

# BUFFALO NEWS

Sunday, October 14, 1979  
THE BUFFALO NEWS

## World of Stereo

### Research Updates 'New England' Sound

By TOM KREHBIEL

I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME during the past few weeks listening to a new product from an old company. The company is Acoustic research, usually called AR, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

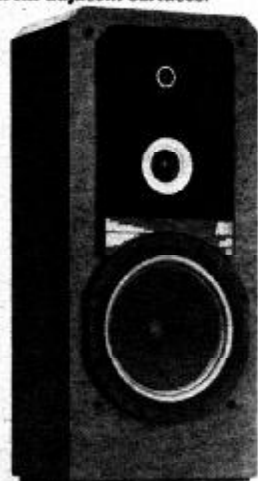
The product is their AR91 speaker system. It's a three-way design (woofer, mid-range, and tweeter speakers reproduce low, middle, and high range sounds) with an acoustic suspension woofer, very much in the tradition of the fine old AR-3.

The AR91 breaks with tradition in being officially designed for floor use, rather than carrying the "bookshelf" designation applied to all previous three-way AR speakers.

AR HAS introduced a full line of "Verticals" which are supposed to offer their optimum performance when standing on the floor and against a wall.

Bookshelf systems generally do their best when on a shelf or recessed into a wall so that their front panels are flush with the surrounding surface. Few ever receive that treatment.

Most end up on the floor where tweeters are well below ear level and woofers suffer from destructive reflections from adjacent surfaces.



AR ACOUSTIC SPEAKER

Ar's vertical speakers attack these problems in a number of ways. First they're tall enough to get the tweeters and mid-range speakers up to a more listenable height. The cabinets are shaped to minimize room boundary interference.

THE THREE speakers on the front of each cabinet are mounted along a vertical line to improve stereo imaging and an "acoustic blanket" surrounds the tweeter and midrange to reduce diffraction effects which are often blamed when a speaker has a "boxy" sound.

The theory sounds good, but the test is how the speakers sound.

When I first hooked them up, I had some doubts. I wasn't overwhelmed. In fact I thought the bass response might be a little thin. I was sure the treble was a little bright.

The treble response smoothed out perfectly when I dropped the mid- and high-range switches down one position. They're located on the back panel of the speaker enclosure.

That's not too convenient a spot, but once they're set they won't need readjusting unless you move the speakers to a very different acoustical environment.

I should explain that the reason this adjustment had to be made was that my listening room is fairly live acoustically. The carpet is not wall-to-wall, the drapes are fairly light, and there's only one piece of upholstered furniture in the room.

One this adjustment was made, I listened some more. I listened to records that were well recorded and poorly recorded, direct cut and digitally mastered, familiar and unfamiliar.

The more I listened, the better the AR91s sounded. I found that the bass was not thin at all, it was simply exceptionally smooth. A friend of mine (who incidentally uses a pair of AR9 speakers, the first and largest of the AR Vertical line) loaned me his copy of Telarc's digitally mastered recording of Holst's "Suites for Military Band."

When I felt the floor vibrating from the bass drum, I knew the AR91 would come through with all the bass response called for by the program material being played.

Stereo imaging seemed adequate, but I'm probably a poor judge of that. I never hear too much "stereo imaging" when I'm listening to live music, so I'm not sure just what it is a speaker is supposed to do.

ONE OF THE things I like best about these speakers has little to do with performance. It's their physical appearance.

Although they are definitely larger than bookshelf units, the AR91s are fairly compact. The slim front to back dimension (which AR claims helps keep bass response smooth) and the faceted upper corners of the enclosure help the speakers fit into a room without overpowering it.

At a suggested price of \$400 each, the AR91 is not an inexpensive speaker. If you audition it in a store, you may not be overwhelmed by its virtues. It isn't that kind of a speaker.

But special performance characteristics that sound like "virtues" when listening for a short while in a dealer's sound room can soon turn to irritating quirks when heard every day.

The AR91 has no quirks and that's probably the greatest virtue a speaker can claim.

If you have a problem or question on hi-fi or stereo, write to Tom Krehbiel, Box 1422, Station H, Buffalo, NY 14214. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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of THE BUFFALO NEWS  
October 14, 1979

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