

Legacy Marquis HD, Studio HD Loudspeakers

(with a word on the Whispers)

A Review

“Legacy” does not mean “old” out there in the land of Lincoln. It is the name of a company that has manufactured and continues to manufacture a legacy of excellent loudspeakers. Nothing Legacy Audio makes in Springfield, Illinois, is cheap in price or quality, but everything they make is a good value. Even their top-of-the-line Helix speaker at about \$48k - give or take a few thou depending on when you read this - costs considerably less than other vaunted audiophile caliber speaker systems. At the same time it takes up less space, is practical to use in a real-world environment, and can play at real life volume levels even without the purchase of monster amplifiers (although the Helix uniquely requires three of them), sound, sensible engineering goes into every Legacy speaker. You can spend less than Legacy up and down their product line, *but you probably will get less*. And you will never find products more lovingly produced.

At first glance, “Whisper” seems a misnomer given their prodigious size and weight, but they do indeed whisper as well as they shout, and Bill designed them to work in real living rooms. My gentle giants never operate as a mere duo, however. I have been a surround-sound aficionado since 1970 when I first attached a rear speaker on the advice that Dynaco printed in all their amplifier user manuals. I followed that with the SQ madness of the 1970s even while ruing bad-sounding recordings and cursing the asthma-like pumping indigenous to early surround logic decoders. No wonder quadraphonic died. When video began creeping into the home and the multi-channel market reopened, I jumped into it gleefully and am now on my fourth surround processor. Since my name is not “Kennedy” or “Rockefeller,” I had make purchases only occasionally to keep my wife from leaving me, which meant that finding an audio Mother Teresa like Bill Dudleston was vital. Forced to expend funds judiciously, I had to buy center and surround speakers that came from the other side of the audio tracks. The mighty Whispers overwhelmed their lesser adopted family members, of course. They were polite about it, but quality shows. It was time to unite the Whispers with their blood relatives from Springfield. Communication with Legacy this time was with customer relations guru, Jeff Hernandez, who before long struck a deal to bring a full family of Legacy loudspeakers to the Brandt listening room. After mulling it over on several occasions with Jeff (who really needs to read more books Civil War – mine, for example), I decided on a Marquis center channel and two pairs of Studio HDs for the surrounds. Clients don’t have a nine-month gestation period to suffer through, but they do have several weeks of anguished anticipation. Legacy makes every speaker from scratch, and every one of them is a carefully crafted piece of furniture. Even my wife loved the woodwork on the Whispers.

First the Marquis. The initial comment everyone makes upon seeing my new center channel speaker is, "Oh, you got a subwoofer." Yes, it's that big. All 85 pounds, 14" h x 38" w x 15" d of it (depth includes the grill cover). It is almost as wide as the 51" TV before which it sits. I have it resting on two 8" floor stands. You will definitely need two - or a large, strong bookshelf. You will not set it atop a television unless you confuse it with a member of the Wallenda family, and we all know what happened to them. With two robust twelve-inch woofers, it's no wonder that people think it's a sub. In fact, since I am able to run it full range, it does indeed offer many of a sub's benefits – assuming you use the center channel for music.

The Marquis' sound is vintage Legacy: clear, dynamic, and tonally balanced. Bass is deep and solid and frequency response smooth. The tweeter and midrange point right up at me but never sound overly bright or fatiguing, although I did flick the back-panel switch that cuts the tweeter level by 2 db, a move driven more by the sound of film and TV than the speaker. It blends beautifully both visually and sonically with the Whispers, and I have no doubt it would do the same with every other Legacy loudspeaker. In fact, although Legacy markets it solely as a center channel, there is no reason you could not use three of them up front, although you would have to mount them horizontally. Seeing three 38" wide speakers might look strange, but it would sound fabulous, match perfectly, and not break your bank account. They are bi-ampable by removing the shorting straps, and they can be bi-wired, although why anyone bothers with such "golden ear" nonsense escapes me. I got mine in natural oak to match the Whispers, but other finishes are available. This is furniture making that would make Ethan Allen proud.

The Studio HDs make excellent surround speakers, but couple them with a subwoofer, and you'll have an excellent main system, which is how Legacy markets them. Forget what you usually see in a two-way, 8" woofer speaker. These babies are a solid twenty-eight pounds and can play LOUD. They look and feel expensive, but they are not. I got mine in a black pearl finish, which gives every appearance of being some high-tech resin-based material. I called Jeff to inquire whether drilling into them for mounting would crack the plastic and he laughed. That's all wood, he said, covered with seventeen coats of paint. Sure enough, when I drilled screw holes, I was soon spitting out sawdust. One word of caution for the Studios if you are going to place them on shelves: The published 10.8" depth is for the cabinet only. Four binding posts stick out from the rear (also the case for the Marquis), which adds another inch or more to the depth. The posts are not recessed even slightly. If you stick banana plugs in the rear you will further increase the depth requirement. (Legacy's website description may have changed by now to describe this.) While they are not made for wall placement, I wanted my side channels that way and used BTECH BT77 wall mounts (not sold by or associated with Legacy), which are rated for almost twice the weight of the Studios. Do not, however, listen to the part where BTECH tells you that you do not have screw the speaker to the mounting plate if you intend to keep the speaker level. Do it, which you must if you tilt the speaker forward as I have. Three 3/4" screws in the bottom are probably sufficient, but you can also place one on either side. There will be no damage to the speaker innards because the cabinet walls are 3/4" thick themselves, and there is nothing but air immediately behind the five possible mounting points.

More on both speakers' binding posts: They are large, metal, solid, and strong enough to be military grade, but they are unable to secure bare wire in smaller gauges such as fourteen or sixteen. Use spade or banana plugs. If you bi-amp, you can remove the shorting straps, which then makes it possible to stick banana plugs in the post holes as well as the rear of the posts. Just don't tighten the posts too much, though. Only your infant loves squashed bananas.

In closing, I find little reason to go elsewhere when shopping for a loudspeaker. Legacy means nothing but quality and sound engineering. Their products, while not cheap, are not overpriced. They sound magnificent playing any style of music, and you won't get better personal attention anywhere.

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