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Superlative!
Dan Clark Audio CORINA electrostatic 'phones



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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NOT BIG, BUT CLEVER



SVS' Ultra Evolution Bookshelf loudspeaker



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Super-sized big brother

SVS hit the ground running with its Ultra Evolution Nano. **David Vivian** wonders if the bigger Bookshelf can find another gear

If you're initially drawn to a new speaker by the clue in its name – this SVS Ultra Evolution Bookshelf, for example – I'd advise caution. Especially if, in the case of the SVS, you feel inclined to take the hint and place it on a bookshelf. I've just checked and there isn't a shelf in my house, for books or anything else, capable of accommodating a speaker 378mm tall, 220mm wide and 295mm deep that weighs 8.6kg. Not that I'd feel happy putting any half decent 'small' speaker on a shelf rather than a dedicated stand, but the Bookshelf's smaller sibling, the Nano (*HFC* 522), far from being tiny, is ideally

bookshelf-sized and theoretically fits the bill if needs must. It's something of a sonic star, too, but as is usually the case, only if given proper support and a little space to breathe. But you know this so, as with the Nano, it's heavyweight 24in Slate Audio stands for the Bookshelf and nothing less.

Is the Bookshelf just a scaled-up Nano? Essentially, it is. Indeed, the Bookshelf looks exactly like a larger Nano: same mildly angled, 'time-aligned' baffle, same radiused cabinet corners, same mirror-smooth tactility of the White or Black gloss finishes, same superb standard of build. The 25mm diamond vapour-coated aluminium dome tweeter sitting

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
SVS Ultra
Evolution Bookshelf
ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
8.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
220 x 378 x 295mm

FEATURES
• 25mm diamond
vapour-coated
aluminium
dome tweeter
• 165mm glass fibre
mid/bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity:
87dB/1W/1M (6ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma AV

WEBSITE
svsound.com
karma-av.co.uk

behind an 'organic cellular lattice diffuser' is a common spec point, too, and unexpectedly high-end in this region of the market. Why go to the trouble? The claims are numerous and run from improved rigidity and lower distortion to a broader frequency span reaching up to a 40kHz ceiling and down to an unusually low 1.8kHz crossover point for a smoother and more seamless transition to the mid/bass driver. The lattice diffuser, meanwhile, is derived from organic cell structures and said to improve off-axis response to expand the listening 'sweet spot'.

It sounds more potent and forceful when the musical temperature soars

So far, so Nano. However, along with the internal volume, other features have grown and multiplied. The mid/bass driver, its glass fibre composite cone favoured for its high stiffness-to-mass ratio, goes from 133 to 165mm and, round the back, the Nano's modest, and oddly offset to the left, 41mm diameter flared bass reflex port balloons to 51mm with a more pronounced flare and is repositioned

to the centre of the top section of the angled rear baffle, while the Nano's good-quality, gold-plated single binding posts become a pair to enable bi-wiring/bi-amping if desired.

The claimed 40Hz bass extension at -3dB looks realistic, but is only a little deeper than the Nano's 44Hz – despite the Bookshelf's substantially larger box and main driver. While it's a given that any standmount speaker worth its salt benefits from the ministrations of classy amplification, the Bookshelf is no power sink given the quoted 87dB sensitivity and 6ohm nominal impedance. SVS says anything between 20 and 150W should be fine.

Sound quality

Although it's somewhat demeaning to talk of the excellent Nano in terms of party tricks, it does have a couple of good ones denied the Bookshelf. First, the delightful disconnect between its compact size and the cavernous soundstage it projects, the novelty of which never palls. Secondly, the equally unexpected depth, punch and agility of its bass. Yes, the Bookshelf sounds bigger, has more effortless dynamic reach and its bass goes a little lower. And as you'd expect, when pushed hard by a muscular amplifier, the Bookshelf does go louder without the onset of detectable distortion and is therefore a more natural fit for larger rooms if you crave party-on sound pressure levels. But these qualities obviously seem less surprising emanating from what is a significantly bulkier speaker.

To think of the Bookshelf's sound as merely the Nano's writ large is wrong. Rather, they sound intriguingly different and, instead of the size of



The £1,000-£2,000 standmount sector is one of the most competitive in the business and simply overflowing with talent. Arguably the sturdiest benchmark is B&W's £1,300 707 S3 (HFC 513), the entry-level model from the acclaimed 700 Series range. It features a carbon dome and teams this with a 130mm Continuum cone mid/bass driver. Audiovector's classy £1,350 QR1 SE (HFC 520) counters with an AMT tweeter, but the Bookshelf's diamond-coated dome more than holds its own with both. Of this group, the B&W is arguably the most technically advanced and is hard to fault, but the Audiovector and SVS are warmer and more forgiving.

your listening room being the sole determining factor, I reckon preferences are more likely to be arrived at through sensitivities to the contrasts in voicing. In broad terms, like the Nano, the Bookshelf pulls off the not inconsiderable feat of combining focused, hear-through clarity with comfortably warm, cossetting tonality. Rather than pursue the icy, detached perfections of the studio monitor, it oozes listenability – which is both a great start and bodes well for the long run.

The most obvious difference is in the bass. The Nano's, surprisingly, sounds more prominent and tactile, conceivably massaged to convey an

The Bookshelf is a more natural fit for larger rooms and party-on sound levels

inviting sense of body and warmth seldom experienced in standmounts of its size. The Bookshelf's lower frequencies, contrastingly, breathe more freely and seem to be delivered with greater ease, at once attracting less immediate attention yet providing more convincing ambient cues and anchoring the foundations of music, especially rock, with superior weight and authority. As a result, the Bookshelf sounds a tad more laid back and relaxed but even more potent and forceful when the musical temperature soars.

Midband presentation marks another point of subtle difference, the Bookshelf sounding marginally more open and explicit, assets that make the

tinest details easier to follow within a more spacious soundstage. Reprising a 24-bit/96kHz stream (admittedly Qobuz rather than Tidal this time) of *Green Flower Street* from Donald Fagen's *The Nightfly Live*, the Nano's natural zeal and agility plays well to the track's live energy with a great sense of the venue acoustic and vibrant instrumental colours, but the Bookshelf's extra heft and midband resolution lands the more convincing impression of 'being there'.

Cueing up *Let The Good Times Roll* from Quincy Jones' *Q's Jook Joint* on vinyl again confirms the mild diversity in execution, both speakers nailing the power and emotion behind the vocal contributions of Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles with palpable presence and intelligibility while the Bookshelf adds a little flesh (not to mention blood and thunder) to the proceedings, giving the scorching orchestral crescendos more heat and headroom. Impressive, though, is the way the Nano's bass delivers convincing weight and extension without boom or bloom and does so with commendable agility and drive, leaving the Bookshelf's plumper and deeper contribution sounding luxurious but slightly lazy by comparison.

Conclusion

It's undoubtedly tough on the Ultra Evolution Bookshelf that the smaller, cheaper Nano is such an exceptional true bookshelf-sized speaker, putting pressure on its 'superior', super-sized sibling to justify the extra real estate and expenditure. Its life is made easier in a larger room scenario where its more generous output fills the space with greater poise and foundational depth, but I'd suggest that the Nano has the edge for musical engagement in smaller rooms. The choice, if you want an SVS Ultra Evolution standmount, is entirely yours. The good news? You won't make a bad one ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Quality room-filling sound; design; build and finish

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Bookshelf-busting size; strong competition from the smaller Nano

BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



WE SAY: A big Nano with a subtly different skill set

OVERALL

