

A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

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The founder, owner, and designer of Avalon is Neil Patel, described by many as the incomparable god of loudspeaker systems. Neil Patel established Avalon Acoustics at the end of the eighties, gradually adding two other divisions to the mother company: Avalon Music Systems and Avalon Professional Products. Today's precious pieces come from the AMS division, and all of these models carry the common name "Symbol". The series was developed as a stereo system and as a system for Home Theater, which means other models bear the suffix, Center and Subwoofer. The seat of the AMS division is in Pennsylvania, near the town of West Chester.

Avalon Symbol

Each pair of two-way Symbols contains two 12 cm diameter mid-woofers. The membrane is coated with a ceramic layer, while the diameter of the magnetic assembly is almost the width of the membrane itself. The robust basket is made of aluminum alloy, each designed and tailor-made for Avalon. The tweeter chassis contain a titanium membrane with a black finish and a metal faceplate with the Avalon logo. The most noteworthy characteristic is that Neil Patel has managed to remove the typical peak-the typical resonance for aluminum or titanium cones occur in the band between 22kHz and 23kHz, which causes coloring and sharp hardness in metal membranes. Even such producers as B & W or Focal are unable to remove this undesired effect completely.

The frequency response of this slim dynamic loudspeaker is claimed to be from 38Hz to 22kHz. The MDF cabinet is filled with fleece and vented with a porthole firing into the floor. Proprietary internal cabling is done with three individually wound Teflon coated conductors, isolated for each pole of the speaker. The protective grille does not only serve as protection from children, the upper part of the frame contains a felt isolation mask to minimize diffraction effects of the front baffle.

A Symbiotic Trio

Edo Nemcek: The trinity of Avalon-Ayre-Cardas has not been chosen by coincidence. The long time attested combination has bourn its fruit along the way, and not only a few apples or pears; the harvest of sound produced by this little set represents a gathering of fruit from all the various climactic zones, colors, and tastes. The soundstage resolves into a 3D picture with an independent envelope of individual instruments, which do not overlap either horizontally or vertically.

The vibrations from the contrabass on Holly Cole's *Temptation*, are drawn with light strokes while still deep and full. All the cords ripple and tremble with great amplitude. Plucks of nails on strings along with the occasional sound of fingers on the neck of the instrument are pure and quick. The Ayre AX-7 transmits the amplified signal without

weakening or dispersing during complex passages. The vocals are literally liquid. You can feel Holly's breathing as she toys with her voice in very quiet passages. We can clearly state: "What the Ayre can mine out, the Symbol is able to deliver." Only now are you able to realize what quantity of information is swallowed by other speaker systems. If you believe that you own an extra precise speaker system, and do not want to give up your belief, do not sit down with an Avalon. It is impossible for me to explain how it is possible for this slim system to play so deeply and purely without distortion.

Two-way loudspeaker systems have their advantages, namely continuity throughout the frequency bandwidth. With this system, a continuous transition up to heavenly heights is easy and seamless. Like the second composition on Earik Trufaz- *Mantis* (Blue Note): The wondrously trembling contrabass with the player huffing and puffing into the perceivable resonance of the studio space is joined by a drummer playing finely on the cymbals, further joined by a comet with a slightly tinny body. The background is completed by electric guitar, free of any urgency: Colors, colors, colors.

The *Triptych* of Vaclav Nehybel is conveyed seemingly as if without any dynamic limitation, with the AX -7 giving its small 60 W into 8 ohms with great ease. Referring to the preceding word "seemingly" - this when compared with the Avalon Ceramique and the Ayre K-lx and V-lx, which provides a bigger hologram in both dynamics and frequency response- as well as in price. The drums on Charlie Antolini's, *Knock out 2000* had not caught my interest until now. Avalon has broadened, in a very agreeable way, the offerings of my own CDs, which I am now interested in mining out of dusty and forgotten shelves. In *Composition No. 7* it is as if a wall of percussion is falling my way. A phenomenally sized scene with unrestricted dynamic drum beats are precisely defined in front of me. Precise coupling and phasing can do wonders. The small towers can really stomp, and this is what only a very few systems can accomplish. Dead Can Dance- *Spiritchaser* (4AD) assumed a different shape again. The width of the scene reaches literally from one wall to another; I was completely enveloped by the sounds of the rumba ball and small drums. The voice of Lisy Gerrard was palpable in front of me, with the rhythmic instrument and keyboard lines layered up with convincing resolution. No articulation is compromised by any cabinet resonance. There is no flashy or artificially attractive sound, no analytic austerity, only purity, detail, with lots of instrumental colors in a holographic and precise picture. Neil Patel has produced systems for listening to music, with a strong emotional echo.

In this case I must ignore atheism and join the line of those who are bowing their heads. At this trinity (Avalon-Ayre-Cardas), we can finally use the term High-End.

J. Pinter: I had the honor of listening to an Avalon speaker system at the high-end exhibition in Frankfurt a few years ago. The room was crowded, as was usual at this sort of exhibition, and it was not possible to think about any relaxed listening. Nevertheless, even under those conditions it was clear that Avalon doesn't just produce a "sweet" sound capable of bringing the whole audience into whopping frenzy with happy expressions on their faces. Avalon caught my interest with their unbelievable sovereignty and easiness with which they mastered various recordings, even in the thickest complex passages.

In the listening tests in Hlohovec, we listened to the least expensive two-way Avalon (Symbol) in combination with Ayre components, which extracted from them a purely musical experience. Little columns with relatively small cabinets surprised us with their unexpectedly voluminous soundfield across the whole acoustic spectrum. Acoustic musical instruments had actual bodies in space. Bass guitar and double bass had an unsurpassed expression with perfect resolution and tonal colors. If you know the individual sounds of each respective instrument, here you can identify them without any problem. Drums get animated with excellent urgency and accentuation. The Symbols are capable of easily catching up with the quickest rhythmic beats of a drummer. Their speed is simply perfect, comparable only with live music. I have heard such a reproduction of the sound of drums only from a few (active, as well) speaker sets. It seems that bass reflex systems are not so hopeless concerning impulse response as claimed by some fans of true listening. Sure, beats on the biggest of drums are a bit curtailed; small mid-woofers do have their physical limitations. Despite that, the volume of sound coming from these cabinets is unexpected. Vocals are presented very naturally, mildly ... and wondrously present at the same time. Human vocals are simply coming from living creatures, from flesh and bones, and not from cartoon figures. A voice is literally living and breathing. Sibilants are faultless. Vocals are a great strength of Avalon. I will allow myself to say that only a few producers of speaker systems offer such perfect voices, this combined with an excellent presentation of string and brass musical instruments. Violins can be heard to have a wooden body and metal strings. Brasses have real color but without brashness. Each is distinguished, not just shouting and present at the same time. The sound of each instrument is excellently balanced and neutral. The only disadvantage of such a precise performance is the unusual differentiation between the quality of related components and recordings, however this is what audiophiles sitting in "first class" have to get used to. CDs recorded by means of a lot of compression and degraded through poor mixing consoles sound disgustingly machine-like. Spatial imaging from this system will not catch your interest through overblown monumentality, but through a precise focusing in space. The best sounds come from double-mike recordings in which musical instruments are well separated and positioned by an exact layering in space.

J. Turok: I was pleased to accept an invitation to Hlohovec, where the *Platan* Company distributes audio products. Here there was something to look forward to, the connection of two American high-end brands, Avalon and Ayre promised an opulent audiophile musical feast with a richly set table and delicious sound experiences. After a **CLOSED** sign started to swing from side to side as viewed from the street and a drapery isolated us from the outside noise, it was time for our Lucullian feast to start. I did not let myself be confused by the anorexic visage if the Avalon Symbols- two-way speakers with a slim silhouette and a pair of woofers of Spartan diameter under an inverted dome tweeter. My colleagues who had an opportunity to hear them at exhibitions referred namely to an unbelievably voluminous and full-bodied sound generated by these beauties. They were right; it was as if the speakers were making sport of the laws of physics. Their performance is really adult-like, which means no trace of a lagging bass on which competitors of comparable growth suffer. The pair of mid-bass drivers and their proud

company logo worked precisely together in time, with the determination of a pit bull. The deepest octave is presented in a fascinatingly unsurpassed way, with crisp and deep contours. The midrange continues on with an obvious fellowship, the seams are all camouflaged with the bravado of a Hollywood plastic surgeon. Information in this band is well separated, with true colors, and without being boringly analytical. Vocals sound natural to such an extent that you instinctively want to reach out and touch the female singer who is singing so warmly in your ear. But the highlight of the sessions is the trebles. No jingling, no screaming character, no cheap jewelry with inappropriate shining and showy cut edges. Everything is rationed in such a way that the resulting impression oscillates in the range of agreeable commonness, modesty and a natural charm in which a connoisseur discovers delicious details and the precision of structure. This you do not hear very often. Spatial presentation has supreme horizontal and vertical parameters, the depth reaching in good recordings so far that the actual positions of the loudspeakers cannot be determined. This is not seen every day. Airiness cures you from any claustrophobic feeling, despite the fact that you are sitting in a listening room with limited space.

Components used:

Electronics: Ayre CX-7, AX-7, K-5x, K-Ix

Cables: Cardas Neutral Reference, XLR and RCA, Neutral Reference Speaker, Golden Reference XLR and Speaker. Power Cord: Golden Reference Cross

Loudspeakers: Avalon Symbol. Avalon Opus Ceramique

From a Lineage of excellence...

Designed by Neil Patel



the debut of the **SYMBOL**®

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