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Acustica Applicata DaaD acoustic treatment

by Alan Sircom

We're taking a break from room treatment for a while, and I thought we'd end where we began – the DaaDs from Acustica Applicata. The reason for the revisit? This is ideal *Hi-Fi+* material; Acustica Applicata is a world-wide success, is based in Europe, and is geared toward the high-end enthusiast. Besides, I don't think we gave it the coverage it deserved the first time round.

In part, this is down to time constraints. Last time, I spent a few hours in an alien environment (not that alien... there was no probing) and heard the difference. This time, it was a home game, and I had the full DaaD treatment for several weeks.

To recap, DaaDs are multi-purpose acoustic panels that principally are broadband bass traps, but with reflectors built into one side of the columnar device. They come in three sizes, DaaD2 (the smallest, working on room resonances 120Hz and beyond) DaaD3 (70Hz and up) and DaaD4 (the biggest, which

fills in from the 50Hz region). There is also a smaller Studio DaaD, designed to work on stands and an Eco DaaD (like a DaaD cut in half, designed to work on walls and ceilings). The main DaaDs are designed to work in the corners of the room, while an additional Studio DaaD (or a pair of DaaD2s) can be installed between and slightly behind the loudspeakers, to help diffract the sound field, and Eco DaaDs are best used on the first reflection points along the side walls and (if possible) ceiling. The Italian company also designs room treatment measurement and analysis tools to fine-tune the requirements, installation, and placement of treatment. However, most of the problems that plague listening rooms are universal; measurement of the room generally confirms the above placement, albeit often with specific treatment for particular anomalies.

I started out with a small room (3.5m x 4.5m); it's not an especially bad listening environment, but one that places limitations on low frequency and imaging, and thus ►

► on ultimate loudspeaker size. In this space, we placed two pairs of DaaD3s in the corners behind the loudspeakers and columns (each comprised of one DaaD4 and one DaaD3) in the corners behind the optimum listening position. We also used a pair of DaaD2s in a stack between the speakers and tried Eco DaaDs for side wall reflection. This is a standard arrangement, unless the room is large enough to necessitate DaaD4s all around and multiple columns.

An important indicator of just how well the DaaDs were performing was the fact that speech immediately became clearer and easier to hear throughout the room. Granted, some of the low-frequency anomalies in the room did tend to undermine vocal articulation, so that one had to put more emphasis on upper registers in order to increase intelligibility (especially when trying to talk to someone outside the room). With the DaaDs in place, that articulation stumbling block all but melted away, and your voice was more intelligible in and out of the room without having to resort to squeaking.

How this worked in audio terms was powerful in the extreme. Loudspeakers became far more even-handed and – initially at least – sounded lighter in the bass. The reality was that, before the Acustica Applicata treatment were installed, the room had suffered from uncontrolled resonance whenever anything approach 50Hz was played. The treatment helped limit those problems, making the speakers sound more taut and better defined in the bass, and more neutral and honest in the mid. In fairness, the treble was largely unaffected, although there did seem a very slight removal of shrill emphasis on the upper part of the brilliance region.

The DaaD treatments also gave three very obvious, very useful by-products. First, it immediately sounded like you'd upgraded the system fairly significantly. Reports from those with the kind of rooms and systems as seen in the photographs suggest the same applies universally, and if you have Avalon Isis loudspeakers and top c-j amps, a 'fairly significant upgrade' could cost as much as a Lear jet.

Next, the treatments also increased the amount of gain (and for that matter, the size of loudspeaker) you could put into the room. This particular test-room is very easy to overdrive, going from loud to shouting to a wall of sound within a few decibels, but the addition of the whole DaaD package meant you could play a lot louder before the system seemed to shout and a whole lot louder before the room really began to scream.

Thirdly, the way the system treats imaging and detail 'changes'. The quotes are there because it's not the system that is changing, but the way you can drive the system in the room. But stage width expands considerably, sounds within

that soundstage are more precisely defined and even more solidly rooted in space and the level of information, the amount you can listen into the recording goes up significantly. With the treatment in place and something like Part's *Creator Spiritus* [Harmonia Mundi] in play, the recording gives up so much information about the individual singing voices and the space they move in that you'll soon be reaching for the credit card.

This inevitably leads to the tuneable aspect of the Acustica Applicata DaaD system. Turn the reflective side of the DaaD (marked) inwards and the soundstage moves with it. Experimenting with placement can bring some remarkable rewards in making the room effectively disappear and the soundstage expand beyond the side walls. Also if you prefer a sound more up-front or more between the speakers, that too is possible with judicious tuning of the corner DaaDs.

We were impressed before we got them for home demonstration – their effect is easy to spot in almost any environment – but it's in the listening room you know best where the real force of the argument is driven home. Although their lobed column look is a tough call in a very small room, the design is such that it blends in fairly easily in most homes (once again, the home demonstration helps). The DaaDs are the high-end acoustics solution in both performance and price, but like all the best high-end products, that's often all the justification you'll need. Very highly recommended! +