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Lu Kang Audio SP230
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Lu Kang Audio Spoey230

Designed and handcrafted by the father and son team at Lu Kang Audio, the Spoey230 is the heavyweight flagship standmount of this artisan range from Taiwan's Taipei City
 Review: **Mark Craven** Lab: **Paul Miller**

The last time you bought a television you probably came across no more than five or six different brands. But what about the last time you bought loudspeakers? It's one of the joyful aspects of hi-fi: the industry is very broad here, supporting a diverse range of manufacturers with different design ideals, resulting in an equally diverse choice for enthusiasts.

Lu Kang Audio, freshly arrived in the UK via Whole Note Distribution, is a perfect example, being a homespun Taiwanese loudspeaker brand perhaps as far removed from the likes of Bowers & Wilkins and KEF as you might get.

A family business rather than a corporate behemoth [see boxout, p69], Lu Kang Audio currently builds only one range of speakers, the Spoey series (*aka* the SP series). This comprises just three models, all standmounts and all very much cut from the same cloth. Or, more accurately, wood.

CLASSICAL CABINETS

Available as standard in cherry, walnut or black walnut finishes (plus special order RAL colours), the Spoey230 (£6495 per pair) is the largest model in the series. Like its smaller stablemates – the Spoey200 (£5495) and Spoey155 (£4255) – it has the look of a 'classic' speaker, with a boxy aesthetic that'll surely find approval with devotees of classic BBC/Spendor marques. And while others might wish for a more modern style, few will quibble about the build quality and finish. Using a handcrafted cabinet made from braced 1in-thick MDF, beneath a real-wood veneer, and treated internally with 'acoustic foam', it feels exceptionally well put together and reassuringly heavy at 23kg. It's only the use of push-fix attachments for the supplied full-length black grilles, rather than magnets, that raised my eyebrows.

All models can be partnered with optional (heavyweight) wood stands, with the same veneer/RAL finishes available.

'The cabinets lock in step to paint an artful, musical picture'

Priced £995, these come pre-assembled and are probably one of the finest examples of 'matching' hi-fi furniture that I can remember. Much of their top surface is open, a design that Lu Kang Audio says 'significantly reduces reflections when compared to a solid-surface base'. Coupled with their open sides, these stands are somewhat reminiscent of the work of graphic artist M C Escher. Three bronze

isolator feet are supplied to sit between speaker and stand – one placed centrally at the front and two at the rear corners, as pictured here.

The Spoey230 measures 635x322x305mm (hwd), but once installed on its

stand reaches a shade over 1m, putting its tweeter likely at ear height. The stands for the smaller speakers are taller, to once again position the speaker at the optimum listening height.

TWO TO TANGO

Lu Kang Audio says its flagship is 'designed to offer modern floorstanding speaker performance in a monitor package'. To that end, it's a two-way model in a larger-than-usual cabinet. Making good use of the available baffle space is a bass/mid driver that's claimed to be 230mm (hence the speaker's name) – but this measurement actually includes the alloy chassis, so a more accurate figure would be 180mm including the roll surround.

This is partnered with a 19mm dome tweeter, where you might reasonably expect a bigger unit to better meet the woofer through the midrange [see PM's Lab Report, p71]. The simple first-order crossover – one air-cored inductor and one capacitor – is designed by Lu Kang Audio's Rox Shih and is notionally set at 2.3kHz.

RIGHT: Braced, 25mm-thick MDF cabinets are finished in real walnut, cherry, black walnut or RAL colours with matching, heavyweight SP230ST stands. The loudspeakers are each supplied with three, two-part bronze 'isolators'



A FAMILY BUSINESS

Lu Kang Audio is new this year to the UK market, but the company – based in Tapei City, Taiwan – isn't a fresh-as-a-daisy startup. It was founded over 30 years ago by Frank Shi, beginning as an importer of 'high-end' audio brands. This is an aspect of the business that lives on – it currently distributes Comet DACs from US marque Exogal, amplifiers from Hong Kong's JE Audio, and Odiosis cables via French company Omerin – but the decision was made in the 1990s to begin developing its own loudspeakers. More recently the baton has been passed from Frank Shi to his son, Rox, who is responsible for the design of the Spoey models, its first to be sold outside of Taiwan and its international calling card. Described as 'a gift to music and all who listen,' the speakers are, we're told, the result of a lengthy driver selection and tuning process.

Both drivers are sourced from Denmark, a nation whose GDP seems successfully based on the audio industry and Carlsberg lager. The high-frequency unit is from tweeter specialist Hiquphon, while the bass/mid is a 'custom' version of an AudioTechnology driver, the company launched by Ejvind Skaaning (also the founder of both Dynaudio and ScanSpeak).

The Hiquphon tweeter is its premium OW4 model, which features a six-step platinum-colour coating and multi-layer internal damping claimed to extend its response down to 2kHz, and up to 22kHz, with dispersion controlled via its shallow waveguide. For the woofer, Lu Kang's Rox Shi has combined AudioTechnology's C-Quenze 231 driver design with the company's Flexi series polypropylene cone. This driver is reflex-loaded via a central front-facing port, as is the case with the step-down Spoey200, although the entry-level Spoey155 has a sealed-box alignment.

The speakers, says Lu Kang Audio, have been 'designed to work within any environment (within reason)', although Whole Note Distribution suggests a 50cm clearance from rear and side walls as a minimum. Following this guidance, and with the cabinets approximately 2.5m apart, I didn't even get into toe-in experimentation – the imaging was thrillingly on point from the get-go.

ARTISAN AUDIO

These artisan speakers deliver an insightful, expansive performance without a trace of a rough edge. They have obvious immediate strengths – low frequencies, as one might expect given the cabinet size and ported bass/mid unit staring you in the face, have extravagant depth coupled with a purity of output, while the resolution and sense of space at the other end of the frequency band is captivating. As said earlier, they seem to image without effort, too, building a soundstage with depth and width that lets you visualise instrument placement

with precision. But against these positive traits there's a laidback feel to the sound that renders it suited to some musical genres more than others. Never is the Spoey230 inclined to go on the attack – a subjective viewpoint borne out by PM's Lab Report [p71], suggesting the performance of this top-of-the-range standmount is more fine wine than fizzy pop...

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Cult's *Electric* album [CD; Sire 9 25555-2] found the post-punk act transformed into a UK version of AC/DC, by way of a stripped-back production from Rick Rubin. Standout track 'Lil Devil' is about as sparse as it gets, giving the Lu Kang Audio pair little to do. It had no trouble unpicking detail, such as the sparkling tambourine that occupies stage right, or the grit in Ian Astbury's vocal. Furthermore, the simplistic drum accompaniment sounded tightly timed, intertwining with the eighth-note bassline.

Yet while the riffing guitar should be the star of the show here, biting and snarling, via the heavyweight Spoey230s it sounded curiously polite. Raising the volume helped, pushing the speakers to be more aggressive, but only to a point – I still wanted a little more midband energy to accompany my 1980s rock 'n' roll.

Naturally, I found other tracks to be more in the speaker's comfort zone, and began to appreciate its astute handling of complex, nuanced material. The varied percussion of 'Graceland', from the 25th Anniversary Edition release of the eponymous album [via Tidal HD] benefited from the clarity, detail and snap of the speaker's far-reaching tweeter just as Donna Summer's disco anthem 'Hot Stuff' [Tidal HD] was funky and infectious.

PORTRAIT OF SOUND

It's the Spoey230's lavish imaging that is its calling card, however, the cabinets locking in step to paint an artful picture of



ABOVE: A soft-dome 'platinum coloured' 20mm Hiquphon 3/4 OW4 tweeter is paired with a 230mm C-Quenze driver from AudioTechnology, reflex-loaded through a large, front-facing port

the music. In Led Zeppelin's 'Heartbreaker' [Led Zeppelin II; Atlantic 289303 13], when everything stops to make way for Jimmy Page's one-take guitar solo, he was placed dead-centre on a wide stage, notes reverberating left and right. 'Rock ↻

LOUDSPEAKER

LU KANG AUDIO SPOEY230



LEFT: Even the rear face of the Spoey230's cabinet is finished in real wood, though the single set of 4mm speaker cable terminals eschew support for bi-wiring or bi-amping

features interplay between strings, woodwind and brass, which all sounded tonally delicious and distinct, particularly the violin that soared higher and higher without becoming thin. A run-through of James Horner's 'For The Love Of A Princess' [*Braveheart OST*; Tidal HD] seemed even more in tune with the Spoey230's voicing, conveying both the layered nature of the LSO's performance and its depth and weight.

ALL ABOUT THE BASS

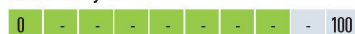
Speaking of depth, Lu Kang's promise of a 'thunderous bass' both oversells the Spoey230's dynamic ability (it's refined rather than rambunctious) and undersells its deft handling of the low-end. True, the deliberately voluminous low-frequency swells on Nelly's hip-hop title track [*Country Grammar*; Tidal HD] benefited too much from the speaker's port-assisted reach – there's no sense of distortion, or of a driver and cabinet not in sync, but it rather dominated the mix.

Elsewhere, the Spoey230's bass output is to be cherished. It presented basslines with notable nuance while giving body to drums, and in tandem with the sensitive treble brought considerable scale to Pink Floyd's 'Comfortably Numb' [*The Wall*; Harvest, CDS 7 46036 8], which only served to make its slick imaging seem slicker still. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

A lover of rich sonic tapestries, emboldened by a bass output that's as big as the cabinet itself, the Spoey230 is a welcome addition to the loudspeaker landscape. Its size, particularly when the robust stands are in use, won't make it a natural upgrade from a conventional standmount, but its easygoing nature as regards amplification and positioning is a deal-sweetener. Rock 'n' rollers need not apply, though.

Sound Quality: 80%



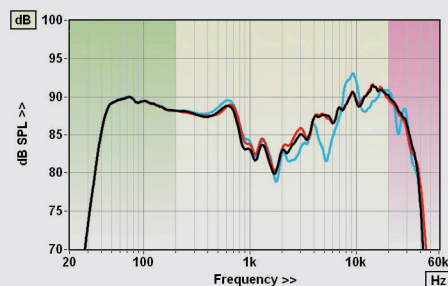
On', from David Essex's 1973 album of the same name [Tidal HD], has a more overt stereo mix that the Spoey230's slid into, delivering details beyond the speakers' boundaries and drum fills that rolled from one to the other. The large cabinets seemed entirely disconnected from the soundscape I was enjoying, a recurring theme throughout my listening – and vocals stood out as a result.

This track also highlighted the system's natural handling of orchestral instruments. Jeff Wayne's arrangement for 'Rock On'

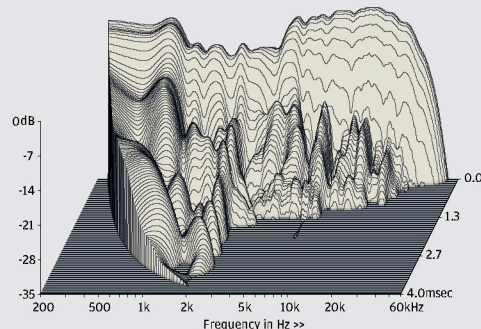
A cursory glance at the Spoey230's on-axis response [see Graph 1, below] indicates the output of the '230mm subwoofer' rolls steeply away above 800Hz (–3dB) following a peak at 620Hz that's coincident with a driver/box mode [see CSD waterfall, Graph 2]. While AudioTechnology's specification for the native driver indicates a far more extended midband response, here the 5-10dB drop in mid/presence output is inescapable before the 20mm soft-dome Hiquphon tweeter builds above 4kHz and restores output >8kHz. Lu Kang suggests a notional 2.3kHz crossover but our measurements indicate this is a lower 1.9kHz.

This broad trough is responsible for the high ±5.8dB and ±5.7dB response errors – increasing to ±7.1dB with the grille in place [blue trace, Graph 1] – but the two speakers are otherwise impressively matched to within 1.2dB. Bass is also thoughtfully tuned with the LF driver offering a broad 60Hz-345Hz (–3dB) output, reinforced at 44Hz by the reflex port to deliver a very useful, diffraction-corrected bass extension of 37Hz (–6dB) [green shaded area, Graph 1].

Lu Kang specifies a modest 86.5dB sensitivity and 8ohm impedance for the Spoey230, the former reduced in practice by the attenuated middle octaves to yield 84.1dB/1kHz and, rather closer, 85.9dB as an average across 500Hz-8kHz. But the Spoey 230 really is a genuine 8ohm speaker – a rarity these days – as its impedance drops to a mere 7.9ohm/165Hz with two other minima of 8.15ohm at 43Hz and 10.2kHz. Swings in phase angle are a symmetrical ±50° with the modulus never dropping below 17ohm here, so this will be a doddle for any amp to drive. PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left, black; right, red; w. grille, blue



ABOVE: Resonances are coincident with the peak in response at 690Hz and 3kHz, plus other modes >5kHz

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	84.1dB / 85.9dB / 84.2dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	7.9ohm @ 165Hz 54ohm @ 65Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	–50° @ 80Hz +50° @ 21Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	1.2dB / ±5.8dB/±5.7dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	37Hz / 33.4kHz/31.5kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.25% / 0.45% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	635x322x305mm / 23kg