

B&W 803D Diamond Series Speaker

In addition to benefiting from Diamond Series enhancements, the \$8000 803D differs from B&W's similar-looking and -named 803S (\$5500/pair), which uses a standard tweeter and two (rather than three) 7" woofers.

Having spent many hours listening to the Nautilus 804 as well as the 703, I'm quite familiar with the way B&W's sound, and the first thing that struck me about the 803D was its lack of sibilance. This is one of the few speakers I've heard that doesn't hiss in the treble. The top end is very airy, and so tonally neutral that it almost seems laid-back or rolled-off, though all of the detail is there. Considering that the previous Nautilus tweeter was on the bright side, and therefore ruthlessly revealing of poor components upstream, this is a remarkable change.

Airy soundfields have always been a Nautilus hallmark, and this new, smoother tweeter only accentuates this effect, making two-channel music seem to surround you like multichannel would. Imaging is top-notch, in large part because the freestanding tweeter is free of cabinet diffractions.

The bass of previous Nautilus speakers was generally on the dry side, and always "enough," but not copious. The 803D's bass is considerably faster and more accurate, and the degree and extension is now "enough plus some." Another major departure: the bass quality is now some of the best that I have heard.

The midrange is very much the same—clear and distinct, with somewhat harder transients than the KEF Reference 207 that I've used in my system. Where the Kevlar midranges of the B&W have more distinct transients, the KEF's paper cones soften transients while conveying detail. Hence, the KEF "whispers" its details to you, while the B&W "talks" to you.

The overall integration of drivers is even better than in the Nautilus Series. If anything stands out, it is the occasional harder transient and very mild chestiness of the midrange. I am nitpicking here, as these effects are not significant enough to detract from the experience, and in some ways add some strength and excitement to the sound. The real upside to the harder transients is the clarity and distinctiveness of vocals—this is one articulate midrange.

Although I was first taken aback by the price premium of the 803D over the 803S, the 803D is a lot more speaker and a very worthy upgrade. I highly recommend it. **Manoj Motwani**

