

SoundStage!

August 2018 - Muraudio SP1 Loudspeakers
Doug Schneider - Review Highlights

The moment I had the SP1s hooked up and was streaming Joan Baez's latest, *Whistle Down the Wind* (24-bit/96kHz FLAC/MQA, Proper/Tidal), **it was obvious that the outputs of very different types of drivers can be mixed so seamlessly that, even if you knew nothing about a speaker's drivers, you wouldn't know which type was handling which frequency, or that it was a hybrid at all.** The SP1s reproduced Baez's cover of Joe Henry's "Civil War" with Baez's voice up front, dead center, with she's-in-my-room clarity. Although the frequency content of her voice, from fundamentals to harmonics, straddled the 750Hz crossover frequency and thus was being reproduced by panel and woofers -- as I could hear when I put an ear next to each driver -- **from my listening seat it sounded so cohesive that it was difficult to believe it was coming from all those drivers pointing in all those directions.**

In "Civil War," Jay Bellerose's drums are placed fairly far back on the stage, an acoustic piano hovers around Baez, and there's a guitar to far right. Again, at the listening seat, **it was impossible for me to hear where one driver type handed off to the other for any instrument, including the piano ... the top-to-bottom sound of the drivers was as cohesive and focused as the best non-hybrid floorstanders -- such as KEF's Reference 3 or Revel's Ultima2 Salon2...**

The acoustic piano is one of the most difficult instruments for speakers to reproduce, not only for its wide frequency range but also for its weight and impact. I played one of my favorite piano recordings, Ola Gjeilo's *Stone Rose* (16/44.1 WAV, 2L), which I like so much because, through a good system, it sounds as if I'm right there with him. Once again, there was no disconnect from lows to highs. **In really explosive passages, as in "The Line," I heard nothing but speed and attack -- none of the woolliness or distortion that plagues some speakers when they try to reproduce this track. It all sounded as immediate, clean, dynamic, and musically exciting as well-played pianos do in concert.**

For the SP1, which is specified as 86dB/2.83V/m, Muraudio recommends 50-125Wpc, which they seemed to prove at the Montreal show in 2018 by using a Simaudio Moon 340i integrated amplifier (100Wpc into 8 ohms). **It's worthwhile to know that the SP1 is not that difficult to drive -- like most speakers, its nominal impedance is specified as 8 ohms.** Muraudio cites a 2-ohm minimum impedance at 20kHz, which is low, but considering that most recordings have little content up so high, that shouldn't present a challenge to most well-designed amps.

... another defining feature of Muraudio's ESL panel is something not easily visible. The perforations in the stators -- the thin metal panels that sandwich the even thinner diaphragm, and that transform the audio signal into electrical fields that push and pull the diaphragm, whose motion pressurizes the air into soundwaves -- aren't just stamped or drilled holes. Instead, the holes' edges are rounded using a patented forming machine that allows the powder coating to be more evenly applied to all surfaces of the stator. Muraudio says that this process substantially increases the panel's power handling.



I checked [the SP1s soundstage] by playing very familiar recordings that I've used as references for many years now: the Cowboy Junkies' *The Trinity Session* (16/44.1 WAV, RCA); Bruce Cockburn's *Humans: Deluxe Edition* (16/44.1 WAV, True North); Greg Keelor's *Gone* (16/44.1 WAV, Warner Music Canada); and Ennio Morricone's film score for *The Mission* (16/44.1 WAV, Virgin)...

I heard no embellishment of soundstage width or depth... the SP1s simply reproduced the wide spread inherent in the recording, at the depth that's supposed to be there. With *The Mission*, much of which is choral music; with each track recorded in a very large space... regardless of which track I played, the soundstages were as wide and deep as I've heard them, but not to the point of the SP1s adding width or depth that wasn't originally there. On those large stages, individual voices and instruments were in sharp focus -- nothing sounded bigger than it should... the SP1s seemed to accurately reproduce the recordings I played through them.

Playing these familiar tracks also highlighted the SP1's main strength: clarity, from lows to highs. ... **any music I played was reproduced with extremely high resolution.** With "No Landing (Lucknow)," from Greg Keelor's *Gone*, I was able to crank up the volume to lifelike levels and hear Greg Keelor's voice before me in full glory, as detailed I've heard it... It was as transparent a view into this recording as I've heard. But I didn't need high volume levels to hear that kind of transparency. Although the SP1s could play louder in my room than I needed them to, most of my listening to them was done at below normal listening levels... Provided other sounds in the room didn't swamp the sounds coming from the speakers, that ability to let me hear into recordings was just as extreme. In short, the SP1 punched high for its price of \$14,700/pair.

When I played "Smokestack Lightnin'," from Howlin' Wolf's *Moanin' in the Moonlight* (16/44.1 FLAC, Chess/Tidal), I heard a tightly focused ball of unbelievably clear sound right between the speakers -- Wolf's voice and the accompanying instruments all wound up nicely, but were reproduced so cleanly that I could easily distinguish each instrument from the others. That's as it should be with a good monaural recording, even one dating from January 1956. There was no stereo spread; if there had been -- or if the sound had been too big in the center, or pulled to left or right, or too far back on the stage -- it would have been because the speakers or something else in the signal chain was adding or subtracting something from the original recording. Instead, **"Smokestack Lightnin'" was reproduced with astonishing clarity, precisely between the SP1s, as if emanating from a single speaker placed directly in front of me.**

Some reviewers talk about their "desert island" or "retirement" speakers -- speakers they could comfortably live with for the rest of their lives. But I think being an audiophile precludes that -- we're always looking for something new, even if we think we're satisfied with what we have. But I understand what they mean -- part of the satisfaction of a purchase is knowing you've bought something you'll be satisfied with for a long time.

The weird-looking and wonderful-sounding Muraudio SP1 is such a speaker for me -- not only for Doug the audiophile and music lover, but for Doug the reviewer. **The outputs of its five drivers blend so well that they sound like a single driver of nearly full range. It sounds wickedly clean and natural regardless of the music played. It can play at volume levels from extremely low to well beyond loud enough equally well. I also liked the way a pair of SP1s painted vast soundstages with well-focused aural images in my room, without sounding exaggerated or artificial.** And all of that, without being difficult to set up. That's a long list of accomplishments... **Muraudio's latest isn't just one of the best-sounding speakers at the price -- I'd wager it can knock the socks off many speakers costing considerably more.**