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WILSON

MAXX SERIES 3

The last word in high-end, high-fidelity reproduction

PRICE £68,000 per pair (approx) CONTACT Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.absolutesounds.com

While the Wilson Maxx Series 3 is the successor to the acclaimed Maxx 2, in reality it's more of a cut-down 'affordable' version of the company's flagship Alexandria 2. And as much as we dislike them, our use of air quotes is justifiable here: affordability is a relative term, as the Maxx 3 still costs a bank balance frightening £68,000...

The Maxx 3 is tall and imposing, standing around 172cm high and weighing about 410lbs (187kg) each. It features five drive units – 13-inch and 10.5-inch woofers, a pair of 6.75-inch midrange drivers and a 1-inch inverted-dome tweeter. Both the bass and midrange chambers are ported and the speaker achieves a sensitivity of about 91dB for one watt. This is marginally less sensitive than the Maxx 2, but Wilson claims the new model presents an easier load for the amplifier to drive. Nevertheless, nominal impedance is around four ohms, dipping below 3 ohms at the 23Hz point. Fortunately, the load is resistive for the most part, though a powerful, high-current amplifier is still necessary.

One of the Maxx 3's main design goals is phase-coherence. Wilson claims that timing errors (caused by individual drive units being wrongly aligned) lead to edgy, smeared treble and a loss of clarity/focus. To achieve optimum phase-coherence, regardless of listening distance, the Maxx 3 allows the position of the midrange and treble drivers to be adjusted. The aim? A wavefront near-perfectly aligned when it reaches your ears. Wilson calls this arrangement Aspherical Propagation Delay. By adjusting the position of individual drive units, you get a multi drive unit loudspeaker that subjectively sounds more like one with just a single driver. But, does it work?

SOUND QUALITY

The first thing that strikes us about the Maxx 3s are their remarkable smoothness and integration. The sound is surprisingly 'whole' – there is no sense of the individual drive units. Tonal balance is dusky-smooth, yet transients are unexpectedly crisp and immediate. Individual notes have impressive decay – you could follow sounds as they died away, despite bustling musical activity elsewhere.

The Maxx 3's virtuosity turns difficult into easy, reproducing music with comfortable effortless ease, but always meeting the demands of the music: a sudden change of dynamics reproduces unflinchingly.

For a big powerful speaker capable (with the right amplifier) of going very loud, the Maxx 3 is unexpectedly dynamic and detailed when played at middle or low volume levels. It can do loud, but does not

need to be played loud to impress. Some expensive hi-fi systems all but assault you with their sense of scale and drama. While not lacking excitement, the Maxx 3 sounds comfortable and inviting: you listen engaged and involved, without feeling overwhelmed.

Stereo imaging is solid and precise. The Maxx 3 makes you aware of positional information in the soundstage that lesser speakers fudge. It excels on simply miked, phase-coherent purist recordings – and at

the same time, it does not make multi-miked recordings sound like a dog's dinner. Sure, you can hear when voices and instruments have been spot-miked and panned into place, but the result is not a caricature.

"The Maxx 3 can do loud, but does not need to be played loud to impress"

Playing Claudio Abbado's DG recording of Bizet's *Carmen*, the Maxx 3s fully reveal the way balances have been manipulated from the mixing desk, yet the end result is exiting and impressive, even if not wholly natural. Bass is very deep.

Wilson claims a response down to 24Hz and one independent review measured the -3dB point at an impressive 18Hz. More importantly, the bass is very clear, with excellent pitch-definition and timing.

At the other extreme, the high treble sounds smooth, integrated and very clean. The sound has bite when bite is called for, but the overall impression is of an impressively refined, smooth, homogenous sound.

Most of the music listened to came from CD sources, but a few LP tracks (via the fabulous Continuum Caliburn, full review on p35) demonstrated another side to the Maxx 3 – its ability to create a 3D holographic soundstage from the most unlikely material. Playing an old Jimi Hendrix outtake *Blue Suede Shoes* from the album *Loose Ends*, we were all but transported back in time to the studio – with Jimi soloing right in front of us.

The Maxx 3 is very revealing – and in some ways quite demanding, too. Its focus and precision enables it to reproduce subtle differences other loudspeakers miss, yet it's not a fussy *prima donna*.

To sum up, Wilson's Maxx 3 loudspeaker ticks all the boxes as far as high-end, high-fidelity reproduction is concerned. It sounds supremely clean and precise, with very wide bandwidth, low coloration, plenty of scale and massive dynamics. It's impressive stuff, alright, but the innate naturalness and musicality of the sound is even more impressive – and a sheer delight to listen to. ■■■

Jimmy Hughes

