

The Double Advent System



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Manufacturer: Advent Corp. 195 Albany St., Cambridge Mass. 02139.
Price: \$120 each (walnut veneer); \$105 (Walnut-Grain Vinyl).

The Advent Loudspeaker, which has been around for several years, has several things going against it with most cultist audiophiles. First, it has been a huge commercial success. Second, it is easily available. Third, it is not backbreaking, either in cost or in weight. Perhaps worst of all, it contains no “radically” new principles.

All this demonstrates, really, is a certain snobbism that permeates the upper reaches of the high fidelity sound business, the sort of follow-the-cultist attitude that, at one level, makes a man choose McIntosh over Citation, or, at another, the British Decca cartridges over the American ADC.

It is very difficult to take a \$120 speaker system seriously, since the very fabric of the American experience teaches us (endlessly) that you pay for what you get. In all fairness to the snobs, someone has got to say this about the Advent: it doesn't sound very much better than any other bookshelf speaker in the typical showroom demonstration. It doesn't sound nearly

so good as it can when it is used with equipment in a comparable price range (inexpensive amps, pre-amps and cartridges). It is an appallingly difficult speaker to classify as to the way it sounds – the Advent is something of a sonic chameleon, sounding more like the program source, deficiencies and all, than itself.

But the larger Advent is sort of the artistic summation of design engineer Henry Kloss's thoughts about loudspeakers. Kloss is the man responsible for some of the most successful acoustic suspension speakers of modern day audio, including, among others, the KLH models 4, 5 and 12. And if the Advent has any kinship with any of Kloss's past creations, it is the KLH model 4 that it most resembles.

There are differences. The Advent exhibits none of the hardness in the upper-mid range that characterized the 4. Its high-end response is much more transparent than the 4s. On the other hand, the Advent is, like the 4, able to make the Celli and Double-Bass sound as if they were being played slightly in front of the speakers.

We should make it clear, though, that we are not talking about single Advents per channel. Formally, this should probably be called the Double Advent System review (our name) since it only when you double up on the Advents, that you begin to get the sort of authoritative performance that comes strikingly close to the real thing.

When we first sampled the Advent speakers, at home, we had the JansZen Z-600s on hand for comparison. At the time, we used one Advent per channel. The JansZens had, quite simply, one of the most romantic high ends we had heard – it simply sounded very sweet and rather glorious (but not on rainy days). The bass end was quite muddy, rather like the bass produced on the older Wharfdale woofers. Wool-like. The JansZens did not respond at all well to high vol-

umes. (During the comparison, we lost a woofer in the JansZen – “lost” means blew it out). By comparison, the Advent (single) sounded somewhat white, and very, very tight on the upper end - rather dry. The bass was different, tight but well defined. We had some sense of a mid-range deficiency and roughness, in the crossover range, which we attributed to deficiencies in its crossover. We cannot say that the Advent won the comparison, but the JansZen had to go off for repairs. In the interim, the single Advent became, by default, the system we had to live with. Weeks later, we still weren't sure about the Advent. There just didn't seem to be enough “space”, enough air about the sound. Everything was too analytic, too X-rayish.

About this time, we heard, in an Atlanta stereo shop, a pair of Advents on each channel. The store, The Stereo Center, had set up a convenient switching arrangement, so their customers could switch from single to double Advent at will. Well, we started switching, and on the basis of what we heard there, bought ourselves a second pair of Advents on the spot. Double Advents eliminated the problems of single Advents. The spaciousness of the two working in tandem suggested that of a huge Bozak system, but without its considerable frequency deviations. The bass, if anything, had that certain low-end sock you hear in a good hall, and the upper strings, massed violins in particular, began to sound like massed violins. (Up until that moment, the only time we had heard massed violins sound like a huge section of individual violins playing together was on a Bozak B-305A). This is not to say that the Double Advents sounded perfect – there was still something of a “curtain” between the listener and the sound, a curtain that, curiously, was more apparent at low volumes than it was at high.

We soon discovered that the

Double Advents were temperamental. Through careless handling and through super-power amplifiers, we managed to exhaust six tweeters on the Advents. In part, this was because Advent did not, at the time, have adequate protection for its soft-domed tweeter, something they have since rectified with a metal grill around the tweeter (and you'd better check that the Advent you buy has one of these). The other part was something less than candor from the company itself. No matter what it says on the spec sheet, the Advent cannot take 100 watts rms per channel. Peaks, yes. But not anything like steady state power. We have since discovered that the Advents can handle prodigious amounts of power on peaks (measured in microseconds), but that it simply isn't safe to connect them, without fuses, to any amplifier capable of producing 50 watts per channel or more.

In fusing the Double Advent system, we ignored Advent's recommendations and used AGC 3s. The fuses, in conjunction with the Phase Linear 700, do not blow until the speaker is being fed 60 watts rms steady loads (that represents zero on the Phase Linear's averaging meters). Any sudden transient through the system (a dropped tone arm, a faulty switch) will blow the fuses and protect the Advents. With the Phase Linear 700 and then Double Advent System, you seldom have to worry about hitting the "zero" meter reading mark; few records will even push the Phase Linear meters past the +minus 20 db" point. (Ours that will, the Mehta/London recording of "The Planets", the Horenstein/Nonesuch recording of Mahler's Third, the Stokowski/London recording of Ives's Second Orchestral Set). This does not mean that there won't be peaks of many hundreds of watts going through the fusing. There will be, only the Phase Linear won't show them. (For the record, we have blown the fuses only when using the Advents and the Phase Linear with the master tape of an organ recording and with some of Ampex's new Dolbyized open-reel tapes).

We must say that we really had no idea of just how good the Advents were until we tried them with the Crown DC-300, and later with the combination of the Citation 11a and the Phase Linear 700. Each improvement in the amplification chain of the reference system made considerable differences in the way we perceived the performance of the Double Advent System. At present, with the ADC XLM, The Citation and the Phase Linear and a Revox A77 Mk III, the Double Advents sound more like good electrostatics than any other cone type speaker we have ever heard. The Double Advents, however, sacrifice nothing in the way of bass response, and they are capable of handling volumes of sound that will make your ears feel as if they are watering.

So what does one say, pending further developments in cartridges and amplifying equipment?

Well, one says this: The Double Advent System is relatively colorless. And it takes considerable listening, and to a variety of program material, to realize just how little of their own sound the Advents contribute to the reproduction process. Double Advents do not, for some reason unknown to us, exhibit any of the difficulties that other speakers do when they are used two per channel.

(We heard Triple Advents, in an audio showroom, put everything else in the store to shame. We even tried it ourselves and decided that our music room was too small to support that much sound, but we are assured, by Advent, incidentally, that such a thing as Triple Advents works very, very well in mansion-type living rooms.

Double Advents do not, even with their 32 Hz response, exhibit that sense of bigness on the bottom end (as in, say Ormandy/Columbia's recording of Tchaikowsky's "Capriccio Italien"), nor the extreme sense of brass weight that a Klipschorn will, in its lower reaches (as in, say, Reiner/Victrola's potpourri of Russian goodies, including "Marche Slav" and "Night on Bald Mountain"). At low levels, they do not exhibit the mid-range

detail of Dayton-Wright electrostatics, although at loud listening levels the differences in transparency and retail are not quite so marked.

At the very high end, from about 10 kHz up to approximately 15 kHz or so (you actually extend the sense of upper-end response with the Advents in tandem), the Advents are very smooth. They are somewhat superior in imaging to most speakers and they reproduce the sense of overtones and the upper harmonics better than any cone speaker that we can think of. (Assuming, of course, that the Citation 11a and Phase Linear 700 are used with the ADC XLM at the beginning of the audio chain).

We did not, for example, find the JansZen Z-600s much more detailed than the Advents (although the JansZens did sound "sweeter"), while we did not find the Advents stereo imaging superior to any electrostatic speaker we have ever heard. The Double Advents are also superior to the Bozaks, the Klipsch and the KLH Nine in smoothness throughout the frequency range (in a word, there is not only less coloration but concomitantly, fewer deviations in response between 80 Hz and 14 kHz, far fewer).

The Advents do seem to "smear" the sound of the instruments on the orchestra (the effect is like a very small blurring, a loss of resolution) more than a well designed electrostatic, or the Audio Research Magneplanar, which is the most precisely focused speaker we have ever heard. And the Double Advent System occasionally exhibits a certain "roughness", very much like small bristles, in the cross-over range.

Quite obviously, a speaker system in the authoritative class – Makes a series of compromises with the sound of music itself. To our way of thinking, the Double Advent System suffers when compared in first one area, then another, to individual speaker systems costing many times more, but overall, none puts it to shame.

-HP

Manufacturer's Comment:

We're pleased that a magazine dedicated to serving the cultist audiophile population has selected to review a product as modestly priced as our speaker system. We are frequently asked why we do not build a more ambitious speaker, and our answer is that we do make such a product: two Advents per channel. Yours is the first review of that "product".

Some specific comments that we think will be of interest to your readers:

The Advent "utility" version is identical in performance to the standard, walnut veneered model, and the cost saving is worth mentioning, particularly for anyone contemplating the purchase of four Advents.

The protective metal grille you refer to is on all Advent speakers manufactured since spring, 1971. It can be fitted on any of our speakers made before that time, and is free for the asking.

Since the speaker was designed, super-power amplifiers have become more commonplace. In recognition of this trend, we have switched over to high temperature voice coils to increase the power handling capacity of the speaker.

RE: our lack of candor, we are falsely accused. At one time we stated in our literature that the Advent Loudspeaker "can safely be used with amplifiers of up to 120 watts per channel *for the reproduction of musical material.*"

However, since this statement was misconstrued to mean that the speaker could handle 120 watts steady state, which, as you correctly point out, it cannot, the statement was deleted over two years ago to prevent further confusion.

We agree that fusing is desirable with amplifiers of 60 watts or more per channel. Your experience with the AGC-3 fuses would lead us to believe that they would be a satisfactory substitute for the ones we recommend.

Finally, if we may be a bit immodest, we'd like to introduce another slant on your comment that the performance of the Advents improved with "each improvement in the amplifier chain". We think the Advent

Loudspeaker is rare in the "American experience", because it is a relatively inexpensive device capable of resolving performance differences among expensive devices.

Andrew Petite
Product Manager
Advent Corp.

HFL Comments:

I can add little to HP's review except to say that you have to start at \$250 per speaker to have anything to compare the Advents to, which means that \$240 for a *pair of* Advents is quite a bargain. I can also confirm the adjectives used: firm, detailed and transparent.

A pair of these speakers (yes, Harry, only a pair) are used as my reference monitors for location and mix-down when I attend to my professional recording chores. You know how flat they are when you listen to them compared to Koss Pro 4 AA headphones. The both sound the same: the finest dynamic headphones on the market and the first speaker that I have heard that sounds as flat and detailed as these headphones.

My main listening room is currently enhanced by Boses. I suspect that when I go 4-channel for good, Advents of Infinity 2000 As will be my choice. These speakers keep remarkable company.

JWC Comments:

Full-range electrostatic freak that I am, I still find myself mightily impressed by the Larger Advent sound. What the Advent *cannot* do (at any volume level, as far as I am concerned) is to reproduce the kind of mid-range detail that seems to come naturally to full-range electrostatics. On the other hand, I know of no conventional speaker that surpasses the Advent in this area, and very few that equal it (on the basis of brief listening, I suspect that the AR-LST may do so – for a helluva lot more money).

The other thing that impresses me about the Advent is how homogeneous and balanced throughout its range it sounds – and on this point it does closely approach my beloved full-range electrostatics. It is this, I suspect, that contributes most to its highly "musical" sound.

I say amen to two points made in the review. First, The double Advents do indeed produce more than just quantitative improvements over single Advents – and still at a cost that is relatively tiny for a system of such accomplishment. Second, the Advents are really good enough to benefit from use with associated equipment costing far more than would ordinarily be used with speakers in their price range. They are, in short, so analytical that they deserve the best possible amp, pre-amp, etc.