





LIVING VOICE R25A
ANNIVERSARY



A supposedly simple dish in a normal restaurant enchanted me recently with such surprising taste explosions that I thought I was in a gourmet temple. I was not wrong: In the kitchen a celebrity chef had prepared the delicacies. But what does this have to do with the Living Voice Auditorium R25 Anniversary and its creator, Kevin Scott?

When celebrity chefs make magic

Which adjective first springs to mind for the products of the British loudspeaker manufacturer founded by Kevin Scott in Derbyshire in 1991? “Coherent”! Back in 2013 I had the pleasure to become acquainted with the Avatar OBX-RW3 in my listening room – an experience that still resonates with me. The OBX-RW3 played so vividly, naturally and freely, with a subtle implicitness, that the desire arose within me to build a second listening room that would revolve solely around this loudspeaker; also, the wonderful amplifiers from Kondo, with matching wiring, from the hands of the prestigious Japanese craftsmen. Just how outstanding the acoustic synergies between the components of the two manufacturers are has been demonstrated a thousand times over and really needs no further words. Kevin Scott has always propagated this pairing, developed around Kondo electronics and even sold it through his UK distributor Definitive Audio for many years. True to the motto “Never change a winning team”, Benjamin Schmieding, Managing Director of Bemax Audio, also decided a few years ago to take this manufacturer team under his wings exclusively for Germany and Austria. I don't have to tell you that dreams and the reality of life don't always go hand in hand. Neither my life circumstances nor my financial wherewithal allowed me to realise the dream of an alternative listening room with the OBX-RW3. The combination of a Living Voice OBX-RW3, a Kondo Overture PMIIi integrated amplifier and the Japanese pure silver strips in 2.5 metres length – including the bi-wiring cables for the external crossover housing of the OBX-RW3 – currently costs 62,500 euros. A hefty chunk of money that very few of us can just casually drop on the counter.

But to listen to music at an extremely high quality level, you don't have to be looking at the ultimate audio components – I'm going to exclude the pre- and power-amplifier combination from Kondo (each for a six-digit sum) and the two Living Voice horn loudspeakers Vox Palladian and Vox Olympian (which approach a selling price of half a million). It's a fact that I've recently heard several affordable tube amplifiers on the OBX-RW3 and on the IBX-R3, which is about 6,000 euros cheaper and comes without an “Outboard X-Over”, i.e. without an external crossover, that have





Tried-and-tested from Denmark: Kevin Scott buys both the 1-inch tweeter with silk dome, copper voice coil and double magnet and the two 6-inch bass/midrange drivers with single magnet from Scan-Speak. The latter differ from the "usual suspects" mainly by the shallow curvilinear diaphragm and the narrow diameter copper voice coil. The signal is routed to the D'Appolito driver, which is strictly manufactured according to his specifications, via a two-core, directional and cryogenically treated solid core copper internal wiring. On the right, another special feature can be seen: the cabinets are only acoustically damped at the rear and on the side wall facing outwards.



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animated the Living Voice constructs to brilliant performances. The high efficiency and impedance-friendly response curve of Kevin Scott's speaker makes it possible. In terms of power, damping and load stability requirements for the amplifier electronics, the entry-level loudspeaker in the world of Living Voice, the Auditorium R3R, with which I haven't yet gained any experience and which is now being replaced by the R25 Anniversary, will surely be no exception. To speak of an "entry-level loudspeaker" does not do justice to the R25A, as I will call it from now on, because after all, good old Kevin Scott, as the name suggests, has been working on its development for 25 years, believe it or not. It should come as no

Partnering equipment

Record Player: Nottingham Analogue Dais incl. Sperling Audio NRM-1/S motor **Platter Mat:** Steinmusic Pi Perfect Interface
Tonearm: Robert Fuchs 13", Origin Live Encounter Mk2 **Pick-Up:** Grado Statement Statement 2, Lyra Kleos, Nagaoka MP 10
Headshell: Acoustical Systems Arché 5D, Oyaide HS-TF Carbon
Phonostage: Tubeguru TubeMann WV2 Phono RIAA, Rike Audio Natalija Pre 2, Perreaux Audiant VP3 **CD-Player:** Lector CDP-707 mit PSU-7T-Netzteil, Ayon Audio CD-35 Signature, Oppo BDP-103
Preamp: Luxman CL-38uC **Poweramp:** Luxman MQ-88uC **Integrated amplifier:** Rike Audio Romy 20SE, S.A.LAB Thunderbird
Loudspeaker: Boenicke Audio W11 SE+, Living Voice Auditorium R25 Anniversary **Cables:** levin design Gold Silber Direct, NF-, LS8- und LS9-cables by Biophotone, Acoustic System Liveline **Ancillary equipment:** Audiophil-Schumann-Generator, TAOC-Racks, Steinmusic Harmonizer and Blue Suns, Acoustic Revive RL-30 Vinyl Record Demagnetizer, Audiodesksysteme Gläss Vinyl Cleaner PRO and Sound Improver, Audio Exklusiv d.C.d. Base and Silentplugs, FPH-Akustik-Schwingungsdämpfer, Herbie's Audio Lab Tenderfoot, Schallwand Audio Laboratory LittleFoot's/BigFoot's, Duende-Criatura-damping rings, fastaudio-Absorber, Acoustic-System-Resonatoren, MFE-Netzleiste, AMR-, Furutech- and AHP-Feinsicherungen, Biophotone Magic Akasha Quantum Power Plugs, Acoustical Systems SMARTractor and HELOX-Plattenklemme

surprise that the result had to be a fully-developed loudspeaker.

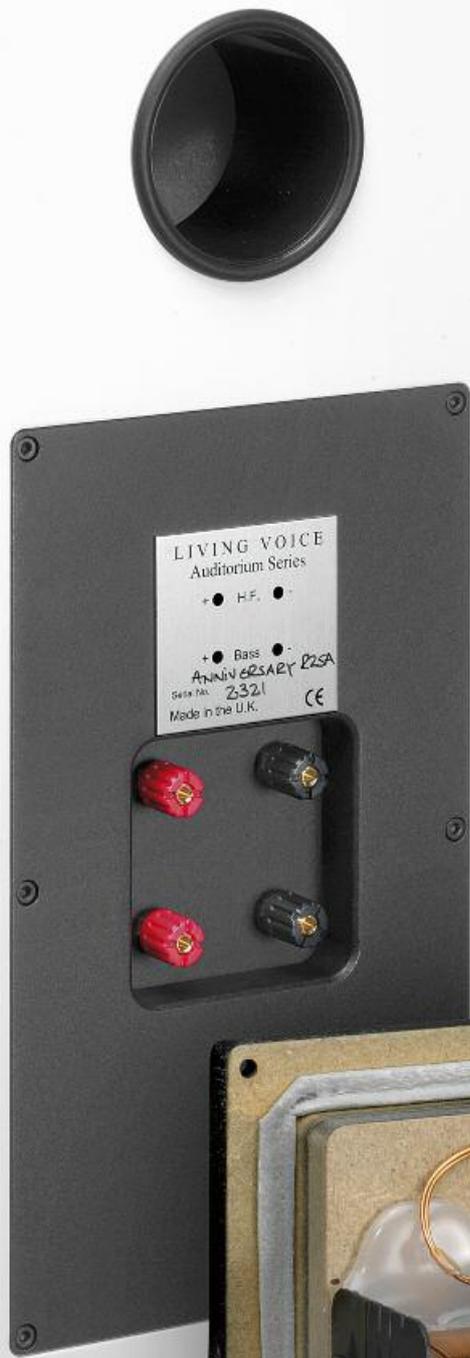
Kevin Scott's discovery of a visual change in the membrane material of his supplier Scan-Speak's tweeter unit was pivotal in the new evolutionary stage of the R3R. Although not measurable and identical to its specification in terms of weight, angle of curvature and chemical composition, the tweeter showed significant differences in sound – an observation he had already made during the development of the OBX-RW3 project: another supplier's driver – although manufactured with exactly the same material and construction specifications – sounded different and led to a redefinition of the crossover concept. Drawing conclusions from this experience and confident in his energy-absorbing particle board housing concept – only the rear wall of the R25A is made of MDF – at a stroke he reassessed the R3R's entire construction details, including the crossover – for the purpose of "sifting" through new optimisation potential. That he finally arrived at in a small stroke of genius I learned shortly after I had set up the successor of the R3R in my listening room. Without labouring the point: the Living Voice Auditorium R25 Anniversary is one of the most uncritical loudspeakers I have encountered. You have to try hard not to make them play brilliantly.

From a purely visual point of view, the R25A is the identical twin of its big sisters from the Avatar series – unmistakably Living Voice. The cabinet is neatly finished, the (optional extra) white satin maple veneer is impressive – even though I am a lover of untreated veneers. The latter are available in a wide selection for the R25A: from walnut to ash (black) and cherry to maple, rosewood and walnut, everyone should succeed in integrating the loudspeaker optimally into their living landscape – and this without the very moderate 255 euros surcharge for the special white finish. The rather petite and unobtrusive appearance of the R25A is likely to receive the approval of the one's 'better half' without much resistance. Even when she hears the price, she might still give her blessing for the purchase of the loudspeaker:

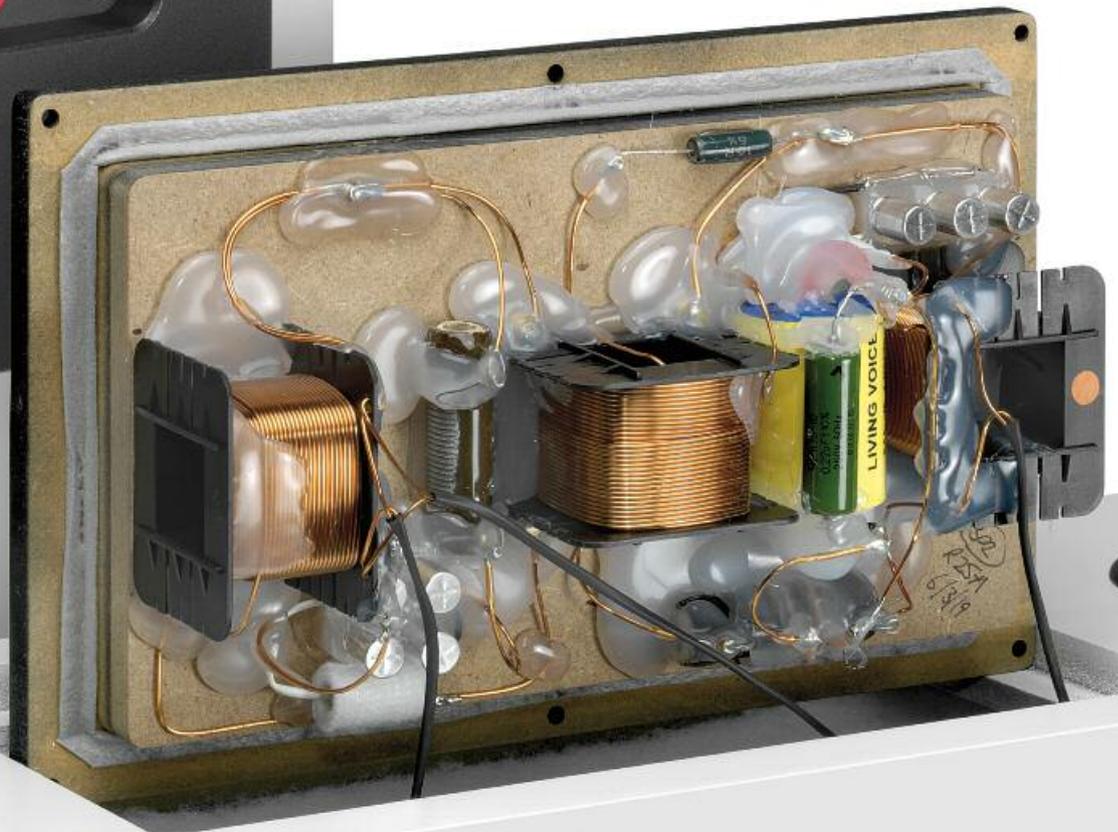
5,995 euros. Like the IBX and OBX Avatar Series speakers, the R25A is also a two-way bass reflex D'Appolito concept, with two six-inch bass/mid-range drivers and a one-inch tweeter reproducing the frequency range. In the case of the R25A, the bass-midrange units are now also manufactured by Scan-Speak and no longer by Vifa – made according to Living Voice specifications, of course. Kevin Scott is tight-lipped about the exact location of the now "lowered" crossover frequency between the silk dome tweeter with double magnet and the bass-midrange drivers. If you enjoy the tonal homogeneity of the R25A, you will quickly understand why the mastermind does not want to give too much away about the crossover points: In music, the range between two and five kilohertz is critical because the human ear is particularly sensitive to acoustic signals in that range – the most sensitive being around four kilohertz according to research. At the end of the day, however, it is always the subjective ear of the listener that decides – in this case mine. And my verdict is clear: The R25A plays like a unified whole! I can't identify any frequency range on "Wake Up", the almost eight-minute opener from the RecordStore-Day re-release of Mad Season's Above (Music On Vinyl/Legacy/Hockeytalkter Records/Monkeywrench Records/Columbia, MOVLP169, EU 2013,

Ltd., 2-LP) that is in any way, shape or form subject to special emphasis. In addition to cohesiveness, an astonishing level stability is added in the lower cut-off frequencies – a characteristic that not every two-way loudspeaker can lay claim to.

Before I go into the sound of the R25A, I'd like to say a few words about speaker cables: with the Romy 20SE single-ended integrated amplifier by Rike Audio and the Thunderbird push-pull power amplifier from Russian audio manufacturer S.A.Lab, I had two fundamentally different but exquisitely sounding feeds at my fingertips, which were to sample the loudspeaker's six ohm nominal impedance and 94 decibel efficiency. But I couldn't even connect the amps at first: the R25A equipped with bi-wiring terminals is delivered without jumpers for single wire loudspeaker cables. And since I don't have a bi-wiring cable, I had to get a bridge to connect my current reference, the Gold Silver Direct cable from Levin design. I could now write a whole article about how a cheap "No-Name" brass bridge, a not-exactly-cheap silver jumper from Kondo and the more affordable jumpers from Levin design change the performance of the R25A. Instead, I'd rather share my conclusion with you: Use a good bi-wiring cable straight away to get the most out of the R25A's potential, and don't compromise on the jumper if you



only have single-wiring speaker cable. Too much can simply be "lost" at this point. Kevin Scott, who uses twin-core, directional and cryogenically-treated solid core copper for the R25A's internal wiring, replied to my question why he didn't include a bridge made of the same material that "this solution didn't convince him in terms of sound". Anyone who knows Kevin Scott and his approach of always evaluating every construction detail according to sound criteria is inclined to grant him a leap of faith. So I summarize his advice on loudspeaker cables: With a very good single-wiring speaker cable and a suitable jumper you can achieve better results than with a less good bi-wiring cable. With a very good bi-wiring cable, the sound becomes noticeably "sweeter", the background blacker, the high frequency ends expanded, the lower frequency range appears more controlled and the overall sound image allows a deeper insight into the events and the music. Let's leave it at



that. I found the Levin design loudspeaker cable really persuasive – both in combination with the Kondo jumper and the Romy 20SE as well as with the Levin design jumper and the Thunderbird – that I decided not to investigate further.

With both combinations the R25A played so lively, free and open that it was hard for me to find a real favourite combination. With the Romy 20SE I indulged in the natural timbres of Mark Isham's trumpet and Phil Palmer's flamenco-like acoustic guitar in "When Poets Dreamed Of Angels" on David Sylvian's masterpiece *Secrets Of The Beehive* (Virgin/EMI Records/Universal Music, 679 533-6, RE EU 2019, LP), while the Thunderbird fascinated me with its smearless presentation of even the most delicate bifurcations in the high-frequency range and the attack and decay of the individual notes were as if viewed through a magnifying glass.

While the Romy 20SE met the semi-electronic drum escapades on *AE* (Editon Records, EDNLP1122, UK 2019, LP), the sensational debut album of Phronesis drummer Anton Eger, with excellent timing and lots of swing, the Thunderbird approached the theme of rhythm energetically with more emphatic presence and a precision that commanded respect, from which the electronic rhythm patterns profited in particular.

Regardless of the taste-dependent advantages of both amplifiers, I can't stress enough how well Kevin Scott has succeeded in combining the lively nature of the R25A with a sculptured sound that is hard to reconcile with the physical presence of the speakers. I have turned my back on many high efficiency loudspeakers that are conceptually close to the ideal of the point source because of the massively limited sweet spot, especially as I prefer to listen in the near field. Heiner Martion, for whom I have a healthy respect

"Although objective measurements and techniques, and computer modeling, are valuable tools in the early stages of loudspeaker development, they can only take you a short distance down the road. Designing the crossover by ear is the only way to make something that touches the human soul." Compared to the crossover design of its predecessor, the new, point-to-point wired crossover consists of 16 components, 9 of which are capacitors – partly proprietary and partly from NOS military stocks - per channel. Kevin Scott completely dispenses with a separate impedance linearization: an LCR network with an impedance peak at 700 Hertz for the tweeter allows him to set the crossover frequency somewhat lower than in the predecessor model



as a person and developer, would have a different philosophy: "You enjoy high-end alone. In the right listening position, right in the middle, sitting in front of the speakers." Now, I like to listen to music alone, but even more so with friends. It would be a shame if only one of us could hear "correctly". My Boenicke W11 SE+ doesn't have such restrictions: with these I can take a seat on the outer edge of the sofa and still absorb 90 percent of the sweet spot – an outstanding stage image in the truest sense of the word that I wouldn't want to be without. One of the biggest surprises with the R25A was the fact that it came very close to the Swiss speaker's "super sweet spot" – not a cramped sports car with two seats, but a fast convertible with 4 seats and plenty of legroom. Although a Boenicke W11 SE+ makes music a little more sensitively at the extreme frequency range limits – a characteristic that I attribute to the loudspeaker's elaborately milled solid wood concept inside and the elaborate tuning measures – I think it's a bit more sensitive, a trace of cabinet colouration in the lower cello positions on "Day 1 – Golden Butterflies" from the new album Seven Days Walking – Day One (Decca/Universal Music, 00602577445156, EU 2019, CD) by pianist and neoclassical star Ludovico Einaudi. But let's not get carried away – I can happily apply particularly high standards to the W11 SE+, because it costs about three times as much as the Living Voice.

The stoic serenity with which the R25A is able to present even complex contexts – without losing a single Newton of impulse energy and losing any of its generous stage presentation – was impressively demonstrated to me by King Crimson's EP Vroom Vroom (Discipline Global Mobile/Virgin Records, DGM 0004, UK 1994, CD). How the loudspeaker brings the effect-loaded guitar 'walls', heavy keyboard 'carpets' and the two different drum sets on "Coda: Marine 475" under one roof, without losing the overview, and at the same time still retains the "big gesture", is frankly a mystery to me. Please do not ask me how the voice or bass articulation of the R25A behaves. If you extend to me the same trust as I

Interestingly, the inner sides of the R25A are also veneered: Kevin Scott has the rear panel made of MDF to avoid "energy jams" in the cabinet. All other sides and the base, which is "docked" to the loudspeaker via modelling clay, are made of particle board, to which he attributes energy-absorbing properties. Kevin Scott obtains both materials from suppliers who can guarantee the exact material densities that he specifies

give Kevin Scott, you will be surprised. Everything's just right! Absolutely coherent.

Let me tot up again – I'm deliberately excluding the Thunderbird from S.A.Lab, which costs 18,000 euros, and due to its control capabilities is actually intended to keep "valve-unfriendly" loudspeakers on a tight rein with a touch of glowing tube charm from the following list: about 6,000 euros for the Living Voice R25 Anniversary, 6,400 euros for the Rike amp and about 3,500 euros for a 2.5 metre long bi-wiring copper loudspeaker cable from Kondo – if you want it a bit cheaper than with the nearly 2,000 euros more expensive Gold Silver Direct LS cables from Levin design. So round about 16,000 euros. Sounds better than the 62,500 euros mentioned at the beginning, doesn't it?! Of course, it could be even cheaper: due to the "easy-going" requirement criteria of the R25A, I see absolutely no reason why a large proportion of the tube amplifiers and cables available on the market should not harmonise

splendidly with the Living Voice – assuming they're of a suitably high quality.

If I might return to the taste explosion experience described in the introductory section: the basic ingredients for a simple dish are well known, as is the design principle of a two-way loudspeaker. But to prepare a "people's dish" in such a way that nigh-on incredible taste nuances unfold and real emotions are awakened while enjoying it – only a true artist can conjure up such a thing at the stove! Kevin Scott is a celebrity chef of loudspeaker design who has succeeded in creating an incredibly good composition with the Auditorium R25 Anniversary.

Loudspeaker Living Voice Auditorium R25 Anniversary

Functional principle: 2-way bass reflex loudspeaker in D'Appolito arrangement

Efficiency: 94 dB (1 W/1 m) **Rated impedance:** 6 Ohm **Frequency range:** 35 – 30000 Hz **Special features:** Stainless steel spikes and cup washers, Bi-Wiring terminals **Cabinet finishes:** Ash (black), walnut, maple, cherry, rosewood, walnut; 255 euros surcharge for maple veneer in matt lacquered white silk **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 21,5/103/27 cm **Weight:** 18 kg **Guarantee:** 5 years **Pair price:** 5,995 euros

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