

Review of Manger P2
by Fritz Schwertfeger,
04/2023 on:

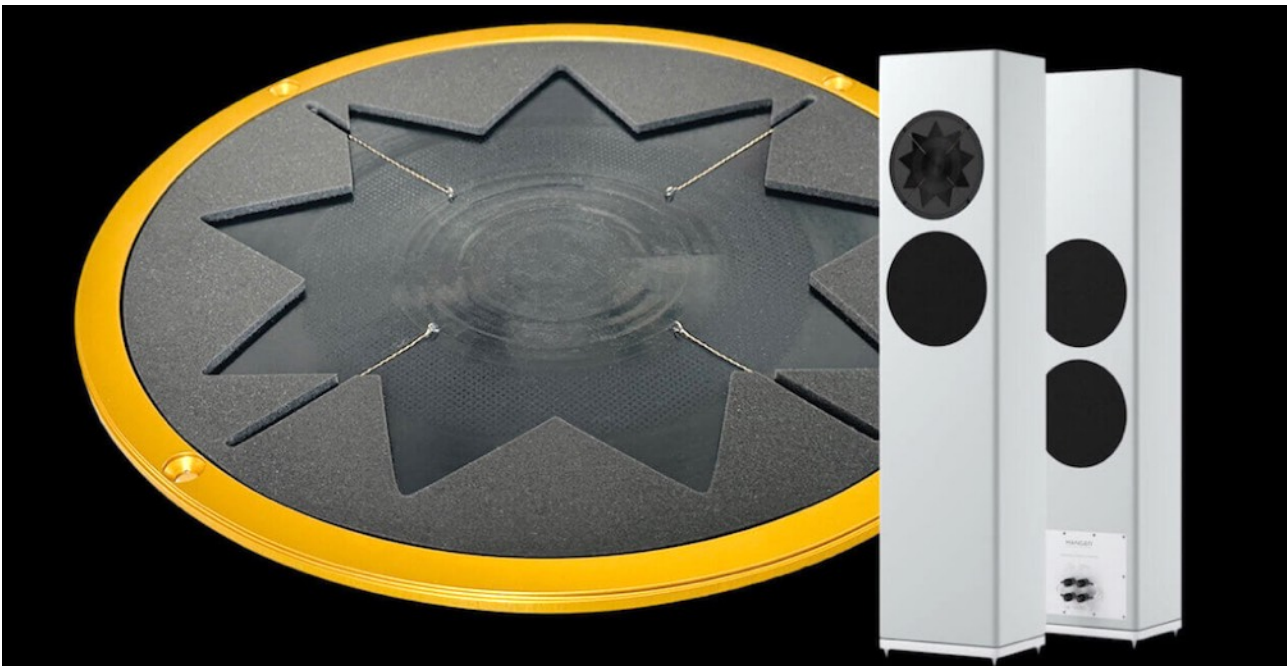
and 05/2023 in english on:



P2



Singers from the stars? Each speaker house follows its own design philosophy and the scope of potential differentiation includes many variations from single-driver widebanders to classic multi-ways. However, most still rely on classic dynamic drivers as a norm only few deviate from. One of those are Manger with their famous and patented bending-wave driver. The difference between their floorstanding P1 and P2 models becomes apparent only upon closer inspection; or rather, when viewed from behind. Where the P1 is a sealed box, today's P2 adds two passive radiators one above the other [see below]. These should build out bass reach. In addition the P2 features a new 20cm woofer which was tuned even more precisely to the 360Hz filter frequency according to Manger.



Otherwise both are passive two-way floorstanders. At almost 114cm tall, appearance is surprisingly delicate despite being accompanied by solid 32kg mass. This may be due to the gently rounded edges to counteract diffraction but which also have a visual slimming effect. Timeless Bauhaus style is the order of this day, not brutalist chic. A solid aluminium plinth with integral conical damper feet ensures stability. The threaded inserts will easily accept spikes instead should we wish. The cabinet with its 38mm front baffle and massive internal braces is made in Germany. The sandwich-laminate 20cm woofer combines carbon-fibre with reinforced cellulose and a special German foam intended to harmoniously match the quick low-distortion Manger driver. The latter is crafted in small production runs in Manger's own Frankenland factory of Mellrichstadt. The process includes many manual steps which require high precision. This may well explain the P2's sticker. This loudspeaker is a purchase for life. Accordingly the quality of ingredients as well as manufacturing and paint finish are all tops. Many different finish and trim options are possible.

The Manger converter named after inventor Josef W. Manger who passed away in 2016 is actually a youngster compared to the classic dynamic cone driver. Its flat membrane generates sound based on deliberate break-up modes called bending waves driven by strong magnets and two voice coils. Due to these coils being wound in opposing directions whilst bonding directly to the membrane, the Manger sound converter responds almost without time delay to be extremely quickly according to company head Daniela Manger.



Daniela Manger and her father Josef W. Manger

High frequencies generate in the center of the cone, lower frequencies travel out towards the edge. The central star damper prevents those traveling waves from reflecting back. It's easy to imagine the bending-wave principle as a rock thrown into a calm lake. Like its waves spread out evenly from the rock's entry point so do sonic waves spread out from the Manger's middle.

The impetus for its original development was Josef Manger's view that instrumental sound lost much of its naturalness when played back through conventional loudspeakers. Due to its operating principle as a mass-loaded spring, a classic dynamic driver generates errors that overlay the original transients of an instrument. In addition, the natural character of an instrument and its spatial positioning are determined by the perception of the temporal relationship between sound waves and differences in their path lengths. As Daniela Manger explains, this is exactly where the Manger converter improves standard phase linearity, time fidelity and impulse response. Apparently a bending-wave driver won't store energy like conventional equivalents. Playback thus reproduces the original sound more correctly in time. Also, the Manger converter packs broad bandwidth here 360Hz to 40kHz to avoid a typical crossover in the presence region. It could play theoretically even lower but then simply rolls off. The choice of 360Hz filter hinge builds in higher sensitivity and resilience.

Years ago I encountered my first Manger speaker of identical size and form factor by way of the active S1. I still nurse pleasant memories of its effortless non-capricious traits. So wondering whether the Manger P2 would follow the same sonic profile or mark out different accents was personally exciting. Incidentally, my choice of matching wine was not by chance a delicate finely sparkling Crémant from the **Fellbacher Weingut Heid**. In contrast to a Riesling Brut developed with pronounced fruit and acidity to be a bit flirtatious, a special elegance and naturalness go to the Crémant precisely due to its restraint. And that also describes the Manger P2 in apt broad strokes. First a word on overall tonality. It seemed to me on the slightly softer side of neutral in the sense that the P2 was positively inconspicuous in the lower and upper registers. Other might simply call it discreet. But if we now assume that the Manger was midrange-y, we'd be wrong. The frequency extremes simply didn't develop a life of their own but integrated with wonderful coherence. Sure, one can pursue showier bass and treble action for the money but that's not what the P2 is about.

It presents a coherent whole not individual parts. That's what makes it so convincing to create this natural, calm tonal impression. More on that later. For now onto the core strength of the Manger P2...



... *soundstaging*. A good litmus test for this was Shostakovich's *Symphony N°8* which just recently blew up my ears in the Beethoven Hall of the Stuttgarter Liederhalle. The whole piece but especially the third movement "Allegro Non Troppo" proved to be a highly dynamic ride that inevitably had me cling to my seat. With haunting dramatic expressivity we encounter thirty-four violins in the front row on the left followed by violas and cellos in the middle and a phalanx of ten double basses on the right. In the second row on the left are the French horns and saxophone followed by flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons. One level behind to the right are the other brasses of trumpets, tuba, trombones as well as the hemispherical timpani, bass drums and bronze man-sized tam-tam gong supported by a potpourri of percussive elements.

The Manger P2 were among the few loudspeakers I've heard thus far which didn't curtail the instruments, groups or orchestra in terms of individual outlines or ensembles. Nothing zoomed out too much to render as shrunk nor did space balloon up where there wasn't any. In the absence of the actual concert I heard which unfortunately the SWR needs a bit more time to issue as streaming live recording, I resorted to the *Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra* under Mariss Jansons which shouldn't be close to the Currentzis version in any way. Here I was struck by the P2's ability to render a stage perspective that came close to my concert which on one hand showed instrumental groups in their entirety and on the other hand allowed me to hone in on the position of individual soloists with great precision. Hence the depiction of individual performers *and* their intonation against the whole felt authentically live.



With one holo profile attached.

It shouldn't surprise that my far cheaper active compacts of KEF LS50 Wireless II do not demand chamber music yet still stage far smaller. Even my ~€10K/pr oldie-but-goldie Isophone Vertigo upgraded by Dr. Gauder himself wasn't remotely as relaxed and fanned out as the Manger P2. How about the above €30K Kii Three BXT?

Despite extreme conceptual differences (cardioid DSP active vs. classic passive), I heard surprising parallels in their depiction of space. The Manger located instruments within the orchestra just as precisely as the Kii even if the latter seemed a little more insistent and intense. Another similarity was homogeneity and tonal integrity even at low SPL. What shouldn't be overlooked is that the Manger P2 consistently and accurately illuminated the outer quadrants of the stage and that images detached effortlessly from its elegant cabs. The soundstage action sometimes started in front of, sometimes behind the speakers' base line depending on recording. The stage impression was almost holographically tangible. Speaking of which, there still were the so-called Manger *holo profiles* which Daniela conveniently had in her luggage. Those should delight fans of panoramic vistas. Once these waveguides attach carefully to the left and right of a Manger converter, the spatial casting fans out even further to have us seem still deeper in the midst of the action. Also, experiment with the placement of the P2 in general. I found it particularly pleasant to angle their axes such as to cross directly in front of my head which resulted in an impressively large sweet spot.

When towards the end of the first movement there's plenty of fanfare by way of kettle/bass drums and trumpets—actually, *everything*—the Manger didn't cave in. Instead it convinced with fortitude which surprised given the elegant appearance. I never had the impression of getting into any trouble. And yes, an active Kii Three BXT reference certainly dispatches more energy into the room and behaves still more dynamic and authoritative. For normal situations meanwhile, the P2's macrodynamic chops should be more than sufficient. There's also the necessary speed on tap to effortlessly parlay fine dynamic gradations and subtle musical nuance. This was important during the interludes in which the strings are just barely audible.



While for me dynamically everything was in balance if inconspicuously so, I still dubbed the Manger *anti horn* since treble presented as rather reserved and softly silky. But even if it felt energetically more genteel than a Kii Three BXT or one of my active Elac or Adam Audio monitors with their AMT tweeters, the Manger's ability to differentiate wasn't in the least bit compromised. All was clear and selective, just with a gentler spectrum of upper harmonics. This is exactly what predestined extended listening sessions. Then along came Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop Till You Get Enough" where there's lot going on in the presence zone. The P2 performed the song quite open-throated without getting annoying, scratchy or uncouth. In short, the treble of the Manger P2 was informative and well resolved but mellower than 100% textbook.

The midband was simply neutral without warming up its lower reach though I heard no deficiencies in the chestiness of vocal readings, just neutrality. I remember Elac's €5'180/pr Vela FS 408 has having been more sonorous and saturated. And while on "Don't Lose Yourself" by Iggy Pop (Album: *Free*) the Isophon Vertigo betrayed slight accents, the P2 remained natural and homogeneous because of its higher resolution. The P2 also managed the trick of giving Iggy Pop's well-hung voice an authentic timbre so that I felt he was standing right in front of me.

Piano attacks on *Bremer/McCoy* grew more corporeal, finely defined and pleasantly floating yet never explicit or harsh. In fact it was this very renunciation of any exposition of the attacks which led to a particularly cohesive natural musical flow. The fact that music over the Manger P2 reaches our ears in very agile direct fashion is certainly also due to its successful integration of the bass range. As mentioned earlier, the woofer which plays well into the lower midband was apparently groomed for exemplary homogeneity and coherence. Of course on "Coax" from Raime's *Tooth*, the Kii Three BXT showed off unmistakably where exactly the bass fun with the Manger ends but even if the P2 didn't plumb the lowest depths with the same vehemence, pressure and opulence, it conveyed sufficient extension and substance. Dedicated bass heads probably won't agree but there *are* other listening modes and tastes. In any case, the Manger was no child of poverty as could be heard with the drum whacks of Shostakovich's *Eighth*. In short, the P2 was more trim athlete than sumo wrestler.



Was it *too* honest? Was there something the P2 couldn't do well? In fact, yes there was: bad or compressed recordings didn't shine. Garbage in, garbage out was the motto without any embellishing. So don't expect even a little makeup. The Manger P2 is an honest type. I thought that more virtue than demerit. In summary, it should appeal particularly to fans of realistic soundstaging who'll be very pleased by its expanse, scale, image specificity and depth of field. There are no sound effects and the overall personality is somewhat reserved but elegant – or put another way, authentic, natural and suitable for the long term. We can certainly identify alternatives in this price range which offer more loaded macrodynamics or more offence in bass or treble. But if we place greater value on concert-type imaging and natural timbres of instruments and voices, this new Manger definitely deserves an audition.

Psych profile for the Manger P2...

- ◆ offers very high separation and selectivity of imaging right up to the edges of the stage. Instruments delineate and individuate clearly and precisely. At the same time we perceive what occurs across the whole. The stage is drawn as wide and deep as the recording dictates. With the right setup we can achieve a very wide sweet spot which suggests excellent off-axis response. With the optional holo profiles that window can be opened even further.
- ◆ resolves very fine detail but never comes across as obsessively aggressive, just finely chiselled. This is partly due to the rather mellow treble.
- ◆ is charmingly authentic in the mid band and delivers impressively natural timbres.
- ◆ bass extends low for its size and is agile and springy. It wasn't groomed for maximum power, attack or reach but perfect integration with the midrange to sound very coherent.
- ◆ Pays pleasantly dynamic to suit the price range and overall concept even if on the macro scale more remains possible. Transients feel realistically balanced so neither too crisp nor too relaxed.