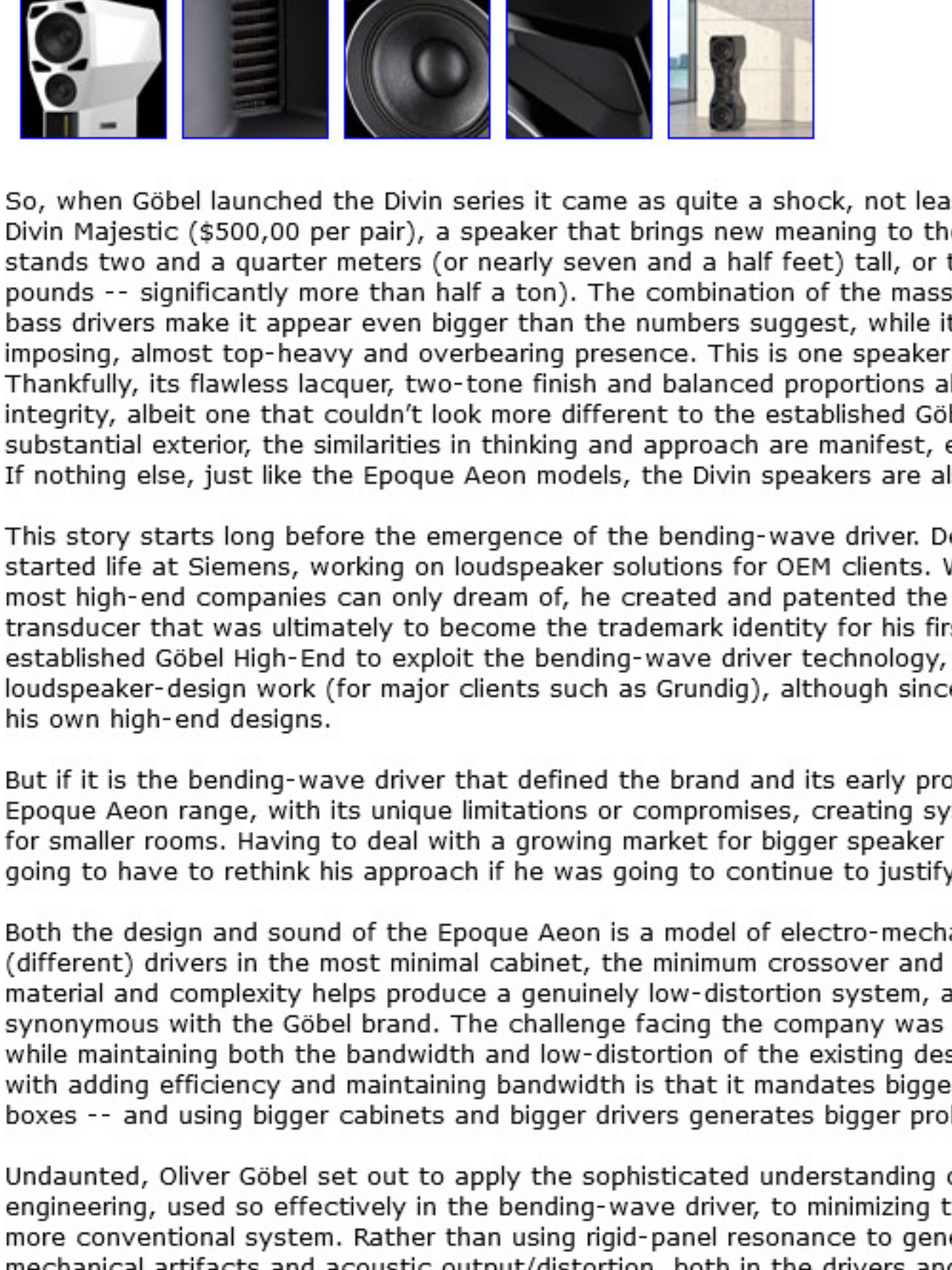


Göbel Audio • Divin Noblesse Loudspeakers

A speaker with an "easy, inviting and convincing sense of musical communication."

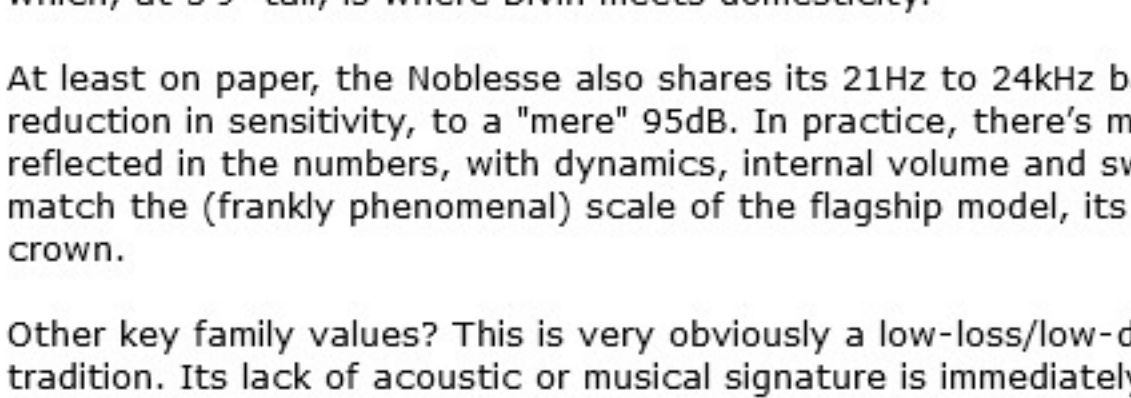
by [Rev. Gregory](#) | August 6, 2021

It's fair to say that the Göbel brand has quietly established a solid but slightly left-of-center reputation with its decidedly different loudspeakers. The Epoque Aeon models are built around the company's own innovative, flat-panel, wide-bandwidth, bending-wave driver, a single unit capable of covering the range from 160Hz to 31kHz. The speakers position the iPad-sized panel centrally, paired with a narrow bank of 6 3/4" (or 170mm) bass drivers below, or above and below, the flat driver. The smooth, aluminum cabinets, heavily radiused corners and angled baffles flanking the severely waistled central section make for a speaker that looks like no other, while the unique driver technology means that each model sounds like no other either. The Bauhaus simplicity of their almost skeletal appearance makes the Epoque Aeon speakers amongst the most distinctive and immediately recognizable designs on the market.



Price: \$220,000 per pair.
Warranty: Five years parts and labor.

Göbel Audio GmbH
82239 Alling, Germany
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So, when Göbel launched the Divin series it came as quite a shock, not least because the first model was the flagship Divin Majestic (\$500,000 per pair), a speaker that brings new meaning to the term massive. It's not just the fact that it stands two and a quarter meters (or nearly seven and a half feet) tall, or that each speaker weighs in at 530kg (1166 pounds) -- significantly more than half a ton). The combination of the massive, faceted, heavily angled cabinet and 18" bass drivers make it appear even bigger than the numbers suggest, while its hourglass shape and symmetry give it an imposing, almost top-heavy and overbearing presence. This is one speaker system that stands to dominate any space. Thankfully, its flawless lacquer, two-tone finish and balanced proportions also give it an almost sculptural visual integrity, albeit, it's not the most visually appealing of speakers. The established Göbel line if it tried. But beneath that substantial exterior, the similarities in thinking and approach are manifest, even while being bent to an alternative goal. If nothing else, just like the Epoque Aeon models, the Divin speakers are also decidedly different.

This story starts long before the emergence of the bending-wave driver. Designer and chief engineer Oliver Göbel started life at Siemens, working on loudspeaker solutions for OEM clients. With development facilities and budgets that most high-end companies can only dream of, he created and patented the design for the stiff-diaphragm bending-wave transducer that was ultimately to become the trademark identity for his first products. Leaving Siemens in 2003, he established Göbel High-End to exploit the bending-wave driver technology, and Göbel Audio to continue his OEM loudspeaker-design work (for major clients such as Grundig), although since 2008 he has concentrated exclusively on his own high-end designs.

But if it is the bending-wave driver that defined the brand and its early products, it remains at the heart of the current Epoque Aeon range, with its unique limitations or compromises, creating systems with low efficiency and a preference for smaller rooms. Having to deal with a growing market for bigger speaker systems in bigger rooms, Oliver Göbel was going to have to rethink his approach if he was going to continue to justify that "High-End" tag.

Both the design and sound of the Epoque Aeon is a model of electro-mechanical minimalism: the minimum number of (different) drivers, the most minimal cabinet, the minimum crossover and minimum silk. The elegance, so much material and complexity helps produce a genuinely low-distortion system, a sonic signature that has become synonymous with the Göbel brand. The challenge facing the company was to create a higher-efficiency speaker system while maintaining both the bandwidth and low-distortion of the existing designs -- not an easy thing to do. The problem with adding efficiency and maintaining bandwidth is that it mandates bigger drivers, lots of them, and much bigger boxes -- and using bigger cabinets and bigger drivers generates bigger problems, both in terms of scale and complexity.

Undaunted, Oliver Göbel set out to apply the sophisticated understanding of wideband resonance and materials engineering, used so effectively in the bending-wave driver, to minimizing the distortion inherent in a more efficient and more conventional system. Rather than using rigid-panel resonance to generate sound, he applied it to reducing mechanical artifacts and acoustic output/distortion, both in the drivers and the cabinet itself. The Divin speakers may look decidedly different from the Epoque Aeon and they may occupy a different place in the audio landscape, but despite all that, the thinking, engineering and technology behind both designs are exactly the same.

Perhaps fortunately, the speaker under review isn't the Majestic but the Noblesse, the next model down in the Divin range. A mere five and a half feet tall, it weighs in at "only" 260kg/570 pounds, crucially making it manageable with only two people -- something that is further facilitated by Göbel's superb packaging and attention to detail, which I'll get to in a moment. Still big, heavy and imposing, the Divin Noblesse is built on something much more nearly approximating domestic proportions -- at least you are a committed audiophile. Shear scale aside, it also shares the materials, design philosophy and general topology of the Divin Majestic. The speaker it might almost be mistaken for at a distance. In another parallel with the Epoque Aeon speakers, the final model in the Divin series is the half-the-height Marquis, which, at 3'9" tall, is where Divin meets domesticity.

At least on paper, the Noblesse also shares its 21Hz to 24kHz bandwidth with the Majestic, albeit at the cost of a 3dB reduction in sensitivity, to a "mere" 95dB. In practice, there's more to generating musical and acoustic scale than is reflected in the numbers, with dynamics, internal volume and swept area all playing a part. But if the Noblesse can't match the (frankly phenomenal) scale of the flagship model, its bottom end is still arguably the jewel in its musical crown.

Other key family values? This is very obviously a low-loss/low-distortion design, perfectly in keeping with the Göbel tradition. Its lack of acoustic or musical signature is immediately apparent, in both the natural clarity it brings to recordings and the way the room so reminiscent of real instruments in real space. What makes a speaker this big so deft and light on its feet? As with any successful speaker, it's a combination of many different factors, working in concert. To fully appreciate them, we'll need to dig beneath the flawlessly finished skin.

But before we go there, let's deal with the significant challenge presented by a pair of speakers this big and heavy. I've commented in many reviews on not just the product but the package. That is, all the thought and effort that the manufacturer has put into ensuring that its products are both easy to handle and optimize, in other words, the set of tools you get to help with the job of installation. It's something that was initially established by Wilson Audio, but in the last decade other manufacturers have followed their lead. It's not that surprising. The bigger the product, the more critical these considerations become -- and when you are dealing with a single speaker that weighs a quarter of a ton and flaunts an immaculate piano-lacquer finish, you'd better hope that someone has paused to reflect on the challenges of installing it in the average house.

Fortunately, Göbel hasn't just thought about it; they've executed a fantastically practical solution, starting with the flight case that this speaker arrives in. I can almost hear the mental gears grinding: not a lot of speakers come in flight cases? Yes they do -- and lifting them out of the base of the crate is a major challenge, even when they don't weigh as much as the Divin Noblesse. What Göbel has done is use a three-part flight-case. Once you have moved the speaker into position using trollies or skates, you remove the end of the flight case that's adjacent to the bottom of the speaker. You then simply stand the speaker on the supplied foam blocks that fit inside the end of the case to protect the floor). When the flight case is vertical, you can unclip the remaining parts and easily remove them. Best of all, Göbel also provides an extensively illustrated, frame-by-frame guide to the process. It's an object lesson in exactly how these things should be done.

Of course, that's only half the problem. You still have a hugely heavy speaker that needs to be moved precisely into place and then angled, equally precisely. Fortunately, Göbel has that covered too. The Divin noblesse is fitted with four massive, adjustable stainless-steel feet. The large discs that interface with the floor turn on 33mm fine-pitch threads, each decoupled by a trio of large ceramic balls. Horizontal holes allow you to use a substantial tool to adjust the height of each foot and the attitude of the speaker with considerable precision. You also get a set of subtly domed Delrin "slippers" that, once fitted to each foot, allow you to slide the speakers into exactly the right place with surprising ease. The shallow depth of each slipper means that you can achieve an initial position for in-room bass response that doesn't even require the use of the tools you have to move the speaker. Such niceties are significant. It's not just that the tools supplied and the thought that's gone into them protect your investment and help deliver the performance you've paid for. It's a welcome indication of the thought and attention to detail that have gone into the product as a whole.

The most obvious feature of the Divin design is its symmetry. Not only does the speaker use a mirror-imaged driver array, a pair of 12" bass units flanking two more 8" midrange drivers, the centrally mounted Hell AMT high-frequency driver, but the complex cabinet is also mirror-imaged side to side and up and down, and the four reflex ports for each bass driver are symmetrically disposed around it. The massive enclosure is built from melamine-resin/wood-fiber composite sheets, compressed under enormous pressure to create a readily worked, rigid material that still possesses good self-damping characteristics. Even so, the radically shaped cabinet, entirely devoid of parallel faces, heavily braced in critical locations and internally divided into six separate enclosures, is a daunting constructional challenge. Yet Göbel cuts no corners to ease the job, that commitment is perhaps best illustrated by the front baffle, a constrained-layer construction that's 80mm thick, consisting of four melamine/fiber laminations interspersed with three damping layers of Polyurethane glue. The extreme profiling and rebating of the symmetrical baffle means that each driver is attached to a separate layer of the baffle, further isolating it from its neighbors and the impact of intermodulation distortion. Meanwhile, once the baffle has been machined to shape, 3/8" (10mm) mitered strips are precisely fitted around its periphery. That means 16 individual pieces, precision machined to exact angles on all four edges. Why bother? Because it's a challenge, but it's a challenge that Göbel has chosen to take on. The result is a single surface that won't crack or delaminate under even the most extreme climatic conditions.

That incredibly complex baffle is just one example of how dimensions, proportions, disposition and choice of materials have been used to minimize the resonant signature of the cabinet, a process that depends on a sophisticated structural analysis and understanding of resonant behavior. It also exemplifies Göbel's commitment to the longevity and practicality of its products. The company spends a lot of time and energy on finishing the speakers, and they want that finish to last, wherever the speakers end up being used.

The drivers are another example of that attention to every detail, each carefully optimized to minimize thermal compression, maximize mechanical stability and eliminate spurious output (especially outside their passbands). Extremely large and heavily vented voice coils are used for both the 12" bass units and the 8" midrange drivers, coupled to fiber-reinforced pulp cones that create the stiff diaphragms necessary for high efficiency. Where the bending-wave experience comes in is in the profile and coatings used on the cones, spiders and custom surrounds, carefully tuning each driver's output and bandwidth. This reduction in out-of-band output has already proved highly beneficial in established designs from the likes of Wilson and Focal, Wilson Benesch and Vienna Acoustics. But in this case, the system optimization goes a stage further than that. There is a kinetic dissipater flexibly mounted to the rear of each midrange enclosure, its variable density carefully tuned to operate at specific frequencies. Meanwhile, the bass enclosures receive a carefully tuned to absorb the inevitable resonant peaks of the enclosure. The result is a more enclosed air mass. The mouth of each resonator is closed with a ceramic foam membrane (think a disc with the structure of an Aero chocolate bar, but seriously rigid), a resistive layer that feeds energy into the Helmholtz resonator's chamber, preventing nonlinear blow-back. It's an approach that allows for more precise damping of the enclosed air volume and all but eliminates the need for foam stuffing, with its broadband energy-absorption characteristics and the associated issues of energy that compresses the material and then bleeds back into the air mass, confusing the output of both the driver diaphragm and the reflex ports.

In one of those *Why didn't I think of that?* solutions, the reflex ports themselves are, as already noted, symmetrically arrayed around the bass drivers, thus offering balanced loading and avoiding any induced instability or wobble in the driver, caused by a pressure differential in the enclosure.

Given the choice of the off-the-shelf Hell AMT high-frequency unit, you might not think there's much to be done in the upper registers, but the Divin Noblesse surrounds both sides of the driver's diaphragm with bespoke technology and solutions. The front face features a proprietary horn profile, machined from a solid alloy block and carefully calculated to match dispersion with the midrange drivers (an often underestimated contributor to perceived discontinuities around a speaker's crossover point). The standard rear chamber is completely replaced with a new, carefully treated structure and damping materials, giving Göbel much greater control over the driver's frequency balance, fundamental resonance and out-of-band output, all key to its seamless integration into the speaker system as a whole.

The crossover is not only housed in its own separate and sealed section of the speaker cabinet, each leg is in turn encapsulated in a sealed box and then mechanically decoupled from the cabinet as a whole. Despite using cost-no-object parts from a who's who of audiophile-component manufacturers, Göbel still treats many of the components, especially the massive air-cored bass inductor, to a deep-vacuum process that impregnates them with epoxy resin as a further defense against moisture. Finally, the drivers and crossover are all lacquered together with the traditional, 18" Lacorde Statement internal wiring. If anything has been overlooked, I'm not aware of it. In a world where designers almost always suffer from some sort of tunnel vision (that prioritizes their particular specialty over other considerations) the most successful speaker designs are also the most comprehensive -- and very few are as comprehensively considered or engineered as these Göbels.

I used that word -- "engineered" -- advisedly, not least because it denotes not just activity but judgment. When it comes to audio-marketing materials and reviews, over-engineered has become an aspirational or positive term, as if it somehow guarantees performance or capability. In many cases that couldn't be further from the truth, and in the case of speakers, it can be positively damaging, undermining performance as surely as inadequate engineering certainly does. Simply throwing ever more mass, more braces and more fixings at a loudspeaker cabinet can be just as musically destructive as filling the internal volume with damping material to kill unwanted resonance. That kills dynamics just as surely as overweight cabinets store and sluggishly release energy to smear and muddle output.

Instead, it's a case of identifying and eliminating undesirable resonance, both in the enclosed volume and the cabinet enclosing it, an almost surgical exercise if you are going to deal with it effectively and prevent that energy bleeding to other frequencies and escaping control. That's what makes for an incredibly complex problem that gets bigger and harder to deal with as speaker cabinets get larger. It is also why, if you consider the issues of and understanding necessary to get control of wide-bandwidth vibrational output from a single, stiff panel the size of a digest magazine, it should become clear that the same knowledge base and skill set can be inverted to control unwanted structural resonance too. All you need to do is look at the Divin Noblesse to understand that if the general approach were considered familiar, the execution certainly isn't.

The first thing that hit me about this speaker's performance was the uncluttered clarity it projects. It's most obvious at low frequencies, but extends across the entire range. Those of you looking for the traditional, rib-rattling tub that many audiophiles associate with big speakers are going to be disappointed. In common with many other more efficient and dynamically responsive speaker systems, the Divin Noblesse delivers bass that's pitch-able, articulate and fast on its feet -- as opposed to leaden, thick and turgid. It's not unlike live, acoustic bass. How often does an orchestra generate the sort of low frequencies that communicate on a skeletal rather than aural level? Very seldom. The bounce-you-round-the-dance-floor bass that comes from clubs and rock concerts is all to do with big, resonant cabinets and lots of amplification and nothing whatsoever to do with audio fidelity.

Indeed, Göbel has worked extremely hard and very effectively to eliminate the electrical and physical flaws that generate one-note bass. Listen to almost any jazz recording with an upright acoustic bass and you'll immediately hear what I mean. Let's use Charlie Mingus's take on the Ellington standard "Mood Indigo" (from the 45rpm reissue of *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus* [Impulse!/Analogue Productions 54) as an example. Both the easy, loping rhythm and the deceptively simple melody are released by the bass, underpinned with M1.1s, the Berning Quadrature Z, with Connoisseur preamp and the VTL S-400, with its elaborate combination of acoustic, electric and magnetic synthesis. The result is a more enclosed air mass. The mouth of each resonator is closed with a ceramic foam membrane (think a disc with the structure of an Aero chocolate bar, but seriously rigid), a resistive layer that feeds energy into the Helmholtz resonator's chamber, preventing nonlinear blow-back. It's an approach that allows for more precise damping of the enclosed air volume and all but eliminates the need for foam stuffing, with its broadband energy-absorption characteristics and the associated issues of energy that compresses the material and then bleeds back into the air mass, confusing the output of both the driver diaphragm and the reflex ports.

Along with that low-frequency speed and definition come transparency and dimensionality. Anybody who has worked with positioning their own speakers will know what that means. Bringing clarity to the bottom end automatically detracts the midbass, midrange and on up. I differentiate midbass in this instance because that's the range that imbues music with so much of its drive and energy, life and vitality. Gaining that clarity at source (as it were) even before you work with room placement is fundamental to the Divin Noblesse's overall sound, its lucid presentation and coherent sense of musical energy and presence. You'll often hear speakers described as well integrated or contiguous, seamless or even-handed, but in the case of the Göbels that goes well beyond the absence of tonal discontinuities and deep into the realm of musical energy and projection. The same substance that imbues Michael Kiwanuka's kick drum with such solid impact applies right up the range, whether it's cello, a pianist's right hand, violin or bells. There's no wispieness or thinness at the top, no pared-away or etched quality to the midrange -- just a sense of body and rightness, irrespective of frequency. While looking at those two substantial midrange drivers flanking the large central ribbon, that might not seem surprising, until you think about the almost ethereal sound and ghostly lack of presence that passes for high frequencies in so many speakers. If the Divin Noblesse was made by Marvel Comics, its super power would be the ability to combine substance and clarity.

Roll those qualities together and it will be even less of a surprise that the Divin Noblesse backs up that convincing sense of presence with an explicit soundstage and impressive dimensionality, that collectively present the music almost entirely independently of the speaker cabinets themselves. The notion that something this big and this imposing can disappear is a challenge, but shut your eyes and the worst purrings of overtrack recording aside, the music happens in a separate and clearly defined space, behind and beyond the speakers, with the delineation of instrumental scale and height being particularly impressive. Play the title track from Gillian Welch's *Time (The Revelator)* [Acony ACNY-0103] and the one-take recording has an almost physical presence and intensity. It's a quality that's not unfamiliar from this disc, but the Göbels take it to a new level, investing it with a combination of concentrated energy and focused delicacy. Combined with the explicit placement of the two guitars and the natural vertical separation of Welch's voice from her instruments, the clear separation of the vocal and the guitar, the speakers here have never been so apparent. The ingredients for one of those "they are here" musical moments. It's not just that you can almost picture the players, their playing makes perfect sense, the placement and scale of the sound sources perfectly overlaid with the recording and the performance, the considerable whole greater than the sum of its minimalist parts. It's hard to credit that two acoustic guitars and one voice with harmonies can produce a result that's as musically purposeful and emotionally impactful as this -- even more so once diluted through the medium of the recording and an audio system -- but the Divin Noblesse speakers seem to extract and project every last ounce of intent and energy, and do so to maximum effect.

That ability to retrieve musical energy crosses musical genres and the scale of recordings. The heavily gated drum sound and prominently fingered bass line of the Cure's infectious "Love Cats" (the 12" single [Fiction fixix19]) has a surefooted, separate-yet-connected quality that brings space and a measured but insistent pace to the track. Benedetti Michaelangelo "Eterni" (Gulini and Wiener Symphoniker [Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft 2531 385]), replaced with the correct Teldec EQ curve, has space and power, a fresh, musical vivacity that illuminates the piece. There's a brightness here, but it's not total nor tame. It resides in the joyous, expressive energy in the playing, in the attack and immediacy but also in the sense of occasion that concentrates this live-performance recording from so many others. There's no brashness or overshoot here, the attack separates firmly on the leading edge of each note, its tail allowed the time and space to decay naturally. Rarely has this record sounded so live -- and rarely has the performance sounded so arresting, the acoustic so present.

It's this ability to sound dynamic and energetic but at the same time poised and precise, cultured and controlled, that makes the Divin Noblesse stand apart from the crowd. There are plenty of speakers possessing this sort of bandwidth and sonic tag that either throw the music at you, leech it of color or kill its expressive core with an overdose of overdamped "price excellence." The Göbels manage to be both impressive and natural in their musical vocabulary and presentation, a combination of a carefully defined acoustic space, with the worst purrings of overtrack recording aside, the music happens in a separate and clearly defined space, behind and beyond the speakers, with the delineation of instrumental scale and height being particularly impressive. Play the title track from Gillian Welch's *Time (The Revelator)* [Acony ACNY-0103] and the one-take recording has an almost physical presence and intensity. It's a quality that's not unfamiliar from this disc, but the Göbels take it to a new level, investing it with a combination of concentrated energy and focused delicacy. Combined with the explicit placement of the two guitars and the natural vertical separation of Welch's voice from her instruments, the clear separation of the vocal and the guitar, the speakers here have never been so apparent. The ingredients for one of those "they are here" musical moments. It's not just that you can almost picture the players, their playing makes perfect sense, the placement and scale of the sound sources perfectly overlaid with the recording and the performance, the considerable whole greater than the sum of its minimalist parts. It's hard to credit that two acoustic guitars and one voice with harmonies can produce a result that's as musically purposeful and emotionally impactful as this -- even more so once diluted through the medium of the recording and an audio system -- but the Divin Noblesse speakers seem to extract and project every last ounce of intent and energy, and do so to maximum effect.

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