

The Advent Loudspeaker
By J. Gordon Holt · January, 1976

After a number of years of equipment reviewing, one gets rather blasé about "compact" loudspeakers. The appearance of yet another one that looks like hundreds of others and embodies no radically new innovations to pique one's curiosity is likely to be greeted with a passionate Ho-Hum.

That, at least, is how we felt about receiving a pair of Advent speakers—their first product since the company was formed. Of course, we were pleased to see a new hi-fi manufacturer taking the plunge and we wished them well, but my God, not another oversized "bookshelf" loudspeaker! Who needs it? And at \$112, could it possibly be any good? Sure, the Dynaco A-25 was a pleasant surprise, but could there be another one so soon?

Dutifully, though, we hooked up the Advents and gave them a listen.

Our first reaction was Ho-Hum! They didn't send us. They seemed to have no character at all. But is that bad? Well, no, as a matter of fact. A speaker shouldn't have character. And indeed, the Advents did prove to be about as uncolored as anything we had ever heard. No squawk, honk or hollowness, no papery or metallic flavor from disc surface noise, no flabby mid-bass boom. The extreme low end was very deep, evidently good to at least 35Hz, and the highs were extremely smooth, sweet and detailed.

After several weeks of listening, we still hadn't found anything to complain about. We couldn't even find any sonic characteristics to hang adjectives on, in order to try to describe their sound. They were, in fact, the least-colored loudspeakers we have ever heard, and this includes the highest-priced systems currently available.

Probably for just that reason, the Advents proved eminently easy to live with, and sounded equally comfortable and natural at low or room-filling listening levels. Dispersion was excellent and so, as a consequence, was the stereo imaging. Driver blending, too, was excellent, and the speakers did an outstanding job of reproducing the front-to-back perspective in stereo and mono program material.

Sweeping an audio oscillator through its range revealed no humps, dips, or rattles. Bass response was very smooth down to around 37Hz, and rolled off gradually below that, producing what we judged to be usable output down to 30Hz. There was no trace of low-end distortion until the system was driven to what would normally be entirely excessive (for most people) listening levels.

In fact, the only respect in which we felt the Advents took a back seat to any other speaker system was in transparency. Compared with the KLH Nine full-range electrostatic, which has some other imperfections and costs over \$1000 anyway, the Advents seemed to be playing through a velvet fog. It wasn't a matter of high-end response—the Advents actually had more of this than the Nine when the latter was oriented so its tweeter beams weren't aimed our way. It seemed more a matter of "focus," as though the Advents were slightly smudging transients in the sound.

Of course, the comparison with the Nine in this respect is patently unfair, because of the price discrepancy and because the KLH has that quality of "focus" to a degree that is unsurpassed by any other speaker. But Advent's literature for their speaker invites comparison with the best available, and indeed, except for the slightly veiled sound, the Advent speaker has no need to feel embarrassed by such a comparison.

Against the Dynaco A-25

In terms of price, of course, the Advent speaker invites comparison with the \$79.95 Dynaco A-25, which we reported on three issues ago. The A-25 has somewhat more transparency than the Advent, a very slightly forward sound (by comparison), a somewhat rougher and not-quite-so-extended high end, somewhat lower [sensitivity], and rather less capacity for producing deep bass at high listening levels.

Both systems tend to be noticeably amplifier-sensitive, in that their low-end performance is audibly affected by the power capability and damping factor of the driving amplifier, although the Advent seems a little less affected. The Dyna, however, seems to perform at its best with amps of moderate power and damping (50–80Wpc), and tends to thin out at the bottom when used with high-powered, high-damping amplifiers. The Advents, in most environments, sound a shade heavy and under-damped at the bottom with a moderate-power amplifier, and are at their best with high-damping, brute-force amplifiers like the Crown DC-300. The differences here are rather subtle and, due to the higher [sensitivity] of the Advents, high-level listening requirements may tip the scales in favor of them when there is not a great deal of amplifier power available.

Certainly, it is no criticism of the Dyna speakers that their low-end performance is best with the kind of amplifier that most people would normally buy for use with inexpensive speakers. (The Dyna Stereo 120 amplifier is an ideal driver for the A-25's, not surprisingly.) But the performance of the Advents with top-priced, top-performance amplifiers suggests that it might not be at all absurd to consider using them and, say, a DC-300 in preference to a couple of \$300 speakers and a \$250 amplifier.

Since the Dyna speakers are often heavily discounted in the stores, it may not really be possible to make a meaningful price-versus-performance comparison between the Dyna and the Advent, but there is no doubt in our editorial minds that each is a "best buy" in its usual price bracket. Where local pricing makes them fairly competitive, your specific installation requirements may force the choice between them. The Advents work best standing on the floor or raised a few inches above it, while the Dynas are generally at their best a few feet above floor level, which is appropriate for bookshelf-sized speakers. Otherwise, our own inclination would be to choose the Advents, if only because they seem more amenable to future upgrading of one's present power amplifier.

Summing Up

As for the Advents versus the top-of-the-line speakers, we can only say that you may prefer them to a pair of KLH Nines or Altec A-7s, or you may not. By all the accepted standard of evaluation (excepting sensitivity, where the Altecs excel), the Advents are as accurate reproducers of sound as any top-line system we have heard. But we must face the fact that accuracy is no guarantee of personal satisfaction with a loudspeaker, and that many people value transparency above lack of coloration and find that a closer or more distant-sounding speaker conveys a more convincing illusion of realism than one that is completely neutral. We feel, though, that listeners who have no particular preference for a certain aspect of or kind of reproduced sound will be as happy with the Advents as with anything costing up to five times as much. Maybe even more so.

Sidebar: Specifications

Description: Two-way direct-radiator loudspeaker. Crossover frequency: 1kHz. Balance control: Tweeter switch selects flat, +3dB, or –3dB. Impedance: 8 ohms. Power capacity: 100W program.

Dimensions: Not noted.

Price: \$116 each in walnut veneer, \$102 each unfinished (1971); no longer available (2006).

Manufacturer: Advent Corporation, Cambridge, MA (1971). Company no longer in existence (2006).

Manufacturer's Comment

Editor: We are very grateful that Stereophile has evaluated the Advent loudspeaker on the basis of absolute sound quality rather than restricting comparisons to its price peers.

We are a bit confounded by the statement that the speaker is "noticeably amplifier sensitive," because this does not agree with our experience. The Advent loudspeaker is critically damped, having an almost ideal system Q of slightly less than 1. As a result, it does not change character when used with different amplifiers that differ only in damping factor, so long as each of them has a minimum damping factor of 10. Any speaker will sound heavier in the bass, for better or for worse, with a low-damping-factor amplifier.

We wonder how many amplifiers Stereophile used with the Advent speakers. The two mentioned in the review have been noted in prior Stereophile reports as having sonic differences when auditioned on other speakers. We suspect that what the reporter heard with the Advents were the previously noted differences between these amplifiers, rather than differences between otherwise-similar amplifiers that were caused by the Advent speakers.—Henry Kloss, Advent Corporation