

# GoldenEar Technology Triton Two+ Loudspeaker

By: Dennis Burger



Every year, right around this time, I go to my bookshelf and pull down my all-time favorite book for yet another read. You'd be forgiven for assuming it is *The Lord of the Rings* or something related to *Star Wars*. But no, it's actually *The Ancestor's Tale* by Richard Dawkins and Yan Wong--a dense exploration of the tree of life, from twigs (all current life on earth) to roots (the ancestor of us all), with strong emphasis on the molecular evidence for how we're related to the rest of life and what sort of world our common ancestors probably lived in.

Of course, in the 12 years since its original publication, some of the book's observations have grown outdated. Incomplete evidence that pointed in one direction a decade ago has been superseded by firmer evidence that points in slightly different directions. So this year, instead of digging into my well-worn, autographed first edition, I'm reading

the new revised and expanded edition for the first time. At its heart, it's still the same book I've cherished for years now; it simply benefits from more than 10 years of poking and prodding at the interwoven strands of nucleic acid that make you you, and me me...and chimps chimps, and bananas bananas.

I'm not here to review *The Ancestor's Tale*, of course. I'm here to review the revised and updated Triton Two+ speaker from GoldenEar Technology. But my mind keeps returning to the similarities between the two. After all, when it was released in 2010, the then-flagship Triton Two rocked the audio market with unparalleled transparency, detail, and dynamics in its price range. However, the company has, if you'll forgive the heavy-handed comparison, evolved quite a bit since then. All of the new research and development that led to the company's flagship Triton One hasn't rendered the original Triton Two obsolete by any measure, but to think that GoldenEar's half-decade-old tower speaker wouldn't benefit greatly from those advancements would just be silly.

As such, the Triton Two+ (\$1,749 each) borrows heavily from its larger sibling in a number of ways. What's new this time around? The upper-bass/midrange drivers, for one thing, which feature a new cone, surround, spider, and voice coil. The Triton Two+ also benefits from a new crossover design and a completely reprogrammed DSP for the active low-frequency section, based on that of the Triton One, with fewer filter stages in the signal path. That's a pretty broad view of the physical

changes, but it doesn't cover the hours upon hours spent listening and tweaking the new design. Those tiny little tweaks here and there add up to a significantly upgraded speaker.

If there's an applicable biological metaphor to be made here, I think horizontal gene transfer is the mechanism that fits best. By that I mean that the Triton Two+ isn't a wholly new organism; it's simply one that's more robust, thanks to a fresh injection of more advanced DNA. It's also better equipped to woo new listeners in an era in which the Triton One has changed the audio landscape to a significant degree.

### **The Hookup**

While a lot has changed about the Triton Two+, one thing remains the same: its form factor. That includes its connectivity, which remains a bit too cramped for my taste. Connecting the speakers to my Peachtree Audio nova220SE Integrated Amplifier via a pair of Kimber Kable 12TC speaker cables proved to be a little cumbersome due to the tight spacing of the speaker's vertically stacked binding posts.

That aside, I found them even easier to position and dial in than the much larger Triton One. For one thing, the Triton Two+ weighs a good 20 pounds less than its larger sibling, and it stands six inches shorter, making it much easier to unbox and relocate. It's not just that, though; I also found them to be a little less particular in terms of placement, especially in terms of distance from boundaries.



They do, of course, still need a power mains connection for each speaker (for the 1,200-watt amplifier driving the pair of five- by nine-inch long-throw high-output quadratic bass drivers coupled to dual seven- by 10-inch quadratic planar infrasonic radiators in each speaker). And you'll need to spend some time finding the right setting for the Subwoofer Level knob. Since the sub and speaker are built into the same cabinet, you might find yourself with a bit of back-and-forth

on your hands--tweaking the level, scootching the speaker just a little, tweaking the level, tinkering with toe-in. In the end, though, it only took me about 10 minutes or so to find the right balance, versus what I'm guessing was around a half hour or so for the Triton Ones (if memory serves).

As with all of GoldenEar's hybrid active/passive tower speakers, the Triton Two+ also features an LFE input in addition to its speaker-level inputs. Since the focus of my evaluation was entirely on two-channel performance, and my integrated amp doesn't do bass management, I didn't make use of the LFE inputs.

### **Performance**

One other note about my setup that perhaps bears mentioning here: I was also fortunate enough to have a pair of Triton Ones in the same room with me during my evaluation of the Triton Two+. Thankfully, the ideal positions of each set of speakers didn't overlap (the Two+ speakers sounded their best a little closer to the wall behind them and a little closer together), so I didn't have to move any big black boxes to compare them in the same room. Sometimes I compared them by changing the speaker cables between them, although that did take a few minutes. Sometimes I compared them by hooking the Triton Ones up to Classé's new Sigma 2200i integrated amplifier and the Triton Two+s to the Peachtree nova220SE, both fed via USB connection from my Maingear Vybe media PC, running JRiver Media Center 20. And vice versa.

In the end, none of these comparisons was perfect because I couldn't A/B them with identical gear from top to bottom. But one thing was clear from my testing: the Triton Two+ and Triton One sound remarkably similar in many respects. In fact, I'd go so far as to chalk up most of the difference between them to simply physics: differences in cabinet size, differences in the number of active and passive bass drivers, and a 25 percent difference in the power feeding those drivers.



But that's not as big a difference as you might expect. Some of that is certainly due to the fact that I just don't have room in my house to crank the Triton One to its fullest potential without doing serious damage to hearing and property. When played at the same level in the same room, taking into account the differences in size, I'd have to say the biggest audible difference between them is that the Triton Two+ is a little more laid back in the very upper frequencies (from 10 kHz up to and beyond the point where my hearing gives out, just above 17 kHz), but it's still noticeably enhanced in this range as compared with most speakers. Other than that, it really just mostly boils down to a difference in output and, to a lesser degree, dynamic punch in the lower end.

As such, I found it difficult to talk about the Triton Two+ on its own terms without plagiarizing my last GoldenEar review.

I found myself returning time and again to the same tracks I love to listen to through the Triton One. The only way to solve that, really, was just to put my music collection on shuffle and jot down my observations on whatever happened to come up. Thankfully, the Triton Two+ sounds downright amazing with pretty much any genre of music.

The first track to come up was "The Lighthouse's Tale" by Nickel Creek, from their eponymous first album (Sugar Hill Records), which begins with a chord that embodies nearly everything I love about the Triton Two+. It's a beautifully rendered medley of harmonics that doesn't just ring through the air between speakers and ears; it positively excites that air. I could honestly write a thousand words about the way the Triton Two+ conveys that simple two seconds of audio: the genuine sense of space created by those few damped-and-plucked strings; the way it decays like a real instrument in a real room, not like a sound that merely increases and decreases in amplitude; the way you can very nearly feel the texture of each string.



You can, of course, chalk much of that up to GoldenEar's trademark High-Velocity Folded Ribbon Tweeter, which is renowned for its ability to cut through the air like a lightsaber through Jell-O. Once the song kicks in for real, though, no one driver steals the show here. Every element of the Triton Two+ works in harmony to create a rich, nuanced, captivating landscape of audio bliss that's so beautifully balanced, no one aspect of the music really draws attention to itself over the rest of the mix. Indeed, every element of the mix seems so perfectly proportioned and interwoven--from Chris Thile's

energetic mandolin and Scott Thile's loping acoustic on the left side of the room, to Sara Watkins' mournful violin and Sean Watkins' weighty acoustic guitar on the right, with Chris's flawlessly rendered vocals filling the space between them--that the song becomes less a thing to listen to passively and more a space to crawl around in and explore.

I'll admit, I very nearly broke my own rule and skipped the next track in my random rotation, since it's not one I've ever thought to be particularly interesting from a purely sonic standpoint. Cake's "Shadow Stabbing" from the album *Comfort Eagle* (Columbia) proved me wrong, though. The track begins with a decidedly lo-fi, overly processed and amplified acoustic guitar riff, and I found no surprises there. But when the bass line kicks in a few seconds later, there's just no denying that there's something special going on here. Simply put, it's flawlessly rendered: powerful but nuanced, the sort of bass delivery that just does tingly things to your tasty bits. Perhaps most surprising, though, is the soundstage. I've listened to this song hundreds of times through more speakers and headphones that I'd ever dare try to count, and I've never realized just how much the shape of the soundscape fluctuates. How the rhythm guitar riffs in the early parts of first verse seem to come from behind the rock-solidly centered ball of John McCrea's vocals in the opening verse and reach out into the room, beside you, behind you. The way it flattens out and widens toward the end of the verse. The depth and textures of the various little percussive hand claps and rasping sticks I never really noticed in the second verse.



It truly rubs my fur the wrong way when audio reviewers go on and on about "discovering elements of the music they've never heard before." And indeed, all of the little nuances of "Shadow Stabbing" that I seemed to be discovering for the first time are in full attendance when I play the track back through various different speaker systems scattered around my home. It's simply that they're obscured to one degree or another--or other aspects of the mix stand out to such a degree that my attention is drawn elsewhere. Through the Triton Two+ speakers, though, there's no uneven emphasis on bass or midrange or treble. Soundstage doesn't trump imaging. Width doesn't come at the expense of depth, or the other way around. My ears are free to navigate the twists and turns in the music as they see fit, rather than being prodded in one direction or another.

Next up? "Forty Six & 2" from Tool's second full-length album *Ænima* (Zoo Entertainment). This one worried me a little, to be frank. It's one of my favorite songs of all time, but not one I typically think of in terms of audio demo material. It's a dense, monolithic mix. A barely penetrable wall of sound in which even the lyrics are somewhat obscured.

I should have known better than to worry. Via the Triton Two+, "Forty Six & 2" is no less dense a mix, but it's given such room to breathe. You know the old animation trick of painting various elements of the backgrounds on sandwiched layers of stacked glass so that, as the camera moves, it creates a parallax effect that imbues

real depth to the image? If you can somehow convert that analogy into an audible effect in your brain, you get a sense of what I'm hearing here. The bass guitar and bass drum undeniably sink to the back of the room. The palm-muted guitars and higher percussive elements are stacked out in front of the speakers by at least a few feet. And Maynard James Keenan's nebulous vocals flow like a viscous gas trapped between them.

Although I didn't incorporate the Triton Two+ speakers into a complete surround sound system as part of my evaluation, I did spend some time watching a handful of movies and TV shows in pure

two-channel mode, and again I found the performance to be so similar to that of the Triton One that I'm almost inclined to simply point you toward that review. The differences, again, were fundamentally a matter of dynamic punch in the very low frequencies and overall output. The second episode of Marvel's *Luke Cage* (ABC Studios/Netflix) is a wonderful example of just how much these speakers shine with video content, though. About 35 minutes into the episode, there's a scene that pushed my home theater system to its limits the evening before I watched it again via the Triton Two+. If you've seen the show, you certainly remember the scene: our titular hero stomps into the nightclub owned by the villainous Cottonmouth to request a parley. It isn't an action-packed scene by any measure, but there is a droning, deep, hard-hitting hip-hop bass line that permeates the entire soundtrack. So deep and hard-hitting, in fact, that it made my subwoofers in the home theater burp. Even with the Triton Two+ speakers cranked to ear-splitting levels, their internal subs never flinched. And through it all, dialogue remained rock-solid and centered even without the benefit of a dedicated center speaker. And later during the same episode, when the neighborhood barber shop at the center of the series is shot up, the speakers have the opportunity to shine in a completely different way, delivering a tangible sense of space and depth even without the benefit of surround speakers.

### **The Downside**

If you've ever read any of my GoldenEar speaker reviews, there won't be any surprises to be found here. In addition to the cramped connectivity mentioned above, the only thing I can really knock the Triton Two+ for is that not everyone likes the look of them. My wife, as I was unboxing them, quipped under her breath, "Oh great, more big black socks." A caveat also worth mentioning--not a downside, per se, but something to keep in mind--is that the Triton Two+ speaker's dual infrasonic radiators are side-firing; so, if you're using them as part of a home theater setup, they will need a little extra room to breathe as compared with traditional, fully front-firing speakers.

### **Comparison and Competition**

I think I pretty well addressed any comparisons and contrasts between the Triton Two+ and Triton One in the Performance section above, but it may be worth reiterating a few points here. On the one hand, they do sound remarkably similar, which is no mean feat given that the Triton Two+ sells for \$3,500 per pair and the Triton One for \$5,000. On the other hand, those comparisons were made with volumes matched. Needless to say, the Triton One is capable of cranking out a lot more sound than the Triton Two+. If you have a very large room and you've been eyeing the One, don't assume that you can save a few bucks on the Two+ and get the same level of output. That said, if you've been eyeing the One but just can't justify the expense due to limited space or budgetary reasons, here's your answer.

As for other speakers in this price range that you might consider: Definitive Technology's new BP9080x comes in at the same \$1,749/each price and certainly shares a good bit in common with the Triton Two+. It has an active bass section, for example, powered by a 455-watt internal amplifier. There's also an LFE input. There are some significant differences, though. The BP9080x is a bipolar design with front- and rear-firing arrays. It's also equipped with an expansion module on top designed to receive Definitive's add-on height-speaker module.

If it's the folded motion tweeter that you're enamored with but you don't really care much about the active bass section or strong dynamic punch, you might also consider MartinLogan's Motion 60XT, which has a similar tweeter but with a passive 6.5-inch mid-woofer and two passive eight-inch low-frequency woofers. You can read more about it in Brent Butterworth's review [here](#).

## **Conclusion**

It's hard to review a GoldenEar speaker without sounding like a fanboy. I fully acknowledge that, and I've been on the receiving end of my fair share of angry comments to that effect. I simply can't hide my enthusiasm when a speaker does pretty much exactly what I want it to do, though. The Triton Two+ delivers incredible depth, palpable detail, exceptional neutrality (especially in the midrange frequencies), and rich, ample, tactile bass that's as musical as it is muscular. What more could you want? Well, I suppose you could always ask for more SPL, and for that there's the Triton One. If you don't have the room to really let the Triton One loose, though, the Triton Two+ is the next best thing (or maybe the next better thing considering its price). It's everything I love about the Triton One--the detail, the transparency, the depth of its soundstage, and the dynamics--scaled down to a size that better fits my home and my lifestyle.