

★ SPECIAL SPEAKER ISSUE ★

stereophile

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**DEFINITIVE
TECHNOLOGY'S
MYTHOS STS**

**SOMETHING
SPECIAL
FOR \$3k**



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Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower

Wes Phillips

LOUDSPEAKER

DESCRIPTION Three-way floorstanding loudspeaker with 300W powered subwoofer. Drive-units: 1" ceramic-coated aluminum tweeter, two 4.5" mineral-filled monopolymer midrange cones, 5" by 10" carbon-fiber woofer cone, two 5" by 10" bass radiators. Frequency range: 16Hz–30kHz. Sensitivity: 93dB/283V/m. Nominal impedance: 4–8 ohms. Recommended amplifier power: 20–350W.

DIMENSIONS 47.5" (1220mm) H by 5.5" (140mm) W by 8.5" (220mm) D. Base: 10.5" (270mm) W by 14" (360mm) D. Weight: 61 lbs (27.7kg).

FINISHES Satin-finished silver, gloss-black aluminum.

SERIAL NUMBERS OF UNITS REVIEWED VEIB 1207 HA 0195/0198.

PRICE \$2998/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 100.

MANUFACTURER Definitive Technology, 11433 Cronridge Drive, Suite K, Owings Mills, MD 21117-2294. Tel: (410) 363-7148. Fax: (410) 363-9998. Web: www.definitivetech.com.

John Atkinson and I were in a Manhattan loft apartment that could have stood in for every sophisticated NYC loft you've ever seen in films. We were surrounded by fabulous contemporary art. Asian and primitive art was discreetly displayed. The furniture was sparse but choice. And, over in one corner, facing a conversation grouping of paintings, two sleek metal tower loudspeakers were making extremely convincing music. We managed to delay examination of this urban paradise long enough to drink adult beverages and inhale some music.

"That's a nice soundstage," said JA, who constantly works that dry, understated Brit schtick. "And that bass player is so solid, I can almost see his fingers."

Our host, Definitive Technology's cofounder Sandy Gross, smiled his Buddha smile. "Not too shabby for \$3000," he said. "But notice that they don't look out of place here. People who like nice things won't think they're too ugly to have around."

"That's true," I chimed in. "They really do resemble a Giacometti sculpture—or a Giacometti pedestal—but it's the big pile of electronics that usually drive loudspeakers that I suspect decorators are less forgiving of."

Gross's grin widened. "True, I'm not playing them with typical high-end electronics." He pointed to two devices sitting in a nearby niche. One was the beautiful Cayin A-50T integrated amplifier (\$1295; see www.stereophile.com/integratedamps/308cay), which could also double as modern art. The source was an object so ubiquitous that 21st-century Americans don't even see it any more: a Sony PlayStation 1.

"You mean to tell me that you're getting sound like this from a system that costs less than \$5000?"

"Closer to \$4000," said Gross. "I bought the PlayStation at a garage sale for \$35."

JA and I sat there, chins touching laps, taking that in. Gross went in for the kill. "So do you think *Stereophile* might be interested in reviewing the Mythos STS SuperTower when we have production samples?"

John carefully closed his mouth and turned toward me. "Interested?"

Indeed I was.

The only joy in the world is to begin

At only 5.5" wide and 8.5" deep but 47.5" tall, the Mythos STS SuperTower is sleek and striking. It's also extremely solid. The cabinet itself is an extruded aluminum monocoque with an aluminum cap. It's bolted to a granite base that not only stabilizes the speaker with its wider stance, but anchors it as well. Both metal and plastic spikes are provided—not only to provide audiophile approval, but also to raise the base so that the speaker's power cable can escape.

That's right: power cable. Each Mythos STS contains a 300W class-D amplifier to drive its racetrack-shaped (an oval 5" by 10") carbon-fiber driver, which in turn is "pressure-coupled" to two passive 5" by 10" planar drivers. DefTech calculates this as being equivalent to having two 12" 300W subs without, as the company's literature says, "taking up all that space."



At the upper end of the Mythos STS is a D'Appolito driver array comprising a 1" (25mm) ceramic-coated, heat-treated aluminum-dome tweeter mounted between two 4.5" mineral-filled mono-polymer-cone midrange drivers with cast-aluminum baskets. The midranges have waveguides as well as DefTech's Balanced Dual Surround System (BDSS), in which surrounds placed at the inner and outer edges of the cone "provide better mechanical stability," said DefTech VP Paul DiComo.

"What?"

"Okay, more linear excursion."

The STS's cabinets are internally

damped by a combination of extruded ribs and inert materials. The baffles—made of Polystone, a dense, polymer-based material said to be nonresonant—are slightly oversized and have to be compressed to fit, says DefTech, thus adding to the structure more *inertitude*. The cabinets and baffle certainly passed the knuckle-rap test: dull *thuds*, no ringing. The enclosure's subwoofer and mid/HF sections are separated from one another by two plates of MDF.

The Mythos STS is rated at 93dB sensitivity. "Well, there's not much in there for an external amplifier to drive," DiComo helpfully pointed out.

Joy comes from using your potential

The Mythos STS SuperTowers weren't difficult to set up. In theory, you bolt on the granite bases, plug in the subs, and attach the speaker cables. At my house, things were more complicated. The Mythos's five-way binding posts are recessed into its cabinet, and none of my audiophile-approved reference cables—all of which have spades—would fit. Audience's John McDonald came to my rescue with a set of Conductor speaker cables.

Although I'd heard the STS SuperTowers sound superb in Sandy Gross's far

MEASUREMENTS

The Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower is specified as having a high voltage sensitivity: 93dB/2.83V/m. My estimate of its sensitivity, taken on its tweeter axis, was not quite as high, at 91.5dB(B)/2.83V/m, but this is still much higher than average. The Mythos STS will work very well with low-powered amplifiers, such as the Cayin integrated with which I auditioned the speakers at Sandy Gross's apartment. The speaker's impedance (fig.1) hardly drops below 4 ohms, but the use of a passive high-pass

filter for the midrange units does lead to an awkward combination of 4.5 ohms magnitude and -50° capacitive phase angle at 80Hz. Tube amplifiers will work best with the STS when used from their 4 ohm taps.

The impedance traces are free from the small glitches that would imply the presence of cabinet resonances of various kinds. Even so, investigating the slim, solid-feeling enclosure's vibrational behavior uncovered a couple of fairly strong modes around 340Hz on the sidewalls level with the lower midrange unit (fig.2). However, the affected area was restricted; there will probably be no subjectively audible consequences of this behavior.

Turning to the Mythos's acoustic output, the green trace in fig.3 shows the nearfield response of the powered woofer, the red traces that of the bass radiators. The sharp notch at 52Hz in the woofer's output indicates that this is its tuning frequency. However, the rise in the bass radiators' output below that frequency indicates that some low-bass equalization has been applied, while the sharp rolloff below 32Hz is due to an infrasonic filter, presumably used to protect the LF unit and radiators from subsonic overload. The blue trace in fig.3 is the nearfield output of the woofer; it rolls off sharply below

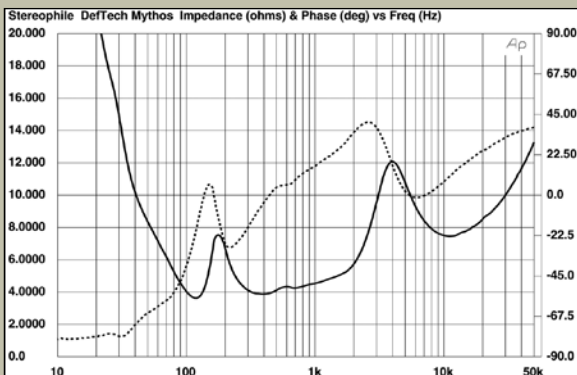


Fig.1 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed). (2 ohms/vertical div.)

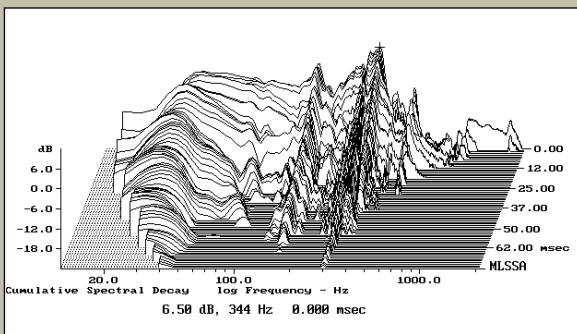


Fig.2 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from the output of an accelerometer fastened to the center of the sidewall 10" from the top (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz).

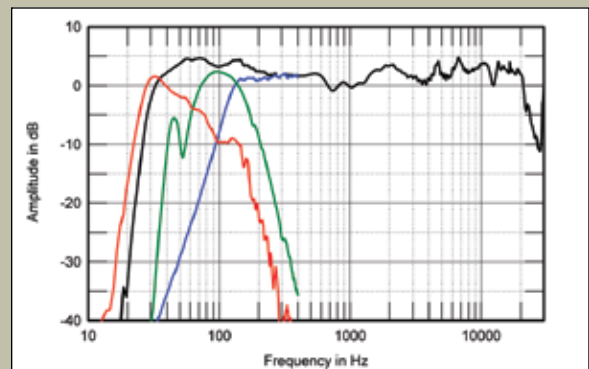


Fig.3 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50", averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with the nearfield responses of the midrange unit (blue), woofer (green), and bass radiators (red), plotted in the ratios of the square roots of their radiating areas below 400Hz, 400Hz, and 350Hz, respectively, and the complex sum of the nearfield responses plotted below 350Hz (black).

larger apartment, as well as at the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show, they didn't get on well in *my* large listening room. To get the timbral balance right, I had to turn up the subwoofers' bass output, which led to a slightly cardboardy sound in the transition from the deep to the midbass. Gross's secret may have been his setup expertise (he'd set the speakers up diagonally in a room corner), or it may have been his lovely Cayin amp. Because I knew the SuperTowers were capable of much better sound than I was getting, I moved them downstairs to my smaller dedicated listening room and dialed the bass down.

Great Googly-Moogly! Suddenly I had deep bass, natural mids, silky highs—and a huge freaking grin on my puss. This *was* going to be fun.

Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is

Two minor setup details: The STS SuperTower's bass-control knobs were a bit twitchy—a little dab'll do ya. And ditch the grilles. Your interior decorator will be horrified, but after she's cashed the check, it's *your* room again. You can even bring back that comfy chair you had to hide from her.

You'll want that chair in the sweet

spot, because the Mythos will keep you there for hours. At least, that's what kept happening to me. I'd grab a CD with a reference track I've used before and cue it up—for example, "At the Café Central," from David Murray's *Shakill's Warrior* (CD, DIW/Columbia CK 48963)—and the next thing I knew, I'd be lost in the music, having let five or six tracks go by without taking any notes.

Damned music just wouldn't let me work.

I turned "At the Café Central" up pretty loud. The STSes could really dish it out, from Murray's big, brassy tenor sax to Don Pullen's thunderously percussive

150Hz, which will ameliorate the potential drive difficulty below 100Hz. The level matching between midrange unit and woofer in this graph will be affected by the latter's gain control, but set to Flat, there is a little overlap in the drivers' outputs in the crossover region, which gives rise to a slight boost in summed outputs in the upper bass (black trace below 350Hz).

Higher in frequency, the Mythos's quasi-anechoic response, averaged across a 30° horizontal angle on the tweeter axis (fig.3, black trace above 350Hz), shows a

slight lack of energy in the upper midrange. Whether the listener perceives this as an absence or as a boost in the lower midrange and treble will depend on the music being played. I suspect that it is this slight imbalance that led to WP's comment about some sung notes being emphasized at the expense of others. The dip above the audioband, followed by the rise to the 30kHz limit of this graph, are due to the tweeter's dome resonance, which is commendably high in frequency and well above audibility.

The response in fig.3 was taken with the grille removed.

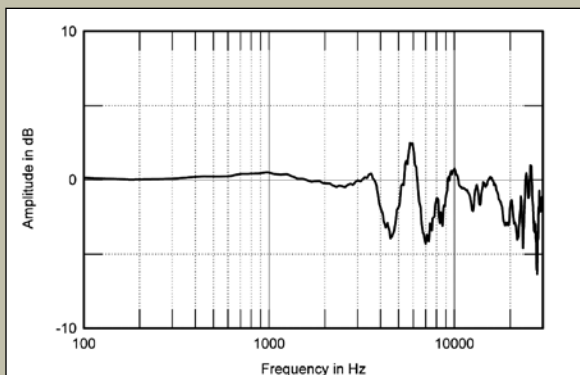


Fig.4 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, effect of grille on anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50° (5dB/vertical div).

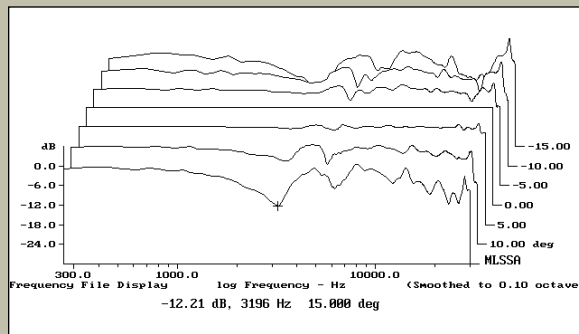


Fig.6 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 15–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5–15° below axis.

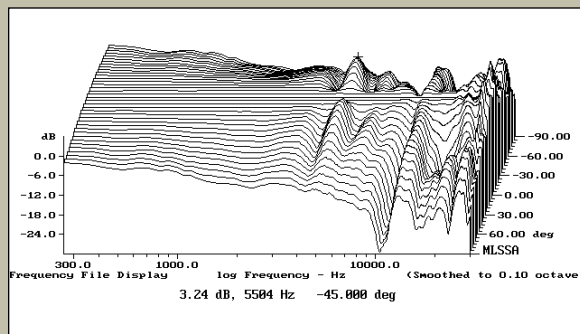


Fig.5 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90–5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5–90° off axis.

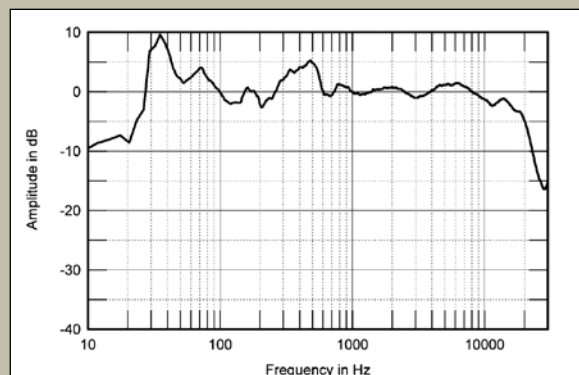


Fig.7 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, spatially averaged, 1/6-octave response without grilles in WP's listening room.

Hammond B3. The DefTechs dug deep, too—Andrew Cyrille's kick drum had enough impact to blow out a candle.

Best of all, the speakers had no problem floating a convincingly life-sized soundstage that stretched the full 75" between them. Okay, maybe you couldn't quite fit a jazz quartet in that space, but the band sure didn't sound small.

While I was attempting to turn a box of office detritus into organized and alphabetized books and CDs, I discovered a sealed copy of the 2001 remastering of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* (SACD, Virgin 50733). Musing that I hadn't listened to this album since my lodgings reeked of pot and patchouli, I decided to open it and check out the first few minutes of Simon Heyworth's two-channel remix on the PCM track. Stop me if you've heard this one: Next thing I knew, Viv Stanshall was introducing the instruments—the part that, back in the day, signaled the end of side 1 and time for a munchie run.

Okay, that's not entirely true—I wasn't so lost in the music that I didn't pinch myself several times just to make sure I wasn't dreaming those intensely deep organ-pedal tones, the naturalness of that Girlie chorus, and, at the climax, the overtone clangor of the titular tubular bells.

Again, I was impressed by the immersive quality of the soundstage and the top-to-bottom solidity of the sound. The deep organ notes didn't have a separate, "subwoofery" quality from the mids and highs, but were cut from the same sonic staff paper. I was also able to turn the music up to satisfying rock levels without the speakers sounding shouty or strident. Not that I had to—I just could if I wanted.

Chant Mozarabe, a recording of Mozarabic chant by Marcel Pérès and Ensemble Organum (CD, Harmonia Mundi 901519), is one disc that I never expect to hear just a few tunes from.

The music is so enthralling, the acoustic captured so realistically, and the performances so compelling, that I know I'm in for the duration of both services. And so it was with the STSes.

I knew that the DefTechs could handle the big and the brawny, but they were exceptional at capturing the small details that put the magic in *Chant Mozarabe*. The Ensemble Organum sounded reasonably life-sized, and the acoustic, while far from turning my room into a chapel, was convincingly huge. Immense, really.

Mozarabic chant isn't like Gregorian chant. (*Mozarabic* means *non-Muslim*, and refers to Christians living in Iberia under Islamic rule.) It predates the 11th-century liturgical reform, and even survived Alfonso el Sabio's decision to "replace" it with Carolingian Gregorian liturgy. The Spanish churches simply didn't comply—in fact, some monasteries set their scriptoria to painstakingly "fix" the melodies on

measurements, continued

Wes did comment that he didn't like the sound with the grilles on. The difference made by adding the grille is shown in fig.4; it obviously has a large effect on the sound, but if you compare figs. 3 and 4, the treble response is actually a little smoother with the grille in place. The horizontal dispersion without the grille in place is shown in fig.5. Again, by comparison with the response in fig.3, the dip at around 5.5kHz can be seen to fill in to the speaker's sides, though the off-axis notch at 10kHz is real enough. Vertically (fig.6), the use of a D'Appolito array for the upper-frequency drive-units results in a balance that doesn't change significantly over quite a wide angle.

Fig.7 shows how these quasi-anechoic response measurements sum in WP's smaller listening room. The treble balance is also exceptionally even, though perhaps with a bit too much upper-octave energy when you consider the increased absorption of the room furnishings in this region. The woofer-level controls were set to WP's preferred positions; this results in a little too much energy below 100Hz, with then a steep

rolloff below 30Hz. I am not surprised that Wes liked the DefTech's low frequencies. What did surprise me was the excess of in-room energy in the middle midrange, which I had not expected to be as pronounced from the on-axis response and the dispersion plots. I could hear this excess as a touch of "character" added to string music, which made violas sound a little more like cellos.

Turning to the time domain, the Mythos STS's step response on the tweeter axis (fig.8) indicates that all three drive-units are connected with positive acoustic polarity, with each one's step smoothly integrated with that of the next lower in frequency on this axis. This is optimal crossover design. The cumulative spectral-decay plot (fig.9) is respectably clean, though some low-level resonant modes can be seen at the bottom of the tweeter's passband, these due presumably to residual cone-breakup modes that have not been fully suppressed by the crossover filter. Nevertheless, they are low in level.

Overall, its measurements reveal the Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower to be well engineered.

—John Atkinson

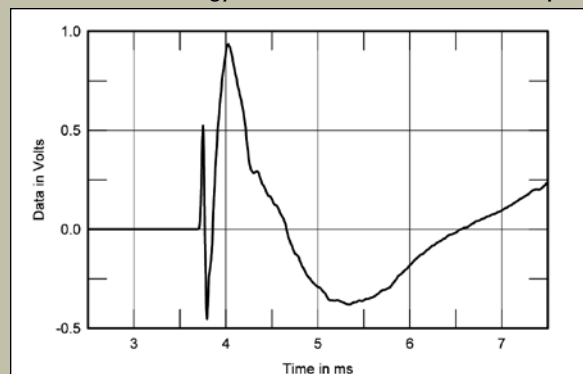


Fig.8 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

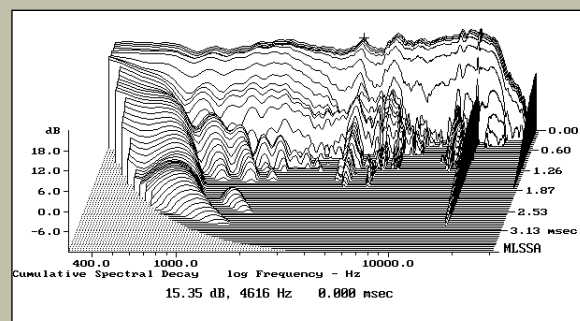


Fig.9 Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50° (0.15ms risetime).

parchment, which is how we can know what it sounded like (unlike the approximate notation of *campo aperto*).

I offer this little slab of musical pedagogy not to show off, but to say that Mozarabic chant is different—it includes wild harmonic intervals never heard in Gregorian chant or polyphony. The STSes delivered those flatted fifths and sevenths with ear-dropping accuracy—there's just something about a nice, clanging harmonic cutting through a bed of acoustic sustain that lesser speakers don't quite capture. The DefTechs neither toned down the clang nor fuzzed up the suspension: the jewel stood out on its field.

Chant Mozarabe set me off on another of those threads along which one attempts to pursue a sustained segue by pulling out recordings in a similar vein—old standbys like Trio Mediaeval, the Tallis Scholars, the Hilliard Ensemble. However, after hearing Pèrès through the DefTechs, I couldn't sustain interest for such a survey. As I said, Mozarabic chant is different. It can spoil you—as can the Mythos STS.

I trust all joy

The compare-and-contrast part of a review is usually pretty straightforward. Luxury speakers should be pitted against one another, as should budget integrations, and so on. The Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower posed a bit of a problem, however. It's an unusually elegant floorstanding loudspeaker that definitely qualifies as full-range, yet its price puts it in the range we audiophiles call “affordable,” meaning that its cost approaches a house payment rather than the whole mortgage. Should I compare the STS to other speakers at its price? Other floorstanders? Full-size reference speakers?

After wrestling with this for a while, I came up with a simple solution: I would compare the DefTech to the Usher Audio Be-718—a speaker that, at \$3000/pair, had also impressed me as punching above its class when I reviewed it in May. Also, I had a pair sitting outside my smaller listening room.

But while the Be-718 had robust bass for a stand-mounted two-way, it simply couldn't match the Mythos's bottom-end slam on David Murray's “At the Café Central.” When Pullen literally pulls out the stops, the DefTechs captured the chest-slapping force of his Leslie Model 147 speaker without breaking a sweat. The Usher simply couldn't compete on the down-low, although it deftly followed Murray's

lightning-fast waves of sound during the tenorman's breakout solo—and they didn't downsize *him* one jot.

With *Tubular Bells*, the Ushers again just didn't have the deep foundation that the DefTechs provided, although Oldfield's electric guitar and Farfisa organ were somewhat smoother in timbre. The DefTechs seem to emphasize certain tones over their neighbors in the upper midrange—not much, but there was a faint whiff of glassiness on those tones.

Chant Mozarabe's acoustic was larger and more real through the DefTechs. It

Pèrès was singing with great force, and is not a “smooth” singer (not a criticism), but the Be-718 didn't react in this way—although it must be said that the Usher has its own slight tinge in the upper mids, so I don't completely absolve them from editorializing. I could easily live with either speaker's deviation from flat, but you should listen for yourself to see if *you* could.

The Usher Be-718 is a very impressive loudspeaker, and there are definitely those audiophiles who will prefer a stand-mounted two-way to a subwoofered tow-

THE DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY MYTHOS STS SUPERTOWER JUST MIGHT BE THE **BEST LOUDSPEAKER I'VE HEARD** FOR \$3000/PAIR.

happens to me frequently, but it comes as a surprise every time: Speakers that can truly reproduce deep, deep bass can float a room sound that's so light and natural and delicate that you'd swear there's nothing going on down there. Obviously, there is.

I also listened to David Russell's *Aire Latino* (CD, Telarc CD-80612). Obviously, with a solo classical guitar, there is nothing going on down there, but with the STS's sub, Russell's guitar sounded more like a guitar in a very real room.

I noticed again that when Marcel Pèrès hit certain notes in his solo passages, the STS gave some of them a different emphasis than others. Granted,

er, but those subs give the STSes a little something extra—and not only at 20Hz.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever

Holy crap! Did I just say the Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower puts out 20Hz? It's actually rated to 16Hz, but I'm not sure my room can sustain that note. Certainly, the STS lacked nothing in the deep bass. Down there, it had power *and* glory.

There's something special about a speaker that can do that, but where the DefTechs really shone was in their effortless creation of a sonic holograph of the original musical event. Those events sounded real, they sounded *right there*, and they sounded solid enough to reach out and touch.

Is the Mythos STS perfect? Not quite. There's that slight glassiness I heard in the upper mids—an effect that wasn't so much a coloration as a difference in articulation. Some listeners will react to this more intensely than I did.

But that's little more than a mote in the eye compared to the timber balks of things the STS did right. It looks stylish, and it visually disappears into a room—if those qualities matter to you. And if performance is your thing, it has gobs of that. It just might be the best loudspeaker I've heard for \$3000/pair. Surely there's not another that matches the Mythos STS's top-to-bottom coherence. If there is, I want to hear it. In fact, *bring it on*. Until then, the Definitive Technology Mythos STS SuperTower will be the speaker to beat in at least one of my listening rooms. Maybe in yours, too. ■

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

DIGITAL SOURCES Ayre C-5xe universal player, McIntosh MS750 media server, Bel Canto e.One CD2 CD transport & e.One DAC3 D/A processor.

PREAMPLIFIERS Ayre K-1xe, VTL Reference TL-6.5.

POWER AMPLIFIERS Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 300 & Musical Fidelity XA-200 monoblocks.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS Ayre AX-7e, Portal Panache.

LOUDSPEAKERS Usher Be-718.

CABLES Digital: Stereovox XV2. Interconnect: Audience Conductor. Speaker: Audience Conductor.

ACCESSORIES Furutech eTP-609 distribution box, Ayre L-5xe line filter, APC APCS15 AC line conditioner; Furutech RDP panels, RealTraps Mini & Mondo Traps.

—Wes Phillips