But enough with musical examples. I could go on forever citing just about every recording that passed through these speakers as the best I've ever heard them. Rock, jazz, classical, electronic, world, and every genre in between was handled with the same proficiency.

The Soliloquy 6.3s were very sensitive to changes in upstream components — most of all, the amp that powered them. Now, I understand that some folks put very little credence in the alleged sonic differences between power

amplifiers, this includes some of my fellow reviewers at this magazine. But aside from the differences I heard swapping solid-state amplifiers (which was admittedly not huge), was the 6.3's preference to be driven by a tube amp. The 6.3s are sensitive speakers, and more importantly have a very friendly 8-ohm impedance. I doubt that I could get by with the manufacturer's minimum recommended power of 10 Watts, but I had no trouble driving the speakers to deafening levels with the 30 wpc Atma-Sphere S-30 output-transformerless tube amp. Loud is one thing, but to do this with no audible distortion or compression is another, and I will leave these noteworthy details for the amp's review. The 250 WPC Krell sounded fine, but the Atma-Sphere sounded better. It was a perfect match that spent quite a while set up this way in my listening room, and continues to do so to this day. I never found the Krell to be grainy or hard sounding in its upper frequencies—but compared to the Atma-Sphere it did.

If one remembers my review of the Legacy Classics *way* back in issue 64, I said that they sounded like the real thing, and that I've heard none better anywhere near their price. That is, none better until I heard the broken-in pair of Soliloquys. Even with less than half the driver area, the 6.3s manage to fill my room with sound and create a wall-of-sound as good as the Legacies — yet with a greater sense of realism imparted to every recording that passed through them. Don't get me wrong, the Legacies are great speakers, and quite a bargain if you consider their size and number of high-quality drivers. Even though the Soliloquys aren't "perfect" speakers, one would likely have to spend a quite a bit more money to get better sound (such as the Soliloquy 6.5, at more than twice the price?).

I confess that I would love to own a 30' x 20' x 14' windowless listening room using loudspeakers in the five figures. But that's not likely going to happen. And it is also likely that very few T\$\$ readers enjoy these luxuries. No, the Soliloquy Model 6.3s aren't as good as most of these haughty speakers. So the rest of us can aspire to owning a pair of Soliloquys. Still, if your musical diet is limited to acoustic music that is simply played and recorded, and you have the room for them, I strongly recommend that you check out a pair of small electrostatic or planar speakers. But if your listening habits also include music that is made with electricity, I can think of none better than the 6.3s — unless you have an exceptionally large listening room. With my varied tastes (or lack thereof) in music they suit me fine.

I thought I'd own a pair of massive speakers driven by a solid-state muscle amp for all eternity, but that concept has changed because of my experience with the Soliloquy Model 6.3. I strongly recommend an audition with a *broken in* pair as soon as you are in the market for new speakers — and maybe even if you think you're not.

-TL