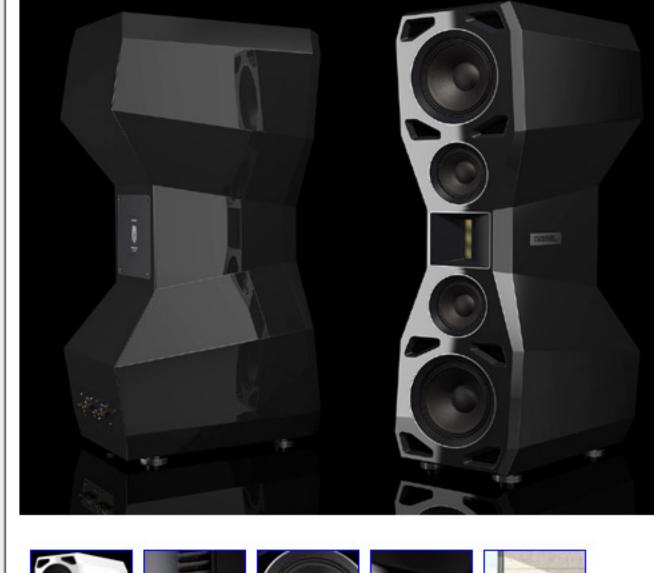


## Göbel Audio • Divin Noblesse Loudspeakers

A speaker with an "easy, inviting and convincing sense of musical communication." by Roy Gregory | August 6, 2021

t'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, flatpanel, 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 waisted 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.



Göbel Audio GmbH 82239 Alling, Germany www.goebel-highend.de

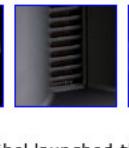
Price: \$220,000 per pair.

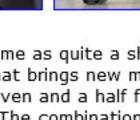
labor.

Warranty: Five years parts and









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 one that couldn't look more different to 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 in the most minimal cabinet, the minimum crossover and minimum bulk. The elimination of so much material and complexity helps produce a genuinely low-distortion system, a sonic signature that has become

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 Aeons 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.

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 if you are a committed audiophile. Sheer scale aside, it also shares the materials, design philosophy and general topology of the Divin Majestic, a speaker it might almost be mistaken for from 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

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 it projects musical energy into 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

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 each speaker arrives in. I can almost hear the mental gears grinding: don't 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 whole thing up (using 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.

critical these considerations become -- and when you are dealing with a single speaker that weighs a quarter of a ton

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 go straight out of the window when you remove the setup aids. 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 and two more 8" midrange drivers flanking the centrally mounted Heil 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

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 expends 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 used to create the light, 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

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 Heil 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

further defense against mechanical vibration. Finally, the drivers and crossover are all laced together using Göbel's own 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

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 controlled, 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 might be considered familiar, the execution certainly isn't. he 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 thud 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-

deceptively simple melody are carried by the bass, underpinning the relaxed brass lines with a security and sure-footed pitch and placement that anchor the track. As it enters its elongated evolution, you hear the patterns and phrases with a clarity that allows you to forget the system and instead marvel at the sheer dexterity in the playing, the slight emphasis Mingus gives a note or doublet from the original melody that he occasionally drops into his meandering exposition. The notes are so clearly defined in terms of spacing and placement, frequency and timing, that you can almost picture Charlie's hands working the strings. That ability to separate what is often the most muddled of frequencies extends across genres. In John Adams's Shaker Loops (Minimalist [Erato/Warner Classics 082564604378]), the first movement -- "Shaking and Trembling" -- builds across the upper strings until the basses enter with a repeated, juddering, wobbling presence that should set the whole piece aquiver. Most full-range speakers produce a grounded, almost subterranean rumble that anchors the piece. The Divin Noblesse captures all the floating agitation of the low frequencies, perfectly reproducing the frisson of excitement

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 wispiness 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 excesses of multitrack 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

delicacy. Combined with the explicit placement of the two guitars and the natural vertical separation of Welch's voice from her instrument, the tonal separation of the close harmony vocals with partner David Rawlings and you have all 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

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 ficsx19]) has a

Benedetti Michelangeli's "Emperor" Concerto (Giulini and the Wiener Symphoniker [Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft

surefooted, separate-yet-connected quality that brings space and a measured but insistent pace to the track.

disc, but the Göbels take it to a new level, investing it with a combination of concentrated energy and focused

2531 385]), replayed 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 tonal nor textural. It resides in the joyous, expressive energy in the playing, in the attack and immediacy but also in the sense of occasion that separates this live-performance recording from so many others. There's no brashness or overshoot here, the attack concentrated 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 boasting this sort of bandwidth and price tag that either throw the music at you, leach it of color or kill its expressive core with an overdose of overdamped "sonic excellence." The Göbels manage to be both impressive and natural in their musical vocabulary and presentation, a combination of qualities that dovetails perfectly with the unrestricted dynamic fluency and uninhibited musical flow of the CH Precision 10 Series amps. Sometimes plans do come together, and I was keen to have both products overlap inhouse, something that panned out perfectly. Would I have appreciated just how much expressive headroom the Divin Noblesse possesses without the standard-setting input of the Swiss amps? I achieved impressively enjoyable results from the CH Precision M1.1, the VTL S-400 II and the Berning Quadrature Z, but there was no escaping the extent to which the Göbel speakers responded to the performance of the new flagship CH Precision electronics, or the gulf in quality that was revealed between these and lesser amps. Nor did the speakers hide the character or relative strengths of these very different amplifiers. The M1.1s sounded just like their dynamic, authoritative, self-effacing yet lucid selves, while the VTL delivered color, presence, power and energy, and the Bernings were quick, agile and transparent.

music keeps dragging at your attention. This speaker ain't perfect, but its flaws are hard to pin-down and, crucially, they are easy to overlook. Compared to a loudspeaker like the Wilson Benesch Cardinal or Göbel's own Epoque Aeon, there is a subtle (and I really do mean subtle) diminution of the tonal palette, a loss of bloom or richness to the harmonics generated by bowed instruments, the chest behind a tenor voice. Hand in hand with that is the characteristic lightness in the lowest bass that comes with so many of the more efficient speaker systems (at least those that aren't big enough to live in). It seems that you can have thud or carved-fromsolid bass weight, or you can have expressive range and articulation. I know which I choose, and for me the Divin Noblesse falls on the right side of that line. But that centered bass energy, pitch definition and texture come at the expense of clearly defined acoustic boundaries, a weighted choice that emphasizes natural intonation and communication, as opposed to any judicious padding of low-end weight and impact.

Let's not get carried away here. These are differences and distinctions that become apparent only with the closest listening to the most familiar material, with the constant mental reference to live instruments in real space. I'm not hearing the characteristic judder that comes from a sawed cello that's thirty feet away -- but then there's not many speakers or systems that can do that, short of spending way more money than this. More importantly, these flaws may

be subtractive in nature but subtract less from the musical sense and purpose in a performance than the additive

acoustic space comes back with a vengeance, along with a greater sense of intra-instrumental space and

another step up in quality, transporting you that much closer to the original event. Absent the blurred edges or

alternatives. In particular, the bass characteristic will be room-dependent, and positioning the speakers in a smaller and less-well-behaved space than mine, I could see that precisely defined bottom end becoming a significant asset. Add subs and (as long as they are good enough to keep up with the speakers) that sense of a clearly defined, coherent

dimensionality, building on the speaker's communicative strengths. What is already impressively direct and natural takes

the utter coherence and natural tonality of their bending-wave driver to a more dynamic and higher-efficiency

alternative, Göbel has had to shift the balance of virtues and compensate for different musical challenges. But the key word in that sentence is "compensate." As is so often the case in audio, the true test of a product's quality and ability to convince lies not in its strengths but how well it deals with its weaknesses and, in this respect, the Divin Noblesse is exceptional. Searching for flaws requires a conscious and constant effort to look past the musical performance, as that

things one way or another through choice of cables and, to an extent, choice of partnering electronics. For the majority of the review period, I had access to the remarkable CH Precision 10 Series electronics (a four-box L10 and two M10s) electronics that don't just raise the bar in terms of musical and audio performance -- they set the standard for absolute neutrality, in the natural, lifelike, non-additive sense of the term, rather than the pinched, thin and threadbare quality that so often attracts the label. There's no doubt that the Divin Noblesse didn't just benefit from but positively thrived on the partnership, one that's appropriate in both price and performance terms. But I also got to use other combinations, including the CH Precision L1 four-box with M1.1s, the Berning Quadrature Z with Connoisseur preamp and the VTL S-400, with the latest TL-5.5 Series II Signature. In each case the speakers responded to the electronics' strengths, rather than highlighting their weaknesses: the balanced, even clarity of the CH Precision, the speed and transparency of the Bernings or the poised flow, authority and articulate power of the VTLs. That's a sure indicator of a speaker with both a benign sonic thumbprint or character and inherent musicality.

qualities that allow these products and especially these speakers to rise above the crowd. Adding padding to give the sense of an extended bottom end might seem superficially advantageous, but in the long run it just risks diluting the speaker's considerable virtues. A pair of quality subwoofers (like the PureLows) would be a far more sensible and successful approach. Alternatively, you could just go the whole hog and pop for the Divin Majestic, whose imposing bulk more than solves any muted reservations I might voice. he Divin Noblesse sits astride what is about to become a fascinating segment of the speaker market, soon to be shared with the rejuvenated Wilson Alexx V and the Stenheim Ultime Reference Two, two speakers that promise an alternative take on the Göbel's musical perspective. If DNA is any guide, then the Stenheim promises a shade more presence and color, the Wilson greater weight and dynamic impact. But can either match the unforced

clarity, immediacy, textural intimacy and articulation of the Divin Noblesse? Or the clarity of musical purpose that

results? Only time will tell, but if those speakers can come close to the musically communicative qualities embodied in the Göbel then we'll be entering a golden age indeed. Meanwhile, possession is nine-tenths of the law, a maxim that applies not only to the Göbel Divin Noblesse's position in the marketplace, but also its position in my listening room. It's a speaker that not only possesses enormous potential but is more capable than most of delivering on that promise, and when the company finally prises them from my grasp, they are going to be sorely missed indeed. I'll miss the extraordinary versatility and ability to bring the best out of partnering products. I'll miss the transparency to input and how easy it makes both setup and assessing changes. But most of all I'll miss the speakers' easy, inviting and convincing sense of musical communication. Few speakers that I've heard -- and none that are more affordable -- have told me more about who wrote, who or how they played or, most importantly of all, why they recorded this music. If you want to define (or redefine) high-end audio, that's a pretty good place to start.

Associated Equipment Analog: Grand Prix Audio Monaco v2.0 turntable with Kuzma 4Point tonearm, Lyra Etna Lambda SL and

Fuuga cartridges, Connoisseur 4.2 PLE and CH Precision P1/X1 phono stages. Digital: Wadax Atlantis Reference transport and Atlantis Reference DAC. Preamplifiers: Connoisseur 4.2 LE, CH Precision L1/X1, VTL TL-5.5 Series II Signature.

Subwoofers: a pair of PureLow LO subs with Wilson Active crossover and CH Precision M1.1 or VTL S-200 amplifiers.

Cables and power: Complete looms of Nordost Odin, Crystal Cable Ultimate Dream or AudioQuest Wild from AC socket to speaker terminals. Power distribution was via Quantum QB8s or Crystal Cable Power Strip Diamonds, with a mix of Quantum Qx2 and Qx4 power purifiers and Qv2 AC harmonizers. Also in use are CAD Ground Control and Nordost Qkore grounding systems.

Supports: Harmonic Resolution Systems RXR, or Grand Prix Monaco Modular rack with Formula shelves. These are used with Nordost SortKone, HRS Nimbus and Vortex or Grand Prix Audio Apex equipment couplers, and HRS damping plates throughout. Grand Prix Audio Monaco and Silverstone 4 amp stands. Cables elevated on Furutech NCF Boosters.

Acoustic treatment: As well as the broadband absorption placed behind the listening seat, I employ a combination of RPG Skyline and LeadingEdge D Panel and Flat Panel microperforated acoustic devices. Accessories: Essential accessories include the SmarTractor protractor, a USB microscope and Aesthetix cartridge demagnetizer, two precision spirit levels (one bubble, one digital) and laser, a really long tape

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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 (\$500,00 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

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

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 match the (frankly phenomenal) scale of the flagship model, its bottom end is still arguably the jewel in its musical

crown. 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

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 adjusted, 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

braced in critical locations and internally divided into six separate enclosures, is a daunting constructional challenge. Yet Göbel cuts no corners to ease the task, that commitment 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 ensures a perfectly smooth surface to which the piano lacquer finish can be applied but, more importantly, a single surface that won't crack or delaminate under even the most extreme climatic conditions.

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 internal Helmholtz resonators, carefully tuned to absorb the inevitable resonant peaks in the enclosed air mass. The mouth of each resonator is closed with a ceramic foam membrane (think a disc with the

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-noobject 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

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

agile, 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 Mingus [Impulse!/Analogue Productions 54) as an example. Both the easy, loping rhythm and the

that's generated by the piece played live. Likewise, the heavily orchestrated, Scandi-jazz-infused soundtrack from Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy [SilvaScreen SILLP 1369], with its elaborate combination of acoustic, electric and synthesized bass, together with Michael Kiwanuka's monumental "Cold Little Heart" (from Love & Hate [Polydor 02547 83458]) serve

to demonstrate just how effortlessly this speaker's bottom end moves beyond two dimensions (pitch and pace) into the all-important third (mood), giving each piece its own individually defined emotional palette, showing how that emotional perspective shifts within or between tracks. The tripartite nature of "Cold Little Heart" has never been so obvious -- or obviously effective. The shifting instrumentation and the reasoning behind those shifts have never been so apparent, the whole bound to the scale and motion defined by the measured restraint or driving purpose of the bottom end. The resulting temporal security brings an impact, precision and tension to the stark guitar riffs, heightening the contrast to

the defocused wash of the backing vocals. When the bass drum enters, it does so with an almost shocking presence and solidity, yet a pulsing, mobile relationship to the repetitive patterns of the bass guitar line. It's a master class in rock recording -- one that the Divin Noblesse lets you fully appreciate. 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 declutters the midbass, midrange and on up. I differentiate midbass in this instance because that's the range that

effect.

In each case, the Divin Noblesse brought out the best in the partnering electronics, sure testimony to the lack of a signature sound or thumbprint in the speaker itself. So far, so very, very good; you could be forgiven for assuming that the Divin Noblesse is a speaker without peer or flaw. Not surprisingly, that isn't the case. All audio products are the result of design compromises and in switching from

softened padding that so often characterize audio's nether regions, the end result is a speaker that can deliver more of the music, more of the time and in more different systems and situations. Of course, you can't listen to just a loudspeaker -- only an entire system. You can -- indeed it's tempting to -- lean

But be careful that you don't over-egg the pudding. Each of these electronic combinations is also inherently wellbalanced. Lean too far or get too characterful and the speaker's inherent neutrality will ruthlessly expose liberties taken elsewhere in the chain. And if the word "inherent" seems like a recurring theme, it is -- reflecting the deeper structural

Power amplifiers: Pairs of CH Precision M10 and M1.1 amps, Berning Quadrature Z monoblocks, VTL S-400 Series II stereo amplifier.

measure and plenty of painters' tape. Extensive use of the Furutech anti-static and demagnetizing devices and the Kuzma Ultrasonic record-cleaning machine.