

### Biography

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My name is Tom Port. I am not now, nor have I ever been, an equipment reviewer. If pressed I suppose I would say I'm a music lover. I am the owner of — and sell, of course — LP's with both audiophile and musical merit. Basically my job is to listen to music.

The description and appearance of the Whisper in the Legacy literature make clear that technically and aesthetically this is a very special speaker. After living with them for a few months now I would like to offer some additional insight into their performance for those of you who are impressed with the design and the look but want to know more about the sound.

I had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the Whispers as I experimented with the speakers in my room. I hooked them up to every amplifier I could get my hands on and tried different preamps, CD players, tubes, interconnects, power conditioners, feet, etc.... One thing that I learned is the **Whispers can make music sound more alive than any speaker I've ever heard.** Admittedly I haven't heard every speaker ever made, but I have heard an awful lot of them (and a lot of awful ones) in the 20 years or so since I caught the audiophile bug. As a starving student in the



LEGACY AUDIO Whisper

70's I managed to scrape together enough money to buy one of the two speaker systems Stereophile rated as State-of-the-Art, the Fulton "J". The "J" is a speaker even Bill Dudleston would have admired, with three 12" woofers, a 10" midwoofer, and 8" midrange, and 2 dome tweeters, all topped by an array of electrostatic panels. That speaker moved some air!

Whisper is not merely an evolutionary refinement in the state-of-the-art, but is in fact a revolutionary quantum leap forward. **A speaker that can do the things the Whisper does, as well as the Whisper does them, by definition is the State-of-the-Art.**

In the ensuing two decades I've had the opportunity to audition scores of speakers in friends' and customers' homes. I've been herded from room to room at high-end shows. I've made countless weekend pilgrimages to my local stereo dealers for demonstrations. But I've never heard a speaker even begin to do what the Whisper does. **It's the first speaker I'm aware of whose design addresses every major problem encountered in recreating music in the home.** Based on my listening sessions with the Whispers, I believe Bill Dudleston has for the first time identified these problems and, more importantly, engineered unique solutions to overcome them.

And what are the things such an ideal speaker system should do? For starters, and in no particular order, such a speaker should:

1. Minimize room effects, so that the size and shape and surface of the room the speakers are in have minimal impact on the sound produced.
2. Allow ideal placement of the speakers in any room, insuring that frequency balance is optimal without sacrificing soundstaging, imaging, or three-dimensionality.
3. Play full range, full size, full power. This means uncompressed dynamics, unlimited frequency response, and lifelike, full-size images.
4. Reproduce all instrumental timbres accurately, of course.
5. And, most importantly, the ideal speaker should have **"The Breath of Life."** More about that later

The first two elements of the Whisper design are concerned with getting the speaker to play its best under difficult and unpredictable conditions, the kind

found in the average listening room.

An enormous amount of research into room interactions and countless experiments were required before the scope of the problem could even be understood. The result is a speaker whose unique placement in the room is built around the idea of creating a large equilateral triangle with the listener. Set eight feet apart, the Whispers angle-in sharply, actually crossing slightly in front of the listener when properly seated eight feet away. This virtually eliminates the effect of dreaded "sidewall reflections". Furthermore, the actual location of the drivers within the cabinet is calculated to avoid reflections from the floor and ceiling as well.

With the listener facing forward, **the speakers disappear at the edges of the visual field — a Cinerama - like special effect.** With fully eight feet of empty space between them, the speakers create a huge soundstage, wide enough to allow each individual instrument its own space. And its own place:

**the images the Whispers produce are as rock solid and distinct as any I've ever encountered.**

Some of this superior imaging is the result of design elements that keep the sound behind the

speakers at a minimum. Boomy bass doesn't "pile up" in the rear corners. The result is virtually no "room hangover" to muddy the sound and distort the soundstage, even at high levels.

Bill also has come up with a unique solution to another common room interaction problem: The Whisper is the first speaker that can be placed far enough from the back wall to "open them up" and provide plenty of luscious depth without compromising the bass response. Impossible you say? Not with the Steradian Environmental Processor. The Steradian allows the user to dial in the right amount of bass regardless of speaker position. In some smaller rooms the speakers may be against the wall or in the corners. The Steradian control will keep the bass from the Whisper's eight fifteen-inch woofers from overpowering the sound even under such adverse conditions.

If you like your speakers well away from the back wall, no matter how large the room, the Steradian can accommodate this preference as well. To find the ideal locations for the speakers you simply move them closer or further from the wall, adjusting the Steradian to provide the correct amount of bass at each location. When accurate timbres and lifelike, three-dimensional images have been achieved, when the placement of

the speakers seems just right, the frequency balance will be correct. The balance is always correct, because you exercise absolute control over it, regardless of the speaker's position.

Is all this hard-won technology — designed to take the room out of the equation — actually being put to good use? In other words, can the Whispers make music?

Let's start with the midrange, the sine qua non of reproduction. Without a good midrange there really is nothing, a cliché by now but one that bears repeating.

One of my good friends, Steve Hoffman, is a mastering engineer for an audiophile label (DCC Records). He coined a phrase to describe a specific, recognizable, all-important quality he listens for in the midrange. It's a kind of naturalness, a freedom (to the extent that it's possible) from artifacts of recording or reproduction. He calls it "The **Breath of Life**". As a mastering engineer his primary goal, as he sees it, is to

protect at all costs that midrange naturalness.

When listening to a singer — take Bing Crosby, for example — the Breath of Life is that quality of Bing's voice that allows you to close your eyes and actually believe there's a real person in front of you. He's no

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longer a recording of a person, he is a person. What's more, the Breath of Life may be so pronounced that you can actually picture in your "mind's eye" the different expressions on his face as he delivers the lines of the song. Forty years ago Bing felt something as he sang those lines. The recording engineer no doubt felt it. The Breath of Life he captured on the tape allows us to feel it too.

It's not accuracy, it's not timbre, it's not micro-dynamics, it's not ambience, although all of those things play a part. It's not really even the sound. It's the emotional content of the sound. It's what we experience when we hear live music, because there we can see the emotion on the performer's face. Even with poor quality sound, the visual element allows that emotional communication to take place. There's no visual element in the home stereo. The emotional content of the music can only affect us if the equipment is working well enough to let it through.

Once you've heard the Breath of Life in a recording it becomes the first and most important test any prospective piece of equipment must pass. To fail the Breath of Life test is to fail completely. It is to fail the very reason we supposedly invested all this time and money in our stereos in the first place: to be moved by

the music.

Electrostatic speakers are famous for having the Breath of Life. I've owned them for twenty years. The Whispers are the only dynamic speakers I've ever heard that had the speed, the transparency, the seamlessness and the utter lack of distortion needed to communicate the Breath of Life on a par with the best electrostatic designs.

But because Bill Dudleston found a way to make his cone midrange drivers behave like electrostatics, he

was able to exceed the best electrostatic designs in one critical area: dynamics. The Whisper is the first speaker in my experience that combines the transparency and delicacy of electrostatics with the power and dynamic capabilities of cone drivers. You have no idea how much compression is going

on in the midrange of most speakers until you hear the Whispers. The Mylar in an electrostatic speaker can only be made to move so far before it comes in contact with the charged wiring attracting it and fries the speaker. The 7 inch KEVLAR® drivers in the Whisper, four per side, are like the Energizer bunny: they keep going, and going, and going... Powerful signals are tuned instantaneously into equally powerful cone excursions.

The result is brass with not only the "bite" of live brass, but the power of live brass. Jimmy Smith's "Bashin'" on DCC gold CD is a prime example. When the band starts wailing on "Walk on the Wild Side" the sound of the entire horn section blowing at once stays clean, just like an electrostat. But unlike an electrostat, the louder the band wants to play, the louder the speaker wants to play. In the finale when they take it over the top you know it, the little hairs on the back of your neck know it, because the Whisper has the power to take it over the top too.

The Breath of Life isn't always as subtle as Bing Crosby's vibrato. It's also the sound of everybody in the band giving it their all and taking the music to an entirely new level, a level even they didn't know they had in them. The ideal speaker has to play that energy if it's ever to generate the feeling and excitement of the live event. I've heard that kind of excitement occasionally on other speakers; we all have. The Whisper is the only speaker I know of that is able to find and let loose every last bit of that energy on recording after recording, no matter how familiar.

And let's not forget the foundation to the music:

bass. **The Whispers eight fifteen inch woofers start and stop faster than any woofer I've ever heard.** When you hear a close-miked double bass through the Whisper, the speaker itself seems to turn into the instrument. (At nearly six feet tall it's about the right size after all.) The speed and the freedom from overhang (in the speaker and the room) and the ability to move as much air as is needed all contribute to a sound that is as close to the real thing as I can imagine.

Which is, after all, the point. The better a speaker is, the easier it is to suspend disbelief, to imagine yourself – to borrow a famous phrase – in the Living Presence of the musicians. Whether it's a studio, a concert hall or a localize instruments, combined with their ability to retrieve ambience and previously hidden details in the

music, have on more than one occasion has me imagining myself at the actual recording session, sitting at the mixing console, hands at the controls, placing each sound exactly where I want to hear it – left, right, forward and back – allotting each instrument its own carefully chosen space in the array of sounds before me, the reverberant echoes trailing far into the depths of the studio, seemingly to the vanishing point.

Think about it. A huge room full of sounds has been miniaturized, shrunk down and inscribed in the grooves of an LP or the pits of a CD, and then somehow turned back into a huge room full of sound in my house. It's nothing short of astonishing. It's as if the music had been preserved in suspended animation and some mad scientist stumbled upon the secret to bringing it back to life. This wonderful music is actually playing live, right here in my living room, floating on nothing but thin air between two big black monoliths, often thirty and forty years after it was recorded. Bill Dudleston is that mad scientist. The secret he discovered is the Whisper. It lets music live and breathe again. Hard to believe it's only a speaker.

Once you've experienced this kind of sound it's very hard to take anything else seriously. It's like the old joke about there being two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who don't. In my world there are only two kinds of speakers: those that bring music to life like the Whispers (in other words, the Whispers), and those that don't (i.e., all the other ones.) For the excitement of live sound there simply is no alternative to the Whispers. Except live music, of course.




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