

REVIEW

Göbel Divin Marquis Loudspeaker...

Gaining on the swings AND the roundabouts

By Roy Gregory

The audio world is full of speaker ranges in which the smallest model is also the best. Not just the best value you understand, but musically the best in absolute terms. It's an observation that generally applies to mainstream product ranges and as often as not reflects the fact that the cheapest model in the line is also the only two-way! Leaving aside the exponentially more difficult task of designing three-ways (with their greater complexity in terms of crossover and larger cabinet panels) it also suggests the sheer pressure imposed by value engineering and the purity of focus it brings to the design process. All of which suggests that this is a rule that won't apply further up the price range, where speakers enter genuine high-end territory (and where different rules and different cost equations apply).



So what are we to make of the Göbel Divin Marquis, a speaker that is neither small nor (at €89,000 a pair) cheap, yet still represents the most affordable model in the Divin line – and still manages, through sheer *joie de vivre*, to match in many ways, the musical performance of the bigger models in the range? In this instance it's not a case of the increased budget or expertise failing to match the demands and ambitions of the larger designs. Indeed, both the Divin Noblesse and the even bigger Divin Majestic are extremely impressive. This is something entirely different. This is a speaker that, relative to its larger and more genuinely more accomplished brethren, manages to turn its weaknesses into strengths. The result is a performance that makes up in listenability and musical communication what it lacks in scale and bandwidth. That's a very, very neat trick if you can do it – and just how it's been done is worthy of examination.



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Physically, the Divin Marquis is a big, bluff and angular box – albeit one that is immaculately constructed and finished. The review pair arrived resplendent in lustrous white piano lacquer with contrasting antique gold trim rings on the drivers and tweeter horn. Combined with the elegantly sculpted facets around and the sculpted profile of the front baffle, it could all be a bit bling, but somehow it pulls it off – a bit like a PA cabinet that's been to finishing school, an experience that's accentuated its natural charm. If the front baffle is obviously and heavily worked, the rest of the enclosure is prosaically rectangular. It's substantial 150kg mass is supported on the same large, stainless steel feet as the Divin Noblesse, with the same huge, finely-threaded posts for angular adjustment. You also get the same Delrin 'shoes' to fit the feet, which makes moving the significant mass of the Marquis considerably easier.

The separate Installation Notes < <https://gy8.eu/blog/installation-notes-gobel-divin-marquis/> > cover the finer points of handling and optimisation, but the supplied Delrin sliders and precisely adjustable feet make for simple (if exacting) set up. In the Music Room, the Marquis stood slightly further forward than the Noblesse, pointed directly at the listener's ears and tilted 0.4 of a degree forwards to bring the tweeter axis to precisely ear height. Other than that it was simply a case of setting the cabinet height to optimise bass. I also ran the Marquis in the smaller Studio space, not least because Oliver Göbel suggested that despite its substantial dimensions it was still capable of maintaining control and quality in surprisingly small rooms. It proved to be a fascinating and worthwhile experiment.

Sweating the details...

Changing amps required (as always!) a shift in the position of the speakers. In this instance that was even more critical than usual, such was the clarity and transparency at low-frequencies, but it was also easier, the large flat feet being perfectly 'nudgable' on my wooden floor, as well as easily adjusted in the vertical plane. It was brutally obvious when you got it right – and frankly ruinous if you didn't (it still amazes me how many reviewers, dealers and audiophiles are perfectly happy to 'compare' different amps – often radically different amps – without undertaking this crucially important step).



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At first glance, it's easy to assume that the Marquis is essentially half of a Divin Noblesse. After all, it uses half the number of mid and bass drivers and costs half of the price. But stand the two speakers next to each other and you soon realise there's rather more to it than that. For a start, the Marquis cabinet is a lot larger than you might think. Despite the straight sides, a dramatic, almost Twiggy-esque contrast to the voluptuous hour-glass figures of the larger models, the Marquis is both taller and a lot deeper than you expect. The Heil tweeter in the Marquis sits with the lower edge of its horn level with the upper edge of the driver horn in the Noblesse. That adds up to an 8"/200mm difference in the height of the driver's acoustic centre. Likewise, the cabinet on the Marquis may be 4"/100mm shorter in depth than the Noblesse, but it's back panel runs vertically for the full height of the speaker, where the Noblesse cabinet is savagely tapered and sculpted. The end result is that the Marquis offers a narrower, taller baffle to the listener, but maximises the volume enclosed behind it. On paper that translates to a sensitivity difference of 3dB between the two speakers, but the same low-frequency extension, although in practice, I'm not sure it really works out that way...



What does work is the symmetrical porting that's been applied to the bottom end of all the Divin designs. Aimed at avoiding asymmetrical loading of the woofer and the distortion that creates, combined with careful cabinet design the result is a clarity, speed and lack of overhang to low-frequencies that is beyond unusual and significantly more natural than the vast majority of speakers. It's something that the Marquis shares with the Noblesse and the even larger Majestic, a speaker that manages to scale performances almost perfectly, despite its colossal dimensions. That's something of a Divin theme, and if the Marquis can't match the chameleon-like acoustic flexibility of the larger models, it still makes each and every recording distinct and individual.



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Where does the Marquis get its incredible sense of musical communication? It possesses a musical integrity that allows it to stand shoulder to shoulder, at least on purely musical grounds, alongside its bigger and far more expensive brethren? No, the Marquis isn't a better speaker than the Noblesse and it certainly can't even come close to the scale and dimensionality of the Majestic. But it has an uncanny ability to match musical expectations and deliver musical satisfaction. That capability is founded on uncluttered clarity: temporal clarity, dynamic definition, immediacy and the absence of intrusive, distracting and disturbing colouration all add up to a singular clarity of purpose. It's a combination of virtues that makes for a communicative and expressive musical vocabulary, one that brings performances to life and performers into the listening room. It's something that has recently been demonstrated even more emphatically by the latest generation AvantGarde Trio, with its active current-drive amplification – at a price. But the Marquis is cut from the same musical cloth, delivers in very much the same manner, also punches well above its weight and does so in much smaller spaces.

Rhythmic gymnastics...

The first thing that strikes you about the musical presentation of the Divin Marquis is its overall coherence – a coherence that extends from the musical to the rhythmic, the spatial to the tonal. The integration between the drivers is exceptional, the linearity and lack of colouration likewise. In many ways that should come as no surprise, those being qualities that are clearly written into the Divin DNA, but here their expression takes on a subtly different form. While the larger Noblesse possesses an uncanny way with acoustic scale and definition, the Marquis leans more to rhythmic agility and articulation. Forget the numbers: numbers that suggest equivalent bandwidth from the two speakers, bought at the expense of sensitivity in the smaller Marquis. When it comes to sheer scale and the ability to recreate the acoustic space within which a recording was captured, the Noblesse trumps the Marquis with an almost dismissive ease. But like all the best designs (irrespective of field or function) the Marquis turns that nominal weakness to its advantage, with a bottom end that shorn of the deepest notes, or at least the weight they carry, isn't just faster, is incredibly tactile and responsive. That means that it can track the pacing of a piece more easily and fluently, fast or slow, as well as the transitions in between. So, despite the disparity in sensitivity, the Marquis actually sounds quicker, more agile and more immediately impactful than the Noblesse.



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Maybe the lighter bass leaves it quicker on its feet, but playing the Mutter/Previn/Vienna P.O. performance of the Tchaikovsky and Korngold *Concertos* (streamed via the Wadax Reference Server and DAC) there's no missing the fluent phrasing and emotional reach of the performance, Wadax strengths for sure, but strengths that the Marquis is more than capable of exploiting. Mutter's playing holds you captivated, despite (or more interestingly, perhaps because of) Previn's measured opening tempo. More on this later, but one thing the Marquis rams home is just how crucial overall pacing is to musical performance – and how woefully inadequate most speakers are when it comes to capturing this on the macro, rather than the simple note to note scale.



This is a speaker that never fears the slower movements, that never makes the music lag, or drags it back. Its low frequency clarity combined with a natural pace and dynamic response means that sudden shifts in level or density still shock or surprise, even from familiar recordings. It's a capability that brings a new subtlety and life to drumming, from Clem Burke's beautifully shaped, propulsive patterns and dynamic control on Blondie's 'Look Good In Blue' to Ed Thigpen's crisp brushwork and staccato punctuation on 'Jet Song' (Oscar Peterson Trio, *West Side Story* DCC GZS-1068). While Peterson's piano and Ray Brown's bass take centre stage, Thigpen's understated drum work provides the perfect underpinning and nicely judged rhythmic accents – a nudge here, a small push there, the odd exclamation mark thrown in almost for fun. There's a sparky, innately communicative quality to the performance that keeps you listening. Revisiting this disc to refresh my memory while writing, I found myself letting it play through to the final medley – despite needing to move on to other musical examples.

This fluid, un-obstructive presentation speaks well of the seamless continuity between the Göbel's drivers but even better of its deftly executed crossover. The passive network is the rock upon which so many loudspeakers' ambitions are dashed, but in this case it is the glue that binds the performance together. There's none of the mechanistic hesitation, disrupted dynamics or fractured energy, disturbed dispersion or distorted perspectives by which most crossovers reveal their presence. As a result, there's no diminution of the drama or tension in a performance, no halting missteps – unless they're the missteps of the musicians themselves. Likewise, there's no diminution of the differences between performances. Play Batiashvili's Tchaikovsky (DGG 4796038) immediately after Mutter's and the difference in tone between the soloists and the performances is stark. The tension and precision in Batiashvili's lines, the power in their focussed intensity combined with the explosive orchestral accompaniment in this concert performance makes for a scintillatingly dramatic reading. In contrast, Mutter's lines are initially softer and her tone less concentrated, the orchestral playing almost muted – but then Previn slowly but inexorably ramps up the pace and tightens the screw, while Mutter responds, drawing you in to the music, until they finally hit the tumultuous final notes of that long first movement over a minute before Batiashvili, Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin. Each is in its own way equally impressive (although Batiashvili is the more immediately so), but what really impresses is just how clearly the Divin Marquis draws the musical distinctions and reveals the contrasting musical visions – and how much sense it makes of them.

The butt stops here...

As I've already alluded to, a great deal of what the Marquis delivers is down to the beautifully natural and effortlessly tuneful bottom end – and just how effectively that bottom-end underpins the musically all-important mid-bass, where so much musical drive, impact AND rhythmic subtlety is centred. The pile-driver drumming that brings such irresistible musical momentum to Lloyd Cole and the Commotions' 'Rich' (from *Easy Pieces*, Polydor LCLP 2) is handled with an astonishing sense of concentrated energy and power. Yet the deftly shaped bass guitar line that underpins and sets the behind the beat pacing of Elvis Costello's 'Alison' (*My Aim Is True*, Stiff Records SEEZ 3) is just as pitch perfect and unforced as it should be. It's the sort of expressive range and flexibility more normally associated with the more articulate mid-band, where driver and cabinet artefacts are so much easier to avoid. This clarity and effortlessly expressive precision are qualities the Marquis definitely shares with its larger brethren. It suggests that Oliver Göbel's thoughts regarding cabinet resonance, colouration and driver design are pretty much bang on the money. So perhaps it's only logical that the rest of the range should dovetail so smoothly with the impressively natural bottom end.



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(All but) removing the bass from the equation is instructive. Play the track 'Last seen October 9th' (from Eleanor McEvoy's album *Yola*, MOSCO EMSACD1) and the Spartan piano accompaniment to the exposed vocal, the subtle strings fills accentuate not just the deliberate pacing of the song but the pauses in the narrative. It's an object lesson in the importance of the space that exists between notes as well as the notes themselves; space that too many systems and especially speakers blur, smudge or dilute with stored energy that bleeds into what should be silent space. In stark contrast, the Marquis plays the tail of the notes with the same precision and scaled energy as it does the leading edges. So the sadness and desolation of 'Last Seen...' is driven home, just as effectively as the jolted, pointed rhythms underpinning a song like 'Leaves Me Wondering'.

Take it a stage further, to the very limit of musical expression and Mitsuko Uchida's astonishing concert performance of the *Andante con moto* second movement from Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto* (BPHR180243). Short and tragic, most musicians play the movement in a little over four minutes. Uchida strings it out to nearly five and a half – and that extra 25% is all silence! The Marquis offer the music all of the freedom it demands, their ability to track both the amplitude and the spacing of the notes as wonderfully explicit as the performance is deeply felt. It's (literally) a master class in the power of poised musical restraint, a lesson the conductor Simon Rattle would do well to take on board, although even his ham-fisted orchestral belches can't disturb the majestic pathos of Uchida's playing. Few speakers in my experience can match the Gobel's ability to let the recording set the musical pace, allowing the space between notes, the micro-dynamic discrimination and the inky black background define the pattern of the performance rather than imposing a grid upon it.



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If that responsive nature is most apparent in slower passages, passages that demand a speaker to start AND stop, passages that lag through other speakers, it is less obvious but no less important on more varied, more driven or simply more hurried material. The way that Mikey Chung accelerates through those urgent bass riffs on 'Rasta Fiesta' (Sly Wicked And Slick, Virgin/Taxi FL 1042) has never been so powerfully impressive. The gloriously semi-organised chaos that is Steve Earl's album *Copperhead Road* (MCA MCF 3246 – on which he is aided and abetted, at least as regards the chaos, by the Pogues) never seems to settle to a steady rhythm. Songs like the title track and 'Johnny Come Lately' start in measured enough a fashion but then rhythmically speaking, so does a runaway train. The Marquis simply nails the necessary combination of frenetic urgency, energy and clarity, letting the track run but never letting go. Did I mention the drums? Big, solid beats. These are drums that aren't just being hit – they're staying hit! The sheer power that is generated on a track like 'Waiting On You' is so potent it is almost physically propulsive. I defy anyone to sit unmoved and unmoving in front of this musical *tour de force*. It brings a whole new, an almost physical meaning to the notion of 'wall of sound'. I might say that Phil never dreamed of this – but then I'm not sure Phil's dreams are somewhere I really want to go...

Speaking clearly...

Few if any speakers in my experience (including the larger Divin Noblesse) can match the sheer intelligibility of the lyrics on this album, ever a favoured torture track in these parts. No great recording, the Göbels manage to sort out the overlapping layers and dense arrangements, bringing a sense of shape and clarity without diminishing the presence, destroying the music's integrity or diluting that all-important attitude. If the mood takes you then they are just as adept when it comes to unravelling rapid-fire rap lyrics or rendering Robert Smith's 'sheets of sound' guitar on *The Head On The Door* (Fiction FIXH 11), conveying the sheer athleticism necessary from (and energy expended by) Sol Gabetta playing the cello transcription of 'Winter' from *The Four Seasons (Il Progetto Vivaldi, Sony Music 88697 131691)* or the temporal dexterity demanded by 'Love For Sale' (Cannonball Adderley, *Somethin' Else, UHQCD 40116*).



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But it takes a track like Eliza Gilkyson's 'Tender Mercies', (*Land Of Milk And Honey*, Red House Records CD174) to really make the point and drive it home. Dating from 2004 and the post 9-11 *zeitgeist*, it seems if anything, even more apposite now. The spacious, largely acoustic arrangement and the fragile quality to both the lyric and the vocals encapsulates the desperation of the disenfranchised, the anger of the downtrodden. The tonal and rhythmic subtleties that come so naturally to the Marquis allow the song and the singing its full range of complex and conflicted emotions. This ability to articulate a melodic line, to capture the intricacies and intent in a performer's phrasing is central to the Göbel's communicative capability. It is apparent in just how affective heartfelt performances are. It is apparent in the way that discs selected for a single track seem almost inevitably to play through to the end. This ability to communicate musical purpose, to capture and hold your attention – that's the Göbel Divin Marquis' 'Super Power'.

Getting there the fastest with the mostest...

There's an old audio trope that 90% of the music happens in the midrange – which is one of the reasons that pint-sized speakers and table radios actually work. But there's also no substitute for bandwidth. The Divin Marquis simply cannot match the scale and extension generated by its bigger brothers – so how does it match their musical impact? The short answer is by making the most of the not inconsiderable bass it does generate – and it does that by extending the qualities we generally associate with the mid-band, way, way down the range. The speed, transparency, resolution, tonal and rhythmic distinctions so critical to musical expression are all present and correct, right through the mid-bass and on down. The clarity and lack of clutter in the sound adds clarity of purpose and structural integrity to the music. It's this continuity and temporal and dynamic coherence that translates in turn into the musical subtlety and articulation that makes the Marquis such a communicative and engaging performer. Now, factor in the natural sense of presence and immediacy that comes with the high sensitivity and responsive dynamics and the speaker brings its own, focussed intensity to proceedings.



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The Marquis might lack really, really deep bass, but it takes that absence and translates it into natural pace and musical impact. Of course, there are plenty of speakers that don't plumb the musical depths, but they can't do what the Marquis does. That's because they lack that absolute clarity and responsive nature that Göbel's driver and cabinet technology delivers. But it also delivers another, quite surprising capability. For a speaker that is far from small and has an unusually deep cabinet, the Marquis is surprisingly at home with both lesser electronics and in lesser rooms. Although I spent time with the Divin speakers in the main Music Room, driving them with the CH M1.1 and VTL S-400 II, I also got great results from the S-200 and the Levinson 585 and Gryphon Diablo 120 integrated amps.

Using the €89K Marquis with those €10-15K pocket battleship integrated amps might seem like a mismatch, at least in budget terms. But musically? Musically it was astonishingly successful. The 585 delivered a more stable, arguably more restrained, more refined and dimensional presentation. The Diablo (as always) majored on attitude and energy. You pay your money and take your choice, but that's exactly the point: the money required for Marquis ownership might not be as much as that €80K ticket suggests – simply because the matching amplification can be so much more affordable, without diluting the musical appeal. Naturally, stepping up to the M1.1 or S-400 transformed the performance, but just as the Marquis covers its tracks when compared to its bigger brothers, it covers its tracks when driven by capable but lesser electronics. Although all of the amps listed here deliver well over 100 Watts/Channel (and most of them at least twice that) and the Marquis displays a clear appetite for power, its easy load and high efficiency make the amplifier's job easier. Although you might assume that opens the door to low powered amplification, what it actually does is enhance the control exerted by the driving amp, making the maximum use of the speaker's clarity and articulation, timing and rhythmic integrity. Yes, you can use the Divin's with flea-powered amps: you just won't be getting the best out of them...



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This is just how close the speakers got to the rear wall in The Studio, limited in part by the depth of the radiator.

As previously noted, I also shifted the Marquis into The Studio, our smallest listening space. At 6m by 5m and firing across the room, this is a much smaller space than you'd think would comfortably accommodate a speaker the size of the Marquis, but it proved an eminently successful installation. The forward firing ports and vertical rear cabinet wall meant that the speaker could be pushed back close to the wall without damaging bass linearity. A (pretty severe) 1.2 degree forward rake was also required – but easily achieved – due to the low-ish seating position, high tweeter placement and short listening distance. But with those things attended to and the M1.1 or 585 doing the driving, results were spectacularly immediate and impactful, the smaller space compensating for any perceived lack of scale in the bigger listening room. Listeners looking for presence, power and a musically communicative speaker to work in a smallish space shouldn't overlook the Divin Marquis. It might well surprise you.

Versatile and effective, potent and powerful yet subtle, delicate and intimate too, the Divin Marquis is an unlikely looking all-rounder. It's bluff cabinet and large drivers are the antithesis of the multi driver columns so popular these days, remarkably reminiscent of 'old-skool' speakers. But that's no bad thing. Many of us grew up with large boxes, with large bass drivers, sat on the floor. It's more than just nostalgia that makes us hanker after those halcyon days. There IS no substitute for bandwidth and if I've spent a long time discussing how little bandwidth the Marquis possesses compared to its bigger and much more expensive brethren, it still has more (and far more potent) bass than the vast majority of the competition. The problem is that, such are its musical capabilities that it ends up getting bracketed with and compared to far more expensive designs. With speakers like the Wilson Alexx V, Stenheim Reference Ultime 2 and Magico M6 cluttering the 150K market sector, it's easy to see or position the Divin Marquis as an alternative to those high-profile models. And it gives them a run for their money. But the Göbel model that should stand toe-to-toe with those large floor-standers is the Noblesse! The Marquis is half their price and far more forgiving of amplification. For anybody seeking serious high-end performance combined with consummate musical quality, that makes the Divin Marquis a surprisingly compact, capable and affordable option. Along with Stenheim's similarly surprising Alumine 5SE, this Göbel loudspeaker is re-writing the rulebook – and doing it in one of the most competitive market sectors in the whole of high-end audio.



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Set up in The Studio: note the array of tools – laser level and rangefinder, digital level and of course, the ubiquitous FrogTape and Sharpie!

If the acid test of any (speaker) system is its ability to sound like real people and real instruments, the Divin Marquis is a stunningly successful design, one that reaches beyond what is being played to the who and the why. Its lack of colouration or dominant character allows you to hear the driving system (and, hopefully, why you bought it). Differences between instruments and players become part of a larger whole, the purpose and motivation of the players laid bare. But more than that, the Marquis doesn't just shine, its attributes and qualities, musical integrity and capabilities encourage the system as a whole to shine. Any truly great system should sound like people. Any truly great system will give each recording its own voice. Any truly great system should put musical quality ahead of recording quality. Any truly great system should be able to seduce – but needs the ability to offend. Göbel's Divin Marquis ticks all of those boxes... emphatically! This is a speaker that punches well above its weight, both sonically and musically. Given its not inconsiderable size and mass, that's impressive indeed.

Technical Panel

Type: 3-way, symmetrically reflex loaded loudspeaker

Driver Complement:

1x Göbel modified Heil AMT tweeter

1x 205mm Göbel carbon/cellulose midrange

1x 305mm Göbel Kevlar/cellulose bass

Sensitivity: 92dB

Bandwidth: 21Hz – 28kHz \pm 3dB

Impedance: 4 Ohms nominal, 3.4 Ohms minimum (95Hz)

Finish: Black piano lacquer with aluminum parts in black ultra matt soft touch with natural aluminum brushed highlights.

Custom finishes available to special order.

Dimensions (WxHxD): 410 x 1180 x 720mm

Weight: 150kg ea.

Prices:

€89,000 (inc. tax)

\$89,000 USD (ex. tax)



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Göbel Divin Marquis Loudspeaker...

Manufacturer:

Göbel Audio GmbH

Schabweg 4a

D-82239, Alling

Germany

Tel. +49(0)8141 22 55 887

www.goebel-highend.de



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