

## Artos Audio Sunrise Loudspeakers



As a reward for my efforts in 2011, editor Jeff Fritz made me an offer: Would I like to review my first loudspeaker for the SoundStage! Network, the Artos Audio Sunrise (\$23,000 USD per pair)? Their construction is first-rate, and the speakers are not only beautiful to look at but sound good. I said yes, and Jeff put me in touch with Artos Audio's US distributor, Alfred Kainz, who owns highend-electronics, Inc., in Apple Valley, California.

### Description

Each Artos Audio Sunrise arrived in its own crate, the speaker braced inside the box and wrapped in a large velvet sack. Instructions on how to unpack the speakers were included; all went well, and when I removed the sacks, it was clear why the Sunrises had been packed with such care. These speakers are beautiful to look at -- I'd put their fit and finish in the same realm as the speakers from Tidal Audio. My review samples were finished in what Kainz calls Spanish Cedar. I'm no aficionado of fine woods -- I doubt I could ID a particular finish in a line-up. But I can say with confidence that the Sunrises' Spanish Cedar -- it's slightly lighter and redder than mahogany -- will catch your eye in a dealer's showroom. The grain is clearly visible through the high-gloss lacquer.



Kainz told me that the Sunrises "are designed by a team of audio engineers from Europe and built in Germany. The resonance-optimized cabinets are made of 11 layers of different kinds of wood, cut with CNC machines, glued together, and pressed into shape. After it dries, the inside is varnished with a special lacquer usually used for instruments. The crossover parts come from Mundorf, and the parts for the larger models from Duelund Coherent Audio. The internal wiring is made by Heavens Gate Audio, in Germany. For the finish they use a special kind of polyester lacquer: ten layers! Between certain drying periods they are sanded and polished to perfection, which makes the finish especially hard and glossy. The hardness is also beneficial for the sound. A pair of Sunrises requires about 100 man-hours to build (only for the cabinets)." The standard finishes are Maple and Etimoe; Artos offers many premium wood finishes (of which 15 are shown on their website), as well as white and black high-gloss lacquer.

The Sunrise is a 2.5-way design; *i.e.*, it's configured like a conventional two-way speaker, but with two woofers that reproduce only the low bass. The Air-Flow vent on the rear is designed to "allow optimal air flow efficiency while keeping resonances at a minimum." The Sunrise has a 1.2" tweeter, a 7" midrange-woofer, and two 7" woofers -- all drivers are ceramic, and custom-made for Artos by Accuton. At the bottom rear of the cabinet is a single pair of premium WBT speaker connectors. Artos claims for the Sunrise a nominal impedance of 5 ohms, an efficiency of 91dB, and a frequency response of 28Hz-35kHz, -3dB. The speaker measures 44"H x 10.2"W x 16.5"D and weighs a solid 88 pounds.

Each Sunrise comes with standard 0.25"-diameter spikes. Available as an option for \$3000/pair is the Artos Resonance Technology Spike System -- not your everyday, ordinary spikes. Per Alfred Kainz, "They are made of aluminum and filled with a resonance-absorbing material. The spike plates are cups of aluminum, and in the cups are wooden inlets in which the spike directly stands. These inlets are available in three different kinds of wood (Beech, Maple, Birch) and make a noticeable difference in the sound." More about the ARTSS later.

The Sunrises come with a nice, leather-bound owner's manual that includes helpful tips regarding unpacking, placement, break-in, and many other goodies to make the speaker-owning experience enjoyable. The manual calls for 200-300 hours of break-in, and I can confirm that the Sunrise needs every one of those 300 hours. To break in speakers, I usually hook them up to an integrated amplifier and an old CD player, put in a CD, punch Repeat, and let it play for a week at a time, 24/7. After a week, the Sunrises sounded noticeably better than when I'd first listened to them, but I decided to give them a second week. After that, they still weren't quite where they needed to be. In an e-mail, Kainz explained to me that not only had he not spent much time listening to the speakers, but that the Heavens Gate Audio wiring used in the Sunrise can take a very long time to break in. After a third solid week of break-in, the Sunrises finally sounded ready for some critical listening.



## Sound

Breaking in the Artos Sunrises took a long time, and I listened for the changes that occurred within those hundreds of hours. Throughout the entire break-in period, the speakers had a warmish sound. At first I thought they sounded soft, but with the passing of each day, more and more detail emerged. Always during this time, the Sunrises presented a large soundstage; it was a little diffuse at first, but, as with the detail, the stage gradually became more solid, with greater focus.

I found the Artos Resonance Technology Spike System (ARTSS) necessary for listening to the Sunrises -- it noticeably improved the sound. Before trying the ARTSS, I used the Sunrise's standard-issue spikes to pierce my carpet and padding and couple the speakers to my concrete-slab floor. But whatever music I played, the bass was always too heavy. The Sunrises didn't sound unmusical, but they seemed to have a midbass hump. The ARTSS eliminated the bass hump, replacing it with bass that was more linear, and a more natural-sounding part of the music. There was also greater bass impact and quicker transient response; overall, the bass was much improved. I did most of my listening using the ARTSS system.

Three weeks later, fully broken in, the Sunrises presented a wide, deep soundstage in my 16' x 25' listening room. Images across the stage had very good focus, and performers were clearly delineated from front to back. Suffice it to say that the Sunrises' soundstaging capabilities should not leave you wanting. However, this is only what should be expected from speakers costing \$23,000/pair; I wouldn't consider it "outstanding" performance.

The Sunrise's tonality was on the warm side of neutral. The sound could not in any way be described as "soft," but it was always attractive and appealing. Anyone looking for zip and sizzle, or the ultimate in "air" or over-etched highs, need not apply. The highs were extended -- I could hear a cushion of air around each performer, and the acoustic of each large concert hall, but the Sunrises never hit me over the head with extra detail. The Artos's transient response was good, allowing me to very distinctly hear little intricacies in the music: the initial impacts of sticks hitting drum rims, piano hammers striking strings, the rapid fingering of an electric bass guitar -- all were on display. Voices were present and breathy where appropriate. I could easily tell when a singer turned away from the microphone, or to the side. The Sunrise revealed other sorts of vocal subtleties -- as when someone had shown up at the studio sounding a little sleepy or nasal.

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Altogether, nothing about the Sunrise's high-frequency performance stood out from the rest of its attributes. Struck triangles sounded sweet, with detailed and lingering decays, and brass instruments had requisite bite. The bass had both impact and deep extension. What most got my attention, however, was the Sunrise's reproduction of the midrange. It was very good, with a great deal of presence in vocal-heavy music. I felt as if singers were present in the room with me. Saxophones and guitars were replicated in stunningly real fashion, with a full palette of tonal color.

A good friend told me about the Kenny Werner Trio's *Live at Visiones: Standards* (CD, Concord 4675). It's become one of my favorite live recordings, especially for how engineer Paul Wickliffe picked up the sound of this New York City jazz club. Of course, the album wouldn't be worth listening to if the music weren't up to snuff, but it definitely is. The Sunrises did a good job of re-creating *Visiones* in my room. The musicians' conversations between tunes and the overall room ambience were easy to hear. The Sunrises easily conveyed the vibe of pianist Werner, bassist Ratzo Harris, and drummer Tom Rainey. Harris makes Miles Davis and Bill Evans's "Blue in Green" his own -- his bass came through the speakers with full expression, and with an incredible amount of bass detail.



Another trio session of standards, Marcus Printup's *A Time for Love* (CD, SteepleChase SCCD 31711), features Printup on trumpet; his wife, Riza Hequibal, on concert harp; and bassist Kengo Nakamura. The harp is rarely used in jazz, though Deborah Henson-Conant's *Talking Hands* was popular in the early '90s, and harpists Dorothy Ashby and Alice Coltrane earned some fame for their recordings in the '60s and '70s. Here, Hequibal's playing in Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa" was fast and dynamic in a way I've rarely heard from the harp, especially with a trumpet playing the lead. Through the Sunrises I could clearly hear the harp's speed, articulation, and transient detail, and a rich palette of tonal colors. The trio does a wonderful job with such tracks as "Besame Mucho" and Horace Silver's "Song for My Father." I especially like the tone of Printup's trumpet, and his flugelhorn playing on this disc.

Another recording I enjoyed listening to through the Sunrises was Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, performed by Antal Dorati and the London Symphony Orchestra (CD, Mercury Living Presence 432 012-2). The Artoses showed off their imaging capabilities, doing a more than credible job of replicating a full orchestra, and displaying a wide, deep soundstage with a good amount of front-to-back layering. The orchestral timbres were easy to hear, and the speakers captured the verve and sizzle of Dorati's interpretation of this ballet's powerful and continuous finale. The Sunrises kept pace with the explosions of thunder and fire represented by the large timpani.

My favorite female singer is Jane Monheit, and one of my favorite albums of hers is *In Full Swing*, which she made with Mark O'Connor's Hot Swing Trio (CD, Odyssey SK 87880). One of my favorite tracks on this disc is "Honeysuckle Rose," with contributions from fiddler O'Connor and guest trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. I thoroughly enjoy Monheit's purity of tone and timbre, and her numbers always seem to be nicely arranged. The Sunrises did an excellent job of making me feel as if she were present in the room -- they captured her breathy singing, and replicated the dimensions and space of the recording venue.

## Comparison

I mostly compared the Artos Audio Sunrise with the Dynaudio Sapphire (\$16,500/pair). It took me a long time to get the Dynaudios set up properly in my room, but after seven to ten days of experimenting, the sound was rewarding. The Sunrises were nowhere near as hard to set up -- they sounded excellent after only a few days of experiments.

The Dynaudios and Artoses produced equally large soundstages. Their reproductions of the bass were close: The Sunrise's bass sounded fuller and warmer, while the Sapphire went deeper and tighter, with slightly more impact. Both did bass very well; which you'll prefer will be a matter of taste. The same could be said of the two models' reproduction of the highs. The Dynaudio was more extended and airy, though the Artos sounded more natural



with some music, something I attribute to its more even tonality. Notice a pattern? It's sort of like the tubes-vs.-solid-state debate.

The midrange qualities of the two speakers were also pretty close, though I could see why some listeners would prefer one over the other. The Sunrise, with its heightened sense of presence, had a bit more of that you-are-there quality. The Sapphire, however, sounded more dynamic and lively. The Artos by no means sounded subdued -- just not as alive as the Dynaudio, and without the Sapphire's dynamic range. The Sunrise painted musical pictures with a more honest set of tonal colors.

### **Windup**

There was one more difference between the Artos Audio Sunrise and the Dynaudio Sapphire: Per pair, the Sunrise costs \$6500 more. Throw in the cost of Artos's ARTSS spike system and it costs \$9500 more than the Sapphire. However, the Sunrise is built to a higher standard, and its wonderful finish is in the fine furniture category. You have to ask yourself if those things are important enough to justify the Sunrise's higher price.

Is a pair of Artos Audio Sunrises worth \$23,000 -- or \$26,000? That's a question best answered by the individual looking for a speaker built to this level of refinement and excellence at that price point. The competition for speakers at that price level is fierce. **The Artos Sunrise is not only beautiful to look at and built to a demanding standard, it's a joy to listen to. Those facts alone mean that it should provide its owner with pride of ownership and musical enjoyment for years to come.**

*. . . Michael Wright*