

#### **KEY FEATURES**

#### +Triton Two towers

(2) 5 x 9-in subwoofers, (2) 7 x 10-in passive radiators, (2) 4½-in mid/bass drivers, folded-ribbon tweeter; 1,200watt, DSP-controlled amp; LFE input and subwoofer-level control;

48 x 7½ x 15 in; 60 lb

Price: \$2,500/pair

goldenear.com

he writer F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said there are no second acts in American lives. But what about third acts? Speaker impresario Sandy Gross is a cofounder of two of the best-known companies in the home theater/audio biz: Polk Audio and Definitive Technology. Ever since Gross and design partner/Def Tech cofounder Don Givogue exited the industry a few years back, we've wondered what they've been up to. Deepsea fishing? Bird watching? Chess? Turns out the answer is none of the above. Predictably, the pair went back to what they know best: making speakers.

It's unusual for us to associate the names of specific individuals with the products we cover in **Sound+Vision**. Gross, however, is not your typical speaker-company president. Rather, he's a dedicated audiophile who likes to have a hand in all aspects of the biz, from design and production to packaging. There are even stories about him getting directly on the phone with customers! That sort of thing is fairly common in the high-end audio arena, but it's almost unheard of in the affordable-audio arena where Sandy and Don made their mark.

Taking past history into account, it should come as no surprise that the stated mission of the duo's new venture, GoldenEar Technology, is to deliver high-quality speakers at an affordable price. GoldenEar's inaugural product range includes the Triton Two towers, the SuperSat 50/50C LCR speakers, the SuperSat 3/3C LCR satellites, and the ForceField 3 and 4 subwoofers. The speakers can be bought individually or in pairs, and GoldenEar also offers 5.1 or more-channel packages for surround sound setups.

Confident that a stereo-only configuration would suffice to show off its stuff, GoldenEar sent us the Triton Two towers. The Triton Two's cabinet flares out gently from a slim 5 ½-inch width in front to a 7½-inch width in back. The cabinet is fully enclosed in black mesh except for its top surface and base, both of which sport a piano black finish. A perforated steel element located on the front baffle (under the mesh) serves as an acoustic "lens" to optimize lateral dispersion. The resulting arched front helps to give the Triton Two a stealthy, disappearing look: When viewed straight on, the speakers appear slimmer than they actually are.

Other concerns that contributed to the Triton Two's unique cabinet design were a need to maximize internal volume and to create non-parallel walls for smoother response. Each speaker packs a good amount of hardware. A built-in subwoofer section contains a 1,200-watt, DSP-controlled amp driving two 5 x 9-inch "racetrack" woofers coupled to a pair of 7 x 10-inch passive radiators. The rest of the speaker's driver complement includes two  $4^{1}/_{2}$ -inch mid/bass drivers arranged directly above and below a folded-ribbon tweeter. (GoldenEar calls this a High Velocity Folded Ribbon — HVFR for short.)

That HVFR tweeter, which is similar in design to the one

found in MartinLogan's Motion Series speakers (reviewed in the October 2010 issue), is worth a few words here. Derived from the Heil air-motion transformer — a technology birthed during hi-fi's heady experimental period in the 1970s — it consists of a pleated film positioned within a magnetic field that makes the pleats open and close in an accordion-like manner, thus squeezing air to create sound. A benefit to this design is that the tweeter's relatively large surface area (8 inches, as opposed to a 1-inch conventional dome tweeter) allows for more sound to be generated with less motion, which increases driver efficiency and minimizes distortion.

#### >SETUP

Setting up the Triton Two in my room turned out to be easier than expected — especially given that each speaker contains its own powered subwoofer. After placing the towers in my normal speaker position, about 2½ feet out from the back wall, I then plugged my cable's banana connectors into the multiway speaker binding posts. I next experimented with toe-in, playing a few tracks until the sonic image projected by the speakers struck a good balance between focus and expansiveness.

The Triton Two's rear panel also has both an LFE input jack and a subwoofer-level dial. Following GoldenEar's suggestion, I opted to make life easy by just connecting speaker cables and setting subwoofer level by ear using a few trusted reference music tracks. That said, taking the additional step of running a cable from your receiver/processor's LFE output to the speaker's LFE input (in most setups you'll need a Y-splitter adapter to route the signal to each tower) will let you tweak bass using a sub-level adjustment on your receiver/processor's remote — a convenient arrangement if you find yourself regularly adjusting LFE level when watching movies.

One thing I discovered during setup was that the Triton Two is capable of putting out serious, voluminous bass. My regular system consists of tower speakers aided and abetted by a 12-inch sub in a medium-size room — a setup that's capable of pretty dynamic performance. But after a few days of break-in, the Triton Two literally overwhelmed me with its low end, and that was with the respective sublevel dial of each tower at the middle position! Pushing both back a few notches to the 9 o'clock position made things just right: Bass was now powerful and present without sounding boomy or unbalanced.

### >PERFORMANCE

Hearing the Triton Two in my home was actually the second time I had encountered the speaker. The first was at the 2010 CEDIA Expo in Atlanta, where I was deeply impressed by its ability to convey the brass-instrument crescendos in "Shiny Stockings," a track from the now out-of-print Reference Recordings CD *Big Band Basie*. Hearing that same track in my home, I remained equally in awe:



# Max Mid

GoldenEar's Phase
Plug driver was
designed to deliver
smooth response to
20 kHz. It's crossed
over well below that
point, but the extra
bandwidth helps to
optimize midrange
performance.



The speaker's uncannily airy top end enabled the horns to swell to loud levels without losing detail or sounding hard. Of course, what I was hearing was the HVFR tweeter at work; no matter what I played, the Triton Two's treble retained that same compelling sense of ease and clarity.

Reaching for another audiophile nugget, I grabbed a JVC XRCD release of Holst's The Planets as performed by Zubin Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. During the fifth movement. "Saturn." the Triton Two managed to impart a sense of drama to the entrance of the bass violins. The speaker's performance here was full and rich, with details like the texture of bows sliding across the bass violin strings coming through clearly. At the same time, there was a bottomless quality; instead of rounding off at some distinct point, the low-end extension seemed to be without limits. The Triton Two's bass was without question the deepest, cleanest, and most nuanced I've yet heard in my room.

GoldenEar's promotional material makes much of the Triton Two's imaging. I'm happy to report that this isn't just hot air; the Triton Two's ability to cast an expansive, spatially precise image is so good it's almost scary. Listening to the track "Barfly" from Ray LaMontagne's CD Till The Sun Turns Black was a revelation: The vocals seemed to emanate from some place not just between the speakers but also well above them, while the song's guitars and gauzy keyboards appeared to push out past the room's walls. What was most striking here was a sense of being inside the music, an almost surround sound-like effect. Also, I could slide over to one side of my couch and the speaker's sound remained consistent.

Seeing how well the Triton Two managed to extract spaciousness from the LaMontagne track (actually one of the more stripped-down ones on that album), I was eager to try it on Kingdom of Rust, a recording by the unapologetically dramatic/cinematic English band Doves. The presentation of the CD's title track was both wide and deep — a perfect fit for the song's spaghetti-Western soundtrack tone. I immediately noted the Triton Two's ability to render the drum kit in a realistic, dynamic manner, with crisp, shimmering cymbals and a powerful-sounding kick. And when the slightly distorted guitar made its entrance for a solo, the sound was surprisingly easy on the ears. (When I've listened to this track on other speakers, my current setup included, that part usually comes across as aggressive and edgy.) But what was most interesting was how well everything held together when I pushed the volume — it seemed that the louder I played music on the Triton Two, the better the detail and clarity I heard from it.

Toy Story 3 arrived during my evaluation, so I gave that Blu-ray a spin. Watching the opening "dream" sequence, the exploding bridges, runaway trains, and dinosaur stomps were presented dynamically, with powerful low-bass effects. And given its performance with music, I wasn't surprised by the surround-like sense of immersion that I experienced with just the two towers alone conveying the soundtrack. Still, I imagine that a Triton Two-based 5.1 system would be a nice thing indeed.

## **Bottom Line**

→ Over the past decade, there's been a great deal of consolidation and shrinkage in the speaker business. Given those forbidding conditions, it's thrilling to watch somebody make the bold move of launching a major new speaker brand. But here, that "somebody" isn't just anybody. The founders of GoldenEar Technology bring decades of experience to the game, and that seasoning is very much in evidence in the Triton Two tower.

GoldenEar's sleek speaker offers a rich, balanced sound and its imaging abilities are nothing short of uncanny. Also, its built-in sub provides enough bass to satisfy even a demanding bass-hound. I'm not only amazed that GoldenEar was able to deliver a speaker that sounds this good for \$2,500 per pair; I'm amazed that speakers can sound this good, period.

# Test Bench FULL LAB RESULTS AT SOUNDANDVISIONMAG.COM/GOLDENEAR\_TRITON\_TWO\_TOWER\_SPEAKERS 15 10 5 0 -5 -10 -15 TOWER 30 Hz to 20 kHz ±3.2 dB section of the speaker delivers usable The GoldenEar Triton Two delivers admirably flat on-axis response and deep bass all the way down to 20 Hz, some of the most consistent off-axis but the bass output isn't super-loud, response we've ever seen; even at an with average low-bass (40 to 63 extreme angle of 45°, the off-axis Hz) output of 87.7 dB and average response looks almost identical to ultra-low-bass (20 to 31.5 Hz) output the on-axis response. The woofer of 82.5 dB. - Brent Butterworth GoldenEar **TRITON TWO** TOWER SPEAKERS SV RATINGS PERFORMANCE VALUE

OVERALL SCORE OPOOR