

The big first impression upon listening to the SP1s, the thing that grabs your attention right off the bat, along with the general electrostatic clarity is the extraordinary presentation of space. The sound picture is expansive in all directions. Depth of image especially is quite startling. On the Telarc Ravel-Borodin -Bizet CD, the off-stage trumpet (Track 13) sounded as if it were in the next county. And when the orchestra came in with the on-stage players, the whole picture had a spatial scope unusually reminiscent of a real orchestra, considerably more so than usual. No speaker in a domestic room will reproduce the literal size of an orchestra as heard at close range—orchestras are on the order of sixty feet wide. But some speakers get closer than others to reproducing the orchestra's scale!

This convincing spatiality was remarkably stable over changes in listening position. A spatially convincing soundfield was spread over a surprising portion of the room. Of course, people are always saying things like this—people like stereo and like how it works. But with the SP1s, it was working in a way quite different from usual. The combination of wide forward pattern and dipole radiation from 750Hz on up was somehow creating a really unusual and unusually convincing impression of being spatially elsewhere, in large venues when a large venue was the site of the recording.

[The SP1s] absence of resonant coloration makes its tonal presentation uncolored sounding. And as noted the sound has a startling purity. This is a speaker capable of producing truly beautiful sound in the strongest sense. The Carmen Intermezzo from the Telarc CD was exquisite. And piano music was superb in its freedom from any grunge whatever and its resolution of the fine structure of piano tone. The Janne Mertanen's Chopin CD (Gradient label) sounded superbly like a real piano. (This is one of the best piano recordings ever, and it sounded like that here!) And vocal reproduction was also excellent: Jane Monheit's "I'll be Around" was even more heartbreakingly beautiful than usual, with impressive naturalness to the voice.

The SP1s are unique among dipole electrostatics in their essentially point-source character. Only the Quad 63s and their descendants have attempted a point source, done via wave synthesis (concentric rings with time delays)... [SP1] comparison to the Quads shows that the literal physical construction of [the SP1s] doubly curved electrostatic element offers some advantage... Admirable though the Quads were and are, the SP1s seem to me to offer a more convincing version of point-source imaging.

And the obvious hybrid electrostatic competition are line-source speakers as far as the electrostatic part goes, namely the Sanders 10e and the various MartinLogan models. The Sanders is not to my mind competition as such but rather a different kind of speaker altogether. It provides a nearly perfect replica of its input in its direct sound to the listening position. But it is not intended as a "room filler." The SP1s are in the same way doing an excellent, indeed uniquely, excellent, job of what they are trying to do. Whether you want the room filler with stability of imaging over a larger area [SP1] or the all-but-perfect one-point experience with minimized room contribution [Sanders] is up to you.

The MartinLogan approach of using a slightly curved panel line source has never really jelled for me (narrow panel versions, which, while balanced nicely, do not really sound completely convincing in comparison to actual music. I have not heard under meaningful conditions the larger panel Neolith which RH reviewed in Issue 259.)

Hybrid electrostatics abound, but the Muraudios are unique. All the other hybrids that operate the electrostatic part as a dipole have an electrostatic part that is essentially a line source. A box woofer surmounted by a narrow, tall electrostatic membrane flat or curved horizontally—that is the rule. The Muraudios are unique in that the electrostatic elements are curved in both directions, both horizontally and vertically. The horizontal curvature involves multiple angled segments, each curved vertically. The effect acoustically is that the speaker presents something more akin to a point source than a line source. The listening effect is of focus behind. And the symmetrically mounted woofers, four per channel two above two below as noted, makes the point-source effect even more convincing.

The SP1s have a much wider and more uniform pattern than the MartinLogan quasi-line-source models, e.g., the Montis, which have horizontally curved panels but with a much smaller amount of curvature than the SP1s segmented panels... What one has here is a wide dispersion electrostatic which resembles a wide-pattern point source in a way no other electrostatic hybrid even aspires to, let alone equals... in terms of wider listening area, imaging that is stable with respect to listener position—a stability which is really impressive here, actually—and a certain naturalness that arises from resembling more nearly how real musical instruments tend to radiate into rooms.

The SP1s tend to remind one rather aggressively of how poorly a great many speakers with lots of drivers actually do stereo. Stereo perception is a robust thing and almost any pair of reasonably well-matched speakers will do stereo—after a fashion. But trying to put stereo together from a lot of drivers is a little bit like trying to make a photo by gluing together a lot of images from cameras at different angles. It sort of works but not really. Speakers that offer something very close to a real point source work for stereo in a way that the others do not. The details of this are not easy to put in words. But you will know it when you hear it. The SP1s really function very nearly as a single driver. They provide a quite different experience from floorstanders with umpteen drivers.



I suppose everyone knows that I have a lot of admiration for speakers which have a big emphasis on direct sound, which beam the sound at you. But these are intrinsically for one listener alone and one who is not going to move. The SP1s managed to be very convincing not only in the one centered ideal position but over a wide area. How this works is not entirely clear to me in theory, but work it does.

Through the SP1s the point-source nature of the imaging felt very natural. And compared to other hybrid electrostatics, well, when the chips are down, most instruments are not line sources. If you are willing to sit absolutely still in the vertical sense, the unusual imaging behavior of line sources, where the image moves up or down when you move up or down, will not be distracting. And, of course, line sources do have the advantage of bouncing little or no sound off the floor, in effect. But the SP1s, which are elevated above the floor a good bit and which up to 750Hz have a symmetric driver arrangement that itself minimizes floor interaction, gets rid of the floor reflection issue quite well on their own terms.

I should remark that the SP1s are elegantly built and finished. And they offer a lot of design and technological expertise for a modest price. In a world where small two-way boxes can cost as much as cars, the SP1s are a clear bargain, priced in a way that makes one feel one is getting a lot for the money. And they look cool, to my eyes, too—unusual but cool, and unusual for a reason. This is not novelty for its own sake, but inventive design.

I would strongly urge you to find the Muraudio SP1s at a show or a dealer and spend some time listening to them carefully. This is a landmark speaker design. There has never been anything else like it. It is unique and sounds like real music in a way which escapes most speakers entirely. I think many people are going to find it matchlessly satisfying, if they can get a serious listen to it. If the audio world were working as it should, dealers would be queuing up to take on the SP1s... New ideas give new life, and new life is what high-end audio can very much use. And the SP1s are a new and very good idea indeed.

Muraudio SP1s are among the most remarkable speaker designs to appear in recent years... they are, to borrow the highest recommendation in the Michelin Tour Guides that I used to travel around Europe with, "worth a journey." Seek them out. You will be glad you did.