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AUDIO REVIEWS

SWISS INNOVATION
SINCE 1951

NAGRA

AUGUST 2017

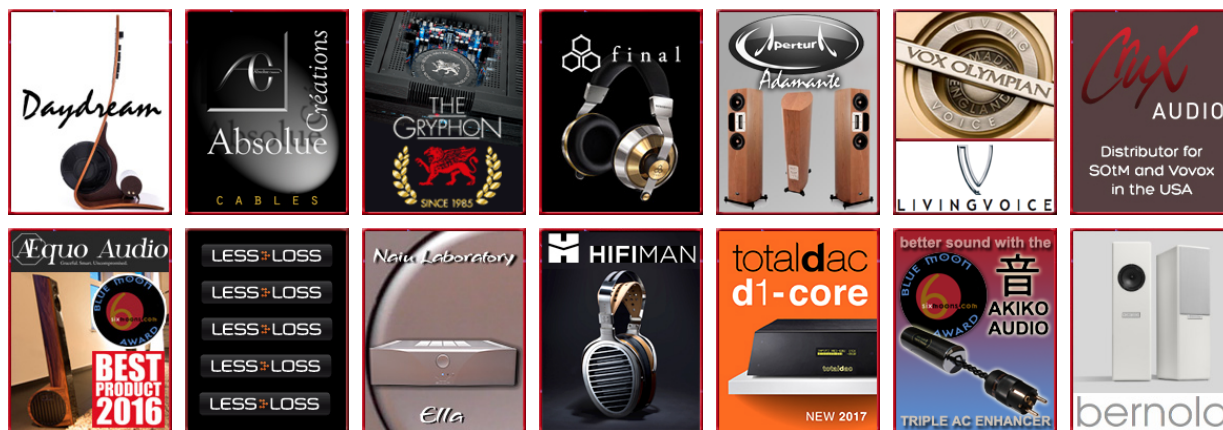


CODEX

Country of Origin

**Reviewer:** Srajan Ebaen**Financial interests:** click [here](#)**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, AURALiC Vega, Aqua Hifi La Scala MKII, 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**Preamplifier:** Nagra Jazz, Esoteric C-03, Vinnie Rossi LIO (AVC module), COS Engineering D1, Wyred4Sound STP-SE Stage II**Power & integrated amplifiers:** Pass Labs XA30.8; FirstWatt SIT1, F5, F6, F7; Crayon Audio CFA-1.2; Goldmund Job 225; Aura Note Premier; Wyred4Sound mINT; AURALiC Merak [on loan], Nord Acoustics One SE Up NC500MB**Loudspeakers:** Albedo Audio Aptica; EnigmAcoustics Mythology 1; Sounddeco Sigma 2; soundkaos Wave 40; Boenicke Audio W5se; Zu Audio Druid V & Submission; German Physik HRS-120; Eversound Essence, *Rethm Bhaava* [on loan]**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 red level Lupo**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 15 metres with double-high gabled ceiling and stone-over-concrete flooring**Review component retail:** £10450/pr in premium finish

Since 2002's site launch, we've lived with a few big speakers across our various rentals in the US, Cyprus, Switzerland and now Ireland. Our present digs are the 10th. Of the speakers I remember the Avantgarde Acoustic Duo, Franck Tchong ASI Tango and AudioSolutions Rhapsody 200. Overall though and given how regularly us vagabonds switch home, we've stuck to smaller speakers augmented by Zu's Submission sub where applicable. Smaller speakers are far less likely to set off rooms. When you move a lot, you never know where/what you end up with. Here speaker modesty trumps excess unless you mean to move through a lot of speakers as well. If one keeps to a fair number for review purposes, smaller also stores, moves about and packs/unpacks easier. So the Zu Druid V, Albedo Audio Aptica, soundkaos Wave 40, EnigmAcoustics Mythology 1 and German Physik HRS-120 have been our preferred poison for a number of years. They're two-ways one and all. Life with them has been very good. And, their various personalities allowed for much musical matching during assignments. Why now rewrite that winning recipe at the top?



It's after we hosted Vivid Audio's smallest Giya model that desire for something bigger grew insistent. Bigger was not about size but bandwidth and finesse. Size was never any attraction. Au contraire. We much prefer smaller. What these futuristically styled compact 4-ways from South Africa brought to the table were more dynamics with more resolution. That's something I wanted to henceforth work with on a permanent basis. With a £24'500 sticker including the required wood plinth to get their tweeters to ear level, the G4 was simply out of reach. A bit later, Audio Physic's Codex 4-way landed on assignment. It excelled in all the same areas, then went even further in the bass by showing uncommon freedom from room interference. Finally it looked more traditional yet came in for less than half whilst adding a more impervious finish with those clever glass panels. With the review loaners done up in a dark below-the-glass veneer, they were returned to Scottish importer Elite Audio UK. We wanted white.



Target in sight, I looked up Audio Physic at Munich HighEnd 2017 to confirm the finish selection. That introduced me to the Codex Structure prototype whose cab was mechanically even quieter and added a then still one-up 3D-printed midrange double basket. Alas, months later there still was no price or ETA. Drawing a line, by early August I contacted Elite's Mark Cargill and placed my order for a standard Codex. Shipment from Germany was set for two weeks later. Our new reference speakers were locked in and loaded. With serious amps coming in like Audio Valve's £22'000/pr Baldur 300, Gryphon's Diablo 120 and something from Vitus by the end of the year, we now had boxes to match. But as their review made clear, our 50-watt LinnenberG Allegro monos or 30wpc Pass Labs XA30.8 stereo are *perfect* code X drivers. This fact keeps open doors for other smaller simpler amps arriving for review. And whenever Codex plays, it will decommission the Zu subwoofer whilst hitting with the same power and reach; in stereo not mono. Time to reshuffle the resident inventory and let go of the soundkaos Wave 40 and Albedo Audio Aptica. I'd hold onto the EnigmAcoustics M1 as examples of reference monitors; and the Zu Druid V as high-efficiency widebanders. Three swappable pairs really ought to do it. And just in case, the German Physik omnis remain dedicated to our 2-channel video rig. If there's any moral to this, it's that twice the price needn't be one iota better. It just takes the right A/B to hear it. And, to get demonstrably better than those top two-ways which play one's room to perfection requires lower louder bass which causes no room issues (*far* from easy) and no driver integration problems (not that easy when one has proper widebanders for reference).



The final bit of morality is to investigate the one-model-down utility. Very often, what primarily separates the next model up is going lower and louder. Here reality may bite when either your room won't support it or your majority music doesn't warrant it. Having enjoyed the rare op to compare Audio Physic's 3-way Avanti to Codex, I heard from the latter's fourth driver sufficient extra dynamic upper-bass shove and tone density, and from the bigger invisible woofer more in-room bass power. Whilst clearly shadowed by diminishing returns, my fondness for 'organic ambient' fare by Mercan Dede & Co. makes subwoofer-style bass without mud or bloat a most treasured quality. Having to multi-task as pleasure and work tool clinched the decision. For once the bigger model—though not much bigger—was realistically and useably better even if the final product is actually not much taller than the Druid and narrower. The extra cubic inches hide in greater depth to remain invisible face on.



And there you have it... the back story to a reshuffle in our top speaker spot after 15 years on the beat. Potential buyers for the soundkaos and Albedo may inquire.

Srajan Ebaen

