



AUDIO REVIEWS



MAY 2017



CODEx

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



Reviewer: Srajan Ebaen

Sources: 27" iMac with 5K Retina display, 4GHz quad-core engine with 4.4GHz turbo boost, 3TB Fusion Drive, 16GB SDRAM, OSX Yosemite, PureMusic 3.01, Tidal & Qobuz lossless streaming, COS Engineering D1 & H1, AURALiC Vega, Aqua Hifi Formula, Fore Audio DAISy 1, Apple iPod Classic 160GB (AIFF), Astell&Kern AK100 modified by Red Wine Audio, Cambridge Audio iD100, Pro-Ject Dock Box S Digital, Pure i20, Questyle QP1R; *Metrum Adagio* [on review]

Preamplifier: Nagra Jazz, Esoteric C-03, Vinnie Rossi LIO with DHT module, COS Engineering D1, Wyred4Sound STP-SE Stage 2

Power & integrated amplifiers: Pass Labs XA30.8; FirstWatt SIT1, F5, F6, F7; S.A.Lab Blackbird SE; Crayon Audio CFA-1.2; Goldmund Job 225; ; Aura Note Premier; Wyred4Sound mINT; Nord Acoustics One SE UP NC500MB; *Linnenberg Audio Adagio* [on review]; *Metrum Forte* [on review] **Loudspeakers:** Albedo Audio Aptica; EnigmAcoustics Mythology 1; soundkaos Wave 40; Boenicke Audio W5se; Zu Audio Druid V & Submission; German Physiks HRS-120; Eversound Essence

Cables: Complete loom of Zu Event; KingRex uArt, Zu and LightHarmonic LightSpeed double-header USB cables; Tombo Tron S/PDIF; van den Hul AES/EBU; AudioQuest Diamond glass-fibre Toslink; *Arkana Research XLR/RCA and speaker cables* [on loan]; *Sablon Audio Petit Corona power cords* [on loan], Black Cat Cable Lupo; Ocellia OCC Silver

Power delivery: Vibex Granada/Alhambra on all components, 5m cords to amp/s + sub

Equipment rack: Artesania Audio Exoteryc double-wide 3-tier with optional glass shelves, *Exoteryc Krion and glass amp stands* [on loan]

Sundry accessories: Acoustic System resonators

Room: Rectangular 5.5 x 15m open floor plan with two-storey gabled ceiling, wood-sleeved steel trusses and stone-over-concrete flooring

Review component retail: £10'450/pr in premium finish \$15,000 - \$15,500 USD



Audio Physic. The name indicates a company concerned with measurable reality. It's not a variation on MySound to lock us into a particular man's purely subjective vision. Rather, physics are universal laws of how things work. This German company applies them to loudspeaker design, with the leitmotif 'no loss of fine detail'. Founded in 1985 by Joachim Gerhard who later ran Sonics and today operates Suesskind, the laboratory connection with MLSSA, Klippel & Co. is part of the firm's genetic code. Gerhard-era models were also predicated upon his setup ideal of very wide spacing, extreme toe-in and a close-up sitting distance. By 2017, the company which had played under the baton of chief engineer and prior Gerhard partner Manfred Diestertich [right] since 2005 was already two years past their 30th anniversary. Many of their classic models had been re-imagined for the jubilee occasion.

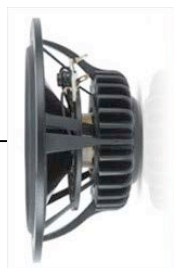
The new Codex tower scales up the classic Avanti platform with a new 7" mid/bass driver atop the Avanti's 6" 2-way head with 1.7" tweeter. With that addition, the Codex grew into a 4-way with more cubic volume than the still current but also revamped 3-way Avanti. Audio Physic's famous geometry of two force-cancelling side woofers has morphed into a single 10" long-throw woofer. Like an integral <100Hz passive subwoofer, that lives in its very own box tucked inside the trapezoid multi-lam main enclosure, then vents toward the floor. The narrow profile and rearward rake remain classic Audio Physic. When the opportunity arose to review a sample from UK distributor Elite Audio, I took it. Soon a gloss Ebony pair hustled it across the Scottish sea to Shannon airport in the Republic of Ireland. I was happy to catch up with an illustrious brand whose show demos I'd witnessed for so many years without ever experiencing a pair within our own four walls.



The cutaway shows porous open-cell ceramic dampers in strategic locations which include resistive damping for the holes of the window-pane braces and even the downfiring woofer vents. It also shows discrete floating filters for each of the four ways, with the upper three drivers terminating in their own chambers. Not apparent is the proprietary nature of two of these transducers manufactured for them by Wavecor on tooling developed and owned by Audio Physic.



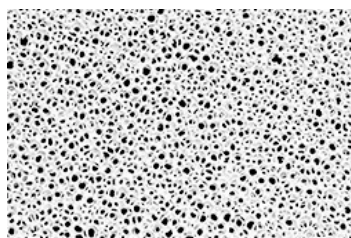
Their 3rd-gen ceramic-coated aluminium *Hyper-Holographic Cone Tweeter* above 3kHz is not a ubiquitous dome at all but a cone with a dust cap...



... whilst the equally 3rd-gen *Hyper-Holographic Cone Midrange* with ceramic-coated aluminium membrane explores new mechanical ground with a dual-basket array that combines a die-cast aluminium outer for stiffness and thermal coupling with an optimally damped plastic inner frame [red in exploded drawing]. As the drivers are from their baffle and the filter boards from their supports, even the single-wire WBT terminals are elastomerically decoupled. With a claimed bandwidth of 28Hz-40kHz at 89dB/4Ω, the 44kg Codex takes up 29 x 37cm of floor space—actually a bit more with its stabilizers—and 119.5cm of air space. Finish options include five wood veneers and six high-gloss, yes *glass* skins. The latter not only increase weight but enclosure stiffness. The spike footers can be upgraded to Audio Physic's 'levitation' devices where counter magnets support string suspension for mechanical isolation from the floor.

The Codex occupies the mid spot between Avanti and Avanterra III. We might call it Audio Physic central perhaps? To learn more, I contacted Manfred Diestertich. Aside from further tech on the Codex such as crossover points/slopes plus more on the bass alignment [the Avanti's 8" woofer box with resistive foam loading at right], I was curious about which core virtues of the early company had been retained.

Going 12 years back, one can hardly call the current three owners new. To most current customers in fact, the brand's Joachim Gerhard days might be all but forgotten and hardly worth revisiting. As our very first review of the brand however, it seemed fair to at least cover this ground in passing. Companies like Sonus faber and Thiel have gone through far more recent restructuring. Like Audio Physic, the Italians are clearly successful at innovating well beyond their famous founder. Thiel's complete disregard for the brand's original design ethos meanwhile did not meet commercial support. With nearly 20:20 hindsight, how would Herr Diestertich frame the company's evolution since he took to the helm; and what was he most proud of as having pooled into their 30th anniversary lineup?



Before his email arrived, I'd given the photos on his bass solution a good long look. As it appeared to me, mounting the face of his 10" long-throw woofer within inches of the main cabinet's side wall probably served as a mechanical brake. Ditto for the shallow woofer box's rear wall. On both the forward and rear stroke, the driver's pressure wave immediately hits a solid object which exerts instant resistance, hence stopping power. The front wave vents to the floor through a slot at the bottom behind the baffle whilst the rest dissipates in the main enclosure. The rear wave captured in the tiny woofer box too escapes toward the floor which creates a second resistive barrier. This scheme of exploiting very close boundaries reminded me of the H-frame subwoofers by Voxativ and Zugspitz which had exhibited terrific control and speed during their reviews. Was this in some ways related? At left, the highly porous ceramic foam such as it is made by Selee. Aluminium foam shows up in the Alporas® shelves of Finite Elemente hifi racks which call the material of "outstanding homogeneity and extremely low weight combined with high specific rigidity and excellent energy absorption." Manfred Diestertich's background in civil engineering and steel construction has him very focused on mechanical addresses to suppress resonance. In his drivers, this includes pre-stressing the metal diaphragms with a circumferential silicon/rubber ring similar to Vivid's carbon damper which pushes up the first cone breakup modes well beyond their pass band.



Dress code: bespoke. Piano gloss lacquers are a questionable luxury. Once you remove their first dust with a cloth, swirl marks appear. Never again will the finish look flawless. Hence I've never understood the lacquer allure. Enter Audio Physic's premium glass finish. It's impervious. In the case of Elite Audio's gorgeous Ebony samples, their wood finish was encapsulated inside the glass dress panels. Looking like perfect gloss lacquer atop striped wood, any fingerprints or dust clean off easy with evaporating Windex. That leaves no trace. Neither will it scratch or ding like exposed veneer accidentally can. It'll look as flawless as it did on day one. In 17 years on the beat, I'd never seen such a smart solution to maintaining luxury gloss to perfection. It also was a first that a finish option would double as mechanical stabilizer. As with all truly great ideas, once seen, it's baffling how none had it sooner. Audio Physic also incorporate a better solution to typical grills which affix a cloth-covered panel atop the baffle. Such secondary baffles introduce diffraction issues. Here each Codex included *two* grills. For my loaner, one was black-backed glass sans cloth to match the other gloss; the other a cloth-covered substitute. This assures identical sound whether your drivers go nekkid or dressed. They see exactly the same immediate surroundings either way. For more good if sadly not common sense, there's no biwire nonsense with deleterious jumpers or splitting the cost of a premium single cable into two runs of inferior wire. And still there's more. Ask Stan Lee, Marvel Comics' iconic inventor, what the greatest power was he's as yet bestowed on any of his super heroes: control over their luck! Watch James Nesbitt's *Lucky Man* for details. This also applies to passive loudspeakers. Since they lack adjustments common to actives, their biggest power really is controlling their luck to sonically integrate with whatever room their owners put them in.

Luck: high. Time for another movie hero. Enter Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry with "you gotta ask yourself one question; do I feel lucky? Well, do ya, punk?" The Codex is that lucky punk. Its bass alignment not only aims down like earlier Audio Physic models. It's not ported. The first means none of the typical rear-port issues so often mistaken for room modes whose ubiquity makes them seem innate, ergo unavoidable. The second means no port-ly behaviour of bloat and ringing so endemic to traditional vents. Obviously even Audio Physic's engineered luck can't magically obliterate room modes. However, compare a rear-ported speaker of equivalent bandwidth, situated in your best spot, to the Codex in the exact same spot. Codex bass will be dramatically more linear and clean. What you *thought* were room modes but really were port crap disappear. What were actual modes remain. With the usual port debris cleared out, those modes now are far smaller road bumps. Because this woofer loading is taut like a high-torque sports car not softly sprung like a lazy family sedan, remaining bumps absorb better. This superior control with lower room interactions is uncanny and easily heard. If the core difference between big and small speakers is that the former go louder and lower, spending serious money on more quantity bass (lower/louder) only to suffer lower quality bass (ringy and boomy) is plain stupid. The Codex puts an end to such nonsense. If your room can support 30Hz, you'll get it at unusually high quality, without the unfortunate byproducts of ported bass overlaying resonant dirt on the vocal range; and with better extension from a smaller enclosure than sealed bass. If that was it, the Codex would already be a winner. But there's more.



Metal: civilized. All metal diaphragms suffer from break-up modes. Those can create tizzy sharp colourations. Those allergic to their bite favour silk-dome tweeters and cellulose mids and are happy to trade ultimate airiness and resolution for greater smoothness. Laurence Dickie's steep aluminium-alloy dome tweeter and upper midrange in the Vivid Giya models use irregular geometries and carbon dampers to push their first breakup well outside the actual bandwidth over which they're used. Clearly Manfred 'Manny' Diestertich and his metal drivers pre-stressed with silicon/rubber rings mine the same notions. Even when driven by DC-coupled ultra bandwidth amps like Ivo Linnenberg's Allegro monos (1MHz circuitry limited to 350kHz for universal interactions), these two Audio Physic drivers don't glint or glare on even potentially problematic fare.

Neither do they manipulate benign behaviour with a sly loss of bandwidth. Test this on subtle cymbal brush work which lesser tweeters obscure; or, on triangle strikes and decays, by how high they shoot and how long you can follow their wispy trailing edges. Navigating my usual test tracks, the Codex tweeter cleared them all to show how the unusual Audio Physic cone tweeter combines the reach, airiness and micro detail of ribbons with the dynamics of - well, bigger dynamic drivers with surrounds.



[Above] wood veneer under glass combines traditional looks with ultra-hard perfectionist finish which then adds mass and rigidity to the entire enclosure. You pay extra but get something that'll look the part ten years later; and still sounds better.



Deliverance: complete. To this mind, the *only* reason to buy big speakers is big bass. At least to our household, quality compact speakers can already play louder than needed. To them add a sub and Bob's your bassist uncle; if integration goes seamless. Still, it's only mono bass unless you spring for two subs. By now you're up to four boxes plus two stands for your über monitors; plus additional cables and cords. Owning a \$5'000 Zu Submission sub—that ivory column behind the main amp—we have an in-room 25Hz reference. With certainty not overactive imagination, the Codex delivered even better bass; not lower but with more room power. *Two is one more than one, grasshopper!* It's admittedly disconcerting not to see anything (no woofers, no ports, nothing) whilst being greeted by active sealed subwoofer-style impact and extension which appear from nowhere also because they don't trigger the room as per usual. This bass pressure just shows up but doesn't interfere. In our space, the resultant cleanliness was exceeded only by the recently hosted fully active DSP-compensated Kii Three. Still, today's passive had the advantage on scale of bass. It dished out long-throw high-torque bass with bigger woofers. That game is about air motion and the tired but still true testosterone mantra of nothing compensating for (cubic) inches. Whilst awaiting Manfred's explanations and promised graphics over the Easter holidays, I couldn't quite wrap my head around just how masterful this loading integrated into the room and came off with such potency even from the 55-watt Linnberg monos.



To reiterate, you could certainly get such bass power and tightly controlled precision also from twinned active subwoofers. My question would simply be, why sacrifice more floor space, then run across it even more wires? To my mind, the Codex fully justified the big-speaker rationale by delivering the one thing small passive speakers can't because they lack the raw weaponry. By the same token, the Codex questioned why you'd go after anything bigger. With such impressive performance, there's no justification for anything taller and heavier. Aficionados of subwoofers for music—this specifically excludes silly home-theatre excess—already know how even very subtle true LF retrieval adds soundstage scale and believability. In a very direct way, low bass is the foundation which grounds what otherwise is a house on stilts or a castle in the air. It's not even about loud bass. That occurs as well but is... well, blatantly obvious. Enhanced spatial realism already happens with near-subliminal venue reflections. Those could be the merest of whispers like that proverbial subway rumble which the recording engineer's Yamaha NS-10 boxes didn't show up to have him unknowingly commit it to disc for posterity. That's the real magic of first-class low bass. It's not about structural damage to your house or upsetting the neighbours. It's about grittier more guttural realism already with normal music not club-ready boom. Mastery of the low freqs is not a mental playback aspect. It triggers the more primitive part of our brains.

Wayward: not. When one encounters proper four-ways like today's Codex or Vivid's Giya 4 from a few months ago, it's hard to escape a suspicion. Isn't much widebander propaganda—that crossovers are evil—predicated upon the fact that their designers wouldn't know how to design a proper multi-way filter in the first place? It's easily accepted how much harder it should be to devise a four-way filter with the seamlessness and consistent phase which remain uncorrupted when one simply avoids a filter altogether. It's just as easy to acknowledge (this only takes listening) that single-driver widebanders have less bandwidth and linearity. Even if they do manage an honest 40Hz with rear horns, their bass is never as well-damped, taut or grippy. And even the most ambitious whizzer invariably sees itself outranked by a proper tweeter like Audio Physic's on extension, air, brilliance and fine detail. That widebanders will still lead on sensitivity remains true; and that because of it, they might exhibit a certain speed and low-volume brilliance which exceed the Codex. But it couldn't really be argued that the Codex is less *coherent*. I heard nothing wayward about its multi-wayness. This is a 4-way effort which single-driver enthusiasts might take another look at when they demand more.



Four: squared. With the £24'000/pr Giya 4 long since returned, I can only invoke 2-month memory for certain snippet opinions. According to those, the Vivid's dynamics and speed seemed to exceed the Audio Physic, perhaps from an even quieter cabinet. By the same token, I'd also call the South African's demeanour slightly cooler. For most unproblematic in-room bass behaviour and even greater LF power, I'd give the Codex the nod over the twin-ported Giya. For uncanny monitor-style soundstaging, at least memory must call them equals. For value, the German at half price is the clear winner. So are its far less polarizing cosmetics and impervious (optional) glass finish. That quick sketch drew out where on the map the Codex belongs.

Proximity: close. Because Ivette and I do a morning meditation accompanied by a singing-bowl soundtrack, I have daily opportunity to see how close I can sit on my floor pillow to whatever speakers play, and still hear stereo, not dual mono. With some boxes, I must sit farther away before the sound properly focuses in the middle. With the Codex, I could sit *very* close. Whilst such use isn't a real concern, it does demonstrate excellent off-axis behaviour. And that becomes a feature wherever music listening is expected to be a social not lone-wolf experience. The other side of proximity-closer to the front wall-applies as well. Because of its clever bass loading, this speaker needn't be in the middle of the room. That and the many decor options put it on a domestic peace keeping mission. The Codex becomes a cracking diplomat who bridges the demands of lifestyle and high performance with equal aplomb

Upper bass: punch. As owners of downfiring subwoofers know, bass which first hits the floor before its pressure wave reaches the ears *registers* differently than front woofers. The latter are more visceral. Without having heard the Avanti which makes do without the 3rd way of the 7-incher, I can only predict that the power zone impact of the Codex is greater. Its hidden woofer operates lower. That lets the vital upper bass create a pressure wave with its own driver, firing it direct at the listener. This adds physicality and on-skin assault as the very things which headfi can't do because its sounds funnel straight into the ears and bypass the rest of the body. If you like your upper bass snappy, the Codex rings that number. Anybody home to pick up?

Swag: useful. Different companies walk different swagger. Some include bumper stickers or lap pins, hoping that you'll advertise for free. Zu instead include de-oxit metal polish to keep your connections clean. Audio Physic include a bubble level on a key chain; perfect to get your speakers perpendicular on uneven floors. The spike cover discs remove to insert a hex driver for length adjustment. Does gap height matter? I tried both narrow and taller and thought that the latter gave just a bit more output; as though the bass was breathing more deeply. Given our 100m² space, that's what I went with.



Class bias: none. Of course no speaker is truly racially biased for or against class A, A/B or D amplification. Just so, certain voicings might lead to quite universal preferences like the well-known widebander/SET aesthetic. With high QC boxes like these—quick and clean—the sound can veer into the lean and dry when powered by matching amplification. Strapping our nCore 500 class D Nord monos to the Codex did warrant a minor course correction. This substituted the direct-drive Metrum Adagio DAC with the Fore Audio DAISy1 tube DAC and Wyred4Sound STP-SE Level II preamp. With this small turn of the steering wheel, I thought the Audio Physic thundered right down the middle of the road. A small loss was the last word in treble finesse. Moving to the Pass Labs class A XA-30.8 segued into a warmer sunnier climate with a more refined top end and mellower transients. Going to the Linnenberg class A/B Allegros lit up the treble even more to get the very most from the special Audio Physic tweeter. Naturally, this airier more energetic mien also was a tad cooler and subjectively faster than the weightier darker Pass. Metrum's class AB Forte shifted emphasis onto the midband to grow warmer and denser but slightly opaque on the very top. Surprisingly, bass power stayed constant between 250w class D, 25w class A, 55w + 100w class A/B. This suggested benign load behaviour. The Germans didn't really benefit from gobs of power or class D's ultra-low output Ω for woofer control as many sealed alignments can. Despite big-boy bass, the Codex didn't need big muscle to get out of 1st gear. To my mind, that was another very practical feature.



Above we see the mechanically isolated WBT terminals embedded in their own rubbery interface. Even the terminal plate claims boilerplate 40-watt happiness. It's true! Back on sound, while my descriptions of stupendous bass might at first predict a bottom-up perspective, this was categorically not the case. Why? Precisely *because* of this bass quality. Being truly cut from one cloth top to bottom—without the LF getting even a hair thicker or embed in more resonance/reverb than the higher bands—this presentation didn't have a 'directional' perspective such as top down or middle out. It didn't fit those terms. Instead, I'd call out full-bandwidth speed, clarity, precision and accuracy. Even though bass integration, reach and power did become first attention magnets because they're so uncommon in a world dominated by ports, my ear/brain quickly clocked a new normal. Now the bass stopped registering as 'different' because it in fact no longer was different. That's the whole point. It was as tensile, taut and crystal as everything else. It didn't stand out to create emphasis. The perhaps best summary then is a mini-monitoresque sound with perfect twinned subwoofer integration. It meant giant super-finessed staging with the scale and anchoredness beyond most monitors unless they're a Mark & Daniel Maximus MkII driven by kilowatt/2Ω class D power. Against that specific example reviewed earlier in these pages, the synthetic marble boxes from Shanghai prioritized chunkiness, dynamic vigor and muscular drive. By contrast, the far bigger Germans were the more transparent and easeful, with superior in-room power and solidity of very low bass not pushed through narrow pipes.

Horse: mouth. After his return to the office post Easter, Manfred's answers arrived. He kept stumm on filter slopes but divulged crossover points as 100Hz, 350Hz and 2'800Hz. As to the new inner-box woofer over the previous force-cancelling sidefiring woofers, "this is a longer story. Over the years, the sidefiring woofer array was improved in many aspects. A very important one was lowering the crossover point to the midrange unit(s) from about 400Hz to 150Hz. This made setup much easier compared to the older designs. When we started the very straight-looking Classic Line about four years ago, we launched the first version Classic 20 with a grille on each side. Now we were criticized for the looks. For the planned next larger model, the Classic 30, I started to think about a new design without lateral woofers and grilles. The result was the inner box. I had some doubts whether this would compromise performance but the results were far better than expected. So I implemented the inner box design into the redesigned Classic 20 [right], now the most successful speaker in the Classic range. I also continued it with the new Avanti. The Codex became the next logical step to follow up the Avanti. We decided to continue with both designs as they show a different character; but at a very high performance level." On the company's transition from Joachim Gerhard to Manfred as chief designer, "in 1999, I started working for Audio Physic as a freelancer. Joachim sold the company in 2004/2005. We first met in the early 80s in the DIY scene. From 1993 to 1998, Joachim had engaged another designer to assist him. In the beginning, I refined the original designs but over the years more of my own ideas found their way into the products. The key elements and motto were always very good imaging and 'no loss of fine detail'. Highlights of the 30th anniversary model changes were the launch of the 3rd generation HHC tweeter and midrange."



Bass: foamed. "Yes, the front wave works on the complete cabinet volume except for the three small tweeter, midrange and lower midrange chambers. Its slot exit begins with a ceramic foam tile of 10x15cm. This creates small losses at normal volumes, then gets more resistive at higher levels. This behaviour increases precision and the open pores help avoid chuffing in case of overload. Four ceramic foam elements connect the woofer chambers. This silicon-carbide foam combines special properties: it is very rigid; has a huge surface; and takes less than 15% of the net volume compared to solid braces because it is more than 85% air."

Page: blank. With its top-quality drivers and tri-laminate enclosure of, inside to out, soft/medium/hard layers, the Codex is essentially a tabula rasa. With your choice of gear, you write on it as you see fit. Unlike deliberately warm speakers which can only be made warmer, never cooler, a blank-state design can be moved in either direction. Remembering Sparkos Labs' discrete opamps, I rolled those into the nCores' input buffer in lieu of the Sonic Imagery stacks. Presto, an instant 'deep triode' makeover. I didn't stick with it long. It ate too much fine detail, obscured the top end and reduced visibility at very low volumes. Experimenting with the Nagra Jazz's transformer-coupled XLR outs vs. Metrum Adagio direct sacrificed the very finest upper harmonics just as the Metrum Forte amp did whose 350V transistor gain stage is modeled to clone 12AX7. Really, to exploit Audio Physic's tweeter to the fullest relied on the Linnenberg Allegro monos. This segues into a little riff on musical energy. If your room has lots of windows with heavy curtains, compare curtains open to closed. Whatever other good things it might be doing, the heavy drapery will dull a certain liveliness. That spark of life depends on uncut treble energy which the drawn curtains absorb. Liveliness also relies on a good impulse response. This, nomen est omen, leads to *impulsive* timing which generates speed and verve. Those are intrinsic Codex qualities. Because of it, any stealing with strategic voicing shifts of partnering gear becomes most apparent. With less revealing speakers, you can't miss what you never had. With the Codex, gear choices create keen awareness of even small gains and losses. Some think such higher sensitivity to changes fussiness. I'd call it responsiveness. A performance car too will let you know far sooner that anything is sub par than a jalopy with overdue tuneup and out-of-date plates.



Given the speaker's potential, my favourite amps ended up the high-speed Linnenberg monos preceded by the actively buffered no-gain Wyred preamp. Aqua Hifi's R2R LaScala MkII DAC with tube/Mosfet outputs added some mild seasoning for tone density. My choices are immaterial of course. You'd make your very own, possibly wildly different. That's key. With as responsive a transducer as the Audio Physic, you're not locked in. Neither are you limited to traverse a narrow sector of tunability. You're in full control of your final destination. Like a gamer, your joystick is boss. This applies equally to the volume control. "Of course" you protest. What serious speaker locks you into specific SPL? Actually, many do. To the ears in our household, very few do at the loud end. Most play louder than we want without coming apart. What they'd do at banger levers becomes utterly irrelevant. It's the other end—how quietly they'll go *with satisfaction*—that's far lossier. Speakers with noisier enclosures, lesser drivers, confused impulse response and an overall warm comfort voicing get too obscure and opaque. Unless their throttle is primed, they just sit there. Here high-efficiency widebanders tend to excel. But they're not alone. Due to its clarity and impulsiveness, the Codex too comes on song very early. That's terrific late at night when the household already sleeps. With a Codex in the living room, you needn't default to headphones. That's a less-mentioned but very practical quality. Because its bass loading is so effective, even LF remain visible far closer to the ambient noise floor than usual; not a horse but hifi whisperer. Yeesh!

Siblings: rivalry. Reading how much I'd enjoyed my time with their Codex, Elite Audio's Mark Cargill offered me floor samples of the Avanter III to keep exploring. That's their next model up. Looking over its descriptions, performance specs proved virtually identical: one Hertz lower bass, 6kg lighter weight. However, arriving at such equality entails four 7" woofers per channel, two each cheek to cheek. The 7" mid-bass coupler of the Codex becomes a second 5.9" midrange. Given my slightly compromised results with the side firing woofer of Boenicke's W11—admittedly a 1st-order affair to easily bleed two octaves past its 150Hz hinge and create room issues—I opted against the Avanter III. I did not think its bass would integrate as perfectly as the hidden 10er of the Codex. Instead I asked for the Avanti one step down. It removes the 7" coupler of the Codex and shrinks its internal woofer to an 8" long-throw unit. It gives up 3 Hertz and 15kg. It goes narrower, shallower and a bit shorter. Of course it's shorter in the wallet too; by half in fact. That's significant.

Given how brilliantly the Codex had played our space which is easily twice bigger than standard, the Avanti was probably all anyone would want for a more conventional 5x7 metre room. Was the Codex simply an über Avanti? That'd make the Avanti a baby Codex for smaller rooms. Or, did each exhibit a unique personality profile to appeal primarily to different listener tastes? That'd go beyond just room and wallet size. Graciously, Elite Audio dispatched the Avanti loaners a few days before picking up the Codex returnees. I could conduct my very own in-home dealer demo. Playing punter by proxy, which one would I buy? And why? Going in, my assumption was scenario N°2. Without the Codex's dedicated 100-350Hz driver and a smaller woofer, I expected the Avanti to be tuned for even more greased reflexes, thus also potential to get lean quicker with the wrong ancillaries. I expected a different personality more than a 'shrunken' Codex. With somewhat reduced bass weight and power-zone impact yet the very same midrange and tweeter, I envisioned a slight upshift of the tonal centre to emphasize speed and transparency. That after all would honour a name that means 'forward' or 'ahead' to imply "let's go, let's go; avanti, avanti". Before I closed the book on the Codex, I wanted this comparison to round out the picture.



Code: X. If 'x' marked the spot, what did it signify? With the Avanti showing up in matching reddish-brown stripes, the same gene pool was even more in the eye. Sonically, reality and expectations met head-on. Still in their boxes, manoeuvring the newcomers into the sound room demonstrated noticeable weight loss versus the bigger brother. Once playing, this manifested in what sounded like a livelier cabinet, becoming audible particularly in the woofer's upper end. By contrast, the power range wasn't as tautly controlled. Against the drier Codex, it was bloomier. By lacking the extra cone area in the vital transition between midband and bass, perceptual emphasis moved up. Because spec sacrifices in bass reach registered little, the tonal upshift and looser power zone textures caused a bit of hollowness and some whiff-of-port redolence. The upshot was that the Avanti sounded brighter and more forward. Neither was it as unflappable about concealing the mechanical pressure effects of its woofer. Its workings were more apparent whereas that of the Codex was for all intents and purposes invisible. I didn't hear its box. With the Avanti's bass, I did at the SPL our room liked.



In this instance, the old dawg of bigger speaker + bigger room = better results learned no new trick. Without question, for our 100m² space I'd pick the Codex. Of course, the law of diminishing returns already ticks with an apparent alarm set to annoy. What - for a somewhat bigger though clearly heavier cab, one extra driver and two extra inches of woofer span, twice the askance? The Avanti brings the same proprietary tweeter and midrange. Those are clearly premium issue. They deliver exactly the same purity and speedy reflexes. So a bit more material for a lot more bread? When presented with the cubic volume to stretch its legs, the costlier package delivered a different quality. It wasn't really about quantity though there was just a *bit* of that, too. The Avanti was the younger flashier arm candy; slightly brash and showy. The Codex was the more mature experienced self-assured companion. Its composure was calmer, its figure fuller, its presence deeper. Its reading manifested grander gravitas and emotiveness. Consider for just one example the musical prayer in the chapel of Flamenco that is the 9-min. "Réquiem" from Vicente Amigo's *Memoria de los Sotidos*. It starts and ends with bells. Between them appear the full-throttle voices of Niña Pastori, Arcángel, Miguel Poveda, Rafael de Utrera and Pedro El Granaíno each searing into the haunting melody before joining into a charged chorus followed by Vicente's moody guitar closing out. The Avanti played all the same notes and from the central midband on up, perfectly on par. What it didn't do was milk the Moorish pathos and deliver the chicken pimples ... goosebumps in proper Spanish. The Avanti spoke to my brain. The Codex aimed for and hit the heart.

Of course once we stop being compadre with comparisons and take things on their own merit, we hop off the giant ferris wheel in the sky. Since I did compare, however... the Avanti pushed the Codex over the edge onto clear award turf. The diminishing law had me hesitate without first sampling the stablemate. Its raw specs are very close. But this is simply where specs can't go. They never communicate the essence of what happens in a room. Very similar ingredients may be assembled into a grander picture to play the game on a higher octave. Here that's the Audio Physic Codex. The last speaker that had me this excited—at twice the price—was the Vivid Audio Giya 4. So yes, the Code X has it; big time. This is a very special speaker!

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