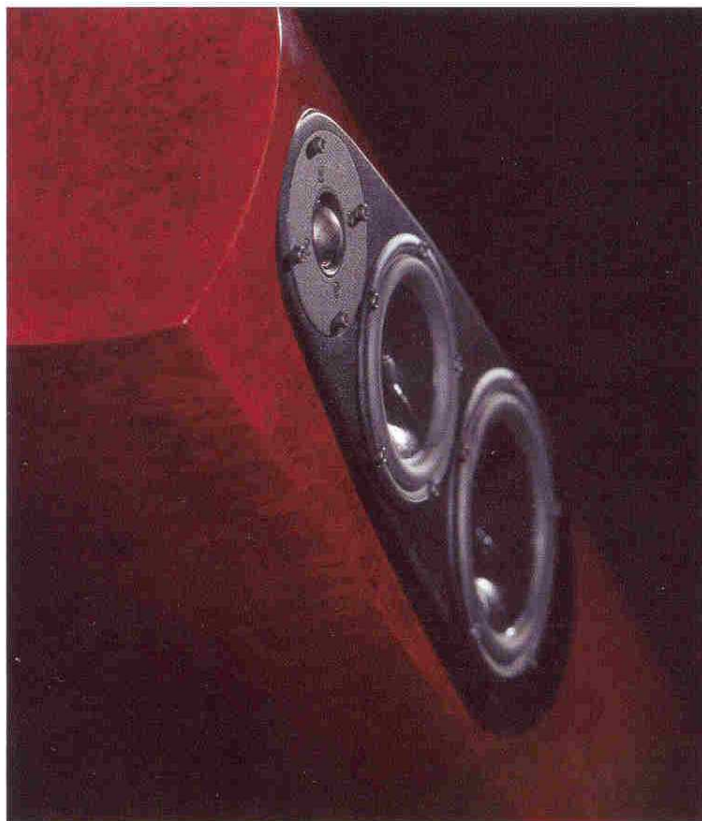


Phonar Akustik Credo S100 Loudspeaker

A “five heart” import from Germany

Sue Kraft



With a star-studded supporting cast of Thor electronics and a SOTA Millennium turntable, the German-based Credo loudspeaker made its U.S. debut in Las Vegas last year at T.H.E. Show 2005. It's no surprise this beautifully crafted 2.5-way floorstander swiveled a few heads, including those of the esteemed TAS contingent. Not only does the Credo S100 possess deeper and more substantial bass than one would expect from a speaker its size, but the sheer naturalness of the midrange presentation will lock onto your psyche and reel you in on a tractor beam à la the Starship Enterprise.

Quite fortunately for me, this meant countless hours cradled in the soul-soothing harmonies of the Wailin' Jennys' *40 Days* [Red House Records] followed by a few selfishly indulgent Eva Cassidy marathons. I was so taken by the angelic purity of Eva's

voice through the Credo that I was compelled to seek out a few more of her recordings, just to make certain I hadn't missed any previously unpublished treasures. Isn't it strange how when you initially audition a new component, you *know* almost immediately exactly what kind of music you need to hear first? Life can be very, very good for those of us who get paid to listen.

Phonar Akustik, the parent company of the Credo, is no “babe in the woods” when it comes to making loudspeakers. In fact, it's been circling the block for over a quarter century. This perhaps explains the meticulous attention to detail of the furniture-quality rootwood veneer finish. Unlike some components which can be nice from afar but unfortunately far from nice up-close, the S100 looks just as gorgeous in the flesh—or veneer—as it does in the glamour shots. The non-symmetrical top and bottom plates combined with half-oval curved sides add an eye-pleasing dose of sex appeal, while at the same time helping to eliminate unwanted resonances. The speaker rests comfortably in a black MDF base which is raised slightly at the front, giving the S100 its gentle five-degree backwards tilt.

Internally, the cabinet is heavily braced and comprises two separate ported enclosures. The top third performs as a full-range 2-way speaker while the bottom two-thirds acts as a bass module with a gentle slope at 630Hz. All drivers, including the 1.14" soft-dome tweeter, 6" mid/bass, and 7" bass units are custom manufactured for Phonar Akustik by neighboring Scan Speak.

I began my evaluation in the smaller listening room, powering the S100 with an Atma-Sphere Novacron tube amp. Although the Credo is a somewhat low-sensitivity speaker (88dB/1W/1m, 4 ohms nominal impedance), I was pleasantly surprised at how well

The overall sound was notably spirited and energetic, engaging and gloriously natural

it performed with such a notoriously load-sensitive OTL. Of course, I'm talking about an afternoon with Andreas Vollenweider's *Cosmopoly* [SLG] at normal to moderate listening levels. If your idea of relaxation is an all-night ear-bleeder with the likes of Nine Inch Nails, best stick with the heavy artillery.

Although the Credo adapted well to its 12'-square acoustically treated environment, I was never completely satisfied with the bass performance in that room. Unlike that of the Coincident Super Eclipse that it replaced, the bottom end was a bit stiff and just a hair out of step. I'm not sure if it was due to the diagonal setup or just the size of the room, but taking the Credo for a stroll into the main 20' x 14' listening quarters alleviated any reservations I might have had about the lower registers.

Once the Credo was paired with the "heavy artillery" McCormack DNA-500 solid-state amp, not only was the bass perfectly in sync, but it was well articulated and respectably deep, too. The overall sound was notably spirited and energetic, engaging and gloriously natural. The midrange of the S100 had what I can only describe as a delicate and seductive aura, which lent itself especially well to breathy vocals and wind instruments. The high frequencies, while not overly forgiving, were smooth and listenable—no irritating tizziness or brightness in the upper end at all.


The top-to-bottom tonal balance of the Credo was very good—if anything was out of whack, it wasn't obvious to me. No complaints about the imaging, either. With speakers toed in slightly, the center image was solid and unwavering. The presentation was slightly upfront or forward of the speaker, which meant I could kick back in the easy chair without feeling disconnected from the music. Conversely, some speakers can be a bit recessed, forcing you to sit up straight or even lean forward into the music. This isn't necessarily always a bad thing, but if given a choice, I'll usually opt for the recliner with my stocking feet up, sharing a bucket of bonbons with the pooch.

Lest anyone think the Credo speaker is only good for mushy girl music, I just about jumped out of my skin when the first bass note hit on Stanton Moore's "Let's Go" [*Flyin' the Coop*, Blue Thumb Records]. And I have to tell you I'm about as familiar with that disc as the

back of my hand, as it's become one of my favorite torture-test recordings. I just wasn't prepared for it to slam quite so hard. I then gave the volume control on the Manley Shrimp some major wrist action to the right and exited the room. You'd be amazed at what a 7" woofer is capable of when driven by a 500W tank. I was suitably impressed by how well the S100 handled all that power at extreme SPLs with no signs of stress or sonic degradation.

Joe DePhillips of Discovery Cables, who also happens to be the importer and distributor of Credo here in the States, offered to send along a few of his wires with the speakers. Although I've got a fairly decent cable arsenal going already, one of my closets still had a couple square inches of space left, so I figured sure, why not? In addition to being a very listenable and sweet cable, the Discovery wires actually moved the soundstage back a few inches and gave the S100 a bit more depth. The smallish soundstage of the Credo—in both width and depth—was my only concern about this speaker worthy of mention. So especially in that regard, the Discovery Cables would be a good match. The Credo still couldn't muster the wall-to-wall expansiveness of either the Coincident Super Eclipse or recently reviewed JMLabs Profile 918, but the Discovery Essential speaker cable and Essence interconnect did help move the S100 closer in that direction.

The more time I spent with this speaker—it's been nearly two months now—the more I appreciated how easy the Credo is to work with. Some speakers are finicky when it comes to associated equipment, and others seem to take system changes in stride. My experience has been that the S100 belongs to the latter group. Be it tubes, solid-state, or one of the new digital amps from Gilmore Audio, the Credo was a reliable team player. The only issue might be room size. If you really want to hear the fantastic bass this speaker is capable of, I'd recommend at least a mid-sized room. But then I suppose the same thing could be said about many other speakers.

Summing up, if I had to describe both the looks and sound of the Credo S100 in just one word, "lovely" would be the first to pop into my head. Sure, paired with 500 sizzling watts of brute power, the S100 can "get jiggy" with the best of 'em. But it was the superbly natural midrange that captured my attention and wouldn't let go. Any component that can make Eva Cassidy sound like an angel from heaven gets an easy five heart rating in my reviewer's "little black book." 

SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 2.5-way bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker
 Driver complement: One 29mm soft-dome tweeter, one 150mm mid/bass, one 180mm woofer
 Frequency response: 28Hz–30kHz
 Sensitivity: 88dB
 Power Handling: 200/300 watts
 Impedance: 4 ohms
 Dimensions: 9.5" x 43" x 13"
 Weight: 59.4 lbs.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Meridian G08, Marantz PMD-320 CD player; AVA Ultra DAC; Meridian G02 control unit, Sonic Euphoria passive; AVA Ultra preamp; Meridian G57, Atma-Sphere Novacron OTL, McCormack DNA-500 amps; Coincident Super Eclipse, Von Schweikert VR4jr, B&W 800D, B&W 704 speakers; Coincident TRS, Paul Speltz anti-cable, Harmonic Tech speaker cable, Harmonic Tech, Audio Magic interconnects; Cardas RCA to XLR adapters; Elrod, JPS power cords; Bright Star Audio, Symposium Sveite shelves; Chang Lightspeed Encounter, PS Audio Ultimate outlet; Echo Busters, ASC room treatment

DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION

DISCOVERY CABLE

P.O. Box 7
 Stuart, Florida 34995
 (772) 219-7979
 info@discoverycable.com
 discoverycable.com
 Price: \$7000