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## SILVERLINE AUDIO LA FOLIA LOUDSPEAKERS

Scot Markwell



Alan Yun's loudspeaker company, Silverline Audio, has been turning out winner after winner these last few years, and the latest example of the breed, his model called La Folia, is no exception. Slim, beautifully finished (mine were rosewood), 43" tall, four-way towers that each have a silk dome tweeter, a Dynaudio soft-dome midrange driver, and a 7" cone mid-woofer mounted on the front baffle along with a rear-mounted, rear-ported 11" woofer, the LaFolia is, at 92 db/watt sensitivity and an easy 8 ohm load, a candidate for either high-quality tube or solid-state amplification. I had the opportunity to try it with Crown Macro Reference and Plinius SA-250 Mk IV SS amps, and a set of AtmaSphere M-60 OTL monoblocks, as well as a variety of smaller SET amps, and the La Folia proved to be compatible with all of them, allowing the virtues and vices of each amplifier to be plainly heard.

In the beginning, I did not really know what to expect from different equipment partnerings with the La Folias, so I started with the AtmaSphere MP-1 preamp (connected in balanced mode) to the AtmaSphere M60 mono OTL amps. This combination could not have been more fortuitous, and I did the bulk of my listening with this setup. The two AtmaSphere pieces worked together to give a smooth, punchy, extended sound with excellent dynamic contrasts, as well as an exceptionally 3-dimensional expansive soundstage, all with a grainlessness and liquidity that was not only complimentary to the music, but relatively uncolored, as well.

With their good sensitivity and a rated 300 watt/channel amp maximum, the La Folias can be played quite loudly with little or no audible distortion. They are quite dynamic and able to handle major whacks in the bass department without distress; the only time I heard them give up the ghost was when played the big cuts from *Gladiator* [Decca/Universal 289 467 094-2] all-out with a Plinius SA-250 driving them. Hell, it may have been the amp clipping, to tell the truth. But these speakers will play *seriously* loud and not lose their composure.

In my experience with them, the La Folias were devilish to place correctly in a room. In my usual area of good sound, they had an odd thinnish midrange balance with a bass bloat that was just not acceptable, and I began to waltz them about to try and find a sweet spot. Interestingly, I ended up with the speakers much closer than usual to the wall (about 20" away), mainly in order to dampen a slight upper mid-bass spike (around 80-90 Hz). After another week or so, that spike gradually smoothed out and I was able to pull them a bit more into the room until I had the speakers about

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30" from the rear wall. At this point they began to develop a good bit more depth and soundstage width, managing to create a seamless and coherent sonic image across my listening room.

The first thing that I noticed in casual listening to the La Folias was that they had a tight and constricted sound across the full bandwidth, especially in the bass, where it sounded positively constipated. Yun assured me that this was the case because this set of Rosewood speakers was brand new, and needed about 200 hours of play to loosen up and fly right. Nothing like torturing the reviewer to ensure a great evaluation. I confirmed this run-in recommendation with my esteemed colleague, Marty DeWolf of *Bound for Sound*, who had reviewed a set of these loudspeakers some time before me. With him telling me essentially the same story, I simply set them to playing a CD on repeat and waited. And waited...

Then one day....

I finally could not take it any more.<sup>1</sup> Listening to the same hokey burn-in CD being played ad nauseam was killing me. So, after about 10 days I decided that I was going to hear some real music even if it pained my ears. Well, sure enough, by the time that I got around to doing this the speakers had loosened up to a remarkable degree, and the first LP that I put on, Nancy Bryan's *Neon Angel* (Acoustic Sounds AAPO 2013-45/45 RPM double album), came pouring forth from the speakers in a liquid wave that was all subtlety and sweetness and nuance in the highs and mids, with powerful, tight, and dynamic bass.

Now, although *Neon Angel* is a wonderful album, it is not the last word in hard transients, explosive dynamics and sledgehammer bass, so I cued up a song from another pop/rock record that is, "Hard Headed Woman" from Cat Stevens' *Tea for the Tillerman* (MFQR 1-0350). This cut really showed me what the La Folias could do when presented with steep wavefronts of vocal and percussive material, and also served as a reminder that sometimes there is just no substitute for cubic inches (watts). This song, at anything other than rather tame volume, would easily bottom any amp I had around except for the Plinius SA 250 and the Crown Macro Reference. But what a report! Some of Yun's designs in the past have sacrificed power and punch for sweetness and agreeability, but not the La Folias! These things can really dish out the bombast, if the material merits the onslaught. Saturn, Mars, and Uranus from Holst's *The Planets* (London CS 6734, with the LA Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta) have some remarkably hard and loud kettledrum and bass drum smacks, as well as pedal organ tones, that are high enough in level to really get some air moving, and the kettledrums, in particular, will sound sloppy and slow if the bass tuning of a speaker is not just right.

Through the La Folias, this record sounded tight and visceral, with excellent pitch definition to the upright basses, as well as a realistic sense of rosin on the bows. These things are not as fast and tight as the big Horning Alkibiades Golds, but they do well in comparison to them and to live music, too, not to mention that they are less than half the price of the Hornings.

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Interestingly, digital and analogue sources sounded closer together in quality than on some other speakers that I have auditioned lately. A CD such as Bob Dylan's *Unplugged* [Columbia CK 67000] came off sounding as good as, and in some ways better, than my excellent mono copies of some of his earliest albums on vinyl, which are so good that you would swear Bob is in the room with you. I cannot easily account for this phenomenon, as phono sources almost always sound superior to even really good digital in my system, but here I never felt that one medium or the other was being given short-shrift. This is quite a positive thing, by the way, and I wish that it were the case with many another speaker system that I have heard.

There are a couple areas where I do wish for a little more from the La Folias. I felt that the midrange, although beautifully captured with the soft dome, was just a bit too "tame" and slightly lacking in sparkle/attack and bloom next to the tweeter. But it did get better as time went on. And Yun's bass tuning was, I feel, a little on the sloppy side of tight. Not much, but one could tell with the right source material that this was a ported system. Not like the Aerial 10T, where the tuning is a low 20 Hz and virtually inaudible. Great, tuneful bass, just a *little* bit more on the tight knob, Alan! Again, to be fair, the sound of the bass on these speakers did evolve dramatically as I played them, and they may get even tighter with time. But I have to hear other things to keep on my review schedule, so I farmed them out to a buddy to see how they will sound with another month or so under their belts. I will let you know if things change significantly.

As I wound down listening for this review, I was quite sure that I had not yet reached full equilibrium with these speakers; I felt as if they were still evolving and changing. Quite a pain in the butt, frankly, but the level of musicality, dynamic "oomph", tonal integrity, harmonic "rightness", and dimensional realism that I was able to coax from the La Folias made them a truly enjoyable listening partner. In some ways, the speakers were good enough that I feel that they cried out for even better ancillary components than I had on hand to play with them. I liked them almost as much as the big Hornings, and that is saying a lot. You certainly get a lot of speaker for \$7,999. This is a lot of money, yes, and at this level the competition is tough, but the La Folias are a solidly good value with performance and looks that will allow them to play competitively in some pretty rarified company. Short of his new \$20,000 Sinfonia, the La Folias are the best Silverline loudspeaker that I have yet heard.

<sup>1</sup> [I feel that I should add at this point a note that the La Folias require much more break-in time than any other speaker I have ever used except for the Horning Alkibiades, and as such, purchasers should be made aware by their dealer that the sound of the speakers will change over a few months, first sounding a bit thin and screechy, then pretty agreeable, then thick and bloated, then slowly back to their best: smooth and rich, with an ever-so-slightly recessed midband, a sweet, extended treble, and potent bass, especially the midbass.]

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## **Associated Equipment**

Lamhorn 1.8 loudspeakers, VPI HW-19 MK IV turntable w/ JMW Memorial 10.5 arm and SAMA (Stand Alone Motor Assembly), VPI Synchronous Drive Unit motor controller; Lyra Evolve 99, Sakura Systems/47 Labs Miyabi, Dynavector DV XV1, Clearaudio Sigma wood body, Benz LP MC cartridges; Marigo Audio Labs MR 20.2 PH/F, Hovland Groove 2, and EX Cell Power Solutions Groove Tube phono interconnects; Siltech Gen 3 and Gen 5 interconnects, Siltech LS 180 Gen 3 speaker cable, Audio Magic silver interconnects; Stealth Audio Silver and gold interconnects and silver ribbon speaker cables; Wyetech Labs Jade (tubed), Plinius CD-LAD and MBL 6010D (SS) preamplifiers; Plinius M-14, Clearaudio Balance (SS), and Hagerman Trumpet (tubed) phono sections, Forsell Air Reference CD Drive; EAD TheatreMaster DAC; Custom Power Cord Company Green Hornet II coaxial digital cable; Coincident Speaker Technology SIP 300B SET stereo integrated amplifier; Wyetech Labs Topaz 572B stereo SET amplifier; Vaic VV 52B ST integrated amplifier; Zanden 7000 845 SET stereo amplifier; Dehavilland Aries 845 SET mono amplifiers, Atma-Sphere M-60 mono OTL amplifiers, Plinius SA-100 SS stereo amplifier, Crown Macro Reference and Indigo BASH 200 wpc SS stereo amplifiers for subwoofers; 2 x VBT Magellan subwoofers, Custom Power Cord Company Top Gun HCFi A/C power cords and super power block, Arcic Suspense Rack.



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