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Complete Lyngdorf System

Lyd & Bilde (Sound & Picture), Norway

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Groundbreaking Sound

By Audun Hage

A stereo system costing more than NOK 100,000 (EUR 13,500/USD 21,000/GBP 10,500) must do most things right, and you will have to search hard for a solution that makes fewer mistakes than Lyngdorf's RoomPerfect system.

WE TEST

CD-1 CD Player - TDAI-2200 RoomPerfect - SDA-2175 Amplifier
DP-1 Loudspeakers - BW-1 Subwoofers

One of the biggest challenges when building good hi-fi is to make the equipment sound well in the room, where it will be used. You may own the world's best CD player, the coolest electronics and the toughest loudspeakers that money can buy, but if they do not play in tune with your listening room, the result will rarely become magical!

Since all listening rooms are different, hi-fi manufacturers have to settle for a compromise that will sound OK in as many rooms as possible. Unfortunately, this adaptation may also imply compromises in relation to the "perfect sound". Even the brainiest loudspeaker manufacturers cannot predict precisely how their products will sound in your home. All this speaks in favor of a complete system, which may be customized, to your particular room, and here Lyngdorf's RoomPerfect system enters the picture.

Perfect sound?

The RoomPerfect system promises perfect sound in any room – big words, even for a system in this price range, but hardly empty words. Actually, this ranks among the most advanced stereo systems that we have tested. The complete system comprises a CD player, two amplifiers and a two-piece loudspeaker solution, where the music signal runs digitally – straight from the CD player and into the amplifier. Last but not least, the setup features a patented room correction system that adapts the sound to your listening room.

Taken individually, none of these technologies are revolutionary, but this is the first time that we test a system where everything has been put into use. The Lyngdorf system is able to measure any influence from your listening room on the sound reproduction, and adapt the sound to the circumstances so that the room's negative impact is reduced.

The TDAI2200 amplifier with RoomPerfect may easily be used together with your existing loudspeakers, but Lyngdorf has furthermore developed its own speakers, which can optimally exploit the benefits of room correction. The two-piece solution entails that the speakers may be placed where it is most convenient, preferably close to the wall. This normally provokes quite a lot of nastiness, like unlinear amplification of the bass frequencies. By means of room correction, however, it is possible to turn this into something positive.

Setup

Contrary to previous Lyngdorf systems, RoomPerfect may be used without a connected PC. Everything happens more or less automatically, and all you need to do is to plug in the microphone, place it in the listening position and click your way through the menu that is displayed on the amplifier. You may make as many measurements you like – first a measurement in the “sweet spot”, followed by more measurements at various places in the room. The more measurements you make, the more the system learns about the acoustics in your room, to make a more accurate adaptation. The amplifier itself tells you how much it knows – % Room Knowledge – in the display, and you can also see to which degree the sound has been corrected. It does not have to take more than 10 – 20 minutes before the adjustment of the system is completed. Then you may choose freely between the "Focus" setting, which is perfectly calibrated for one listening position (up to 7 different positions) and "Global", which is a more general setting for the entire room. Lyngdorf has also included a number of pre-programmed equalizer settings (Voicings) that may be used to adjust the sonic balance to your taste or mood.

Sound quality

Theoretically, this system should be able to deliver perfect sound in even the most hopeless room. To set it up in Lyd & Bilde's well-damped test rooms was therefore not as interesting as to try it at home in my own apartment, where the acoustical challenges are more evident. The shape of the living room makes it difficult to place the speakers optimally, and naked plasterboards contribute to a somewhat hard sonic character with a lot of reflections. Tough conditions for any hi-fi system! The sound of a calibrated Lyngdorf system triggers many "gee whiz" experiences. During the first auditioning, you may almost feel that something is missing. The bass guitar does not sound quite as boomy as it normally does, and the vocals may appear slimmer. You have this feeling that there is less "booze" in the music than you are used to. But less of something can also be a good thing! As you become better familiarized with the Lyngdorf sound, you feel that there is no lack of dynamics and power, but rather that coloration and distortion are conspicuous by their absence. This may have a dramatic influence on how different music recordings are experienced. Take for instance classical music that probably is some of the most demanding material that you may ask a music system to reproduce. Here, Lyngdorf really excels. On a well-produced recording like Gustav Holst's "The Planets", the sound stage grows to enormous proportions with a formidable reproduction of all the instruments' nuances. And what dynamics! Even the greatest orchestral efforts sound fresh with no limits imposed by the system.

Deafening silence

It is not only in the loud sequences that Lyngdorf excels – the silence between the individual notes is almost more impressive. The way that the music fades out provides a clear feeling of the size of the concert hall. I will not claim that it is like sitting there, but you certainly have a foot inside the door. Lyngdorf also performs an outstanding job with less dramatic works, like Ryan Adams' "Cold Roses" or Nils Lofgren's live album. Strings and vocals are reproduced with crystal clarity, and each single tone stands out clearly from the previous note. Meticulous accuracy is the name of this game.

Revealing

At the same time, the Lyngdorf system must be described as rather unforgiving when it comes to lesser recordings. When we move towards more synthesizer based, bass heavy music like Hip-Hop and Rhythm & Blues, the sound is experienced as slightly firm and restrained.

Lightweight pop and rock songs may also seem a little thin and fragile compared to the more extrovert sound that characterizes Denon or Densen, for example. OK, the bass reproduction has an almost perfect fullness and extends all the way down into the basement, but it is delivered with less drive than you might have expected.

All kinds of music do not necessarily sound best with a super correct frequency response. In such cases, it may be fun to use the built-in equalizer options in the TDAI2200 to make your life more colorful. In my listening room, I actually experienced that the sound in general became best and most "natural" with the "Global" setting of the room correction and the equalizer set to "Music 1", which gives a slight emphasis of the midrange frequencies.

When you do this, the sound remains very neutral and accurate, but slightly more warm, full and fluid than in the "Focus" mode. Best of all, you may move freely around the room without experiencing significant changes of the sound stage. After some experimentation to and fro, I decided to leave the amplifier with these settings.

Excellent loudspeakers

Gradually, Lyngdorf has cut down on the amount of sound correction for the front loudspeakers. The system primarily makes minor level adjustments, and most of the corrections take place in the bass range, since this is where the room exerts its greatest influence. This strategy also ensures that the main speakers preserve their original sonic signature.

When it comes to Lyngdorf's own loudspeakers, however, you have to search long and hard for any unique sonic character. With them, the system delivers some of the cleanest and most neutral sounds that I have heard. The dipole loudspeakers DP-1 have a quite special ability to disappear within the sound stage and leave a crystal clear midrange that brings out even minute details in the sound mix. The tweeter belongs to the fine-grained variety that does not stand out too much, unless required to, and it never becomes unpleasant to listen to. Instead, it contributes to an incredibly crisp and airy reproduction of wind, percussion and string instruments. In spite of all this, the greatest strength of the Lyngdorf system is concentrated in the bass range. Never before have I experienced such a light and fast, but still utterly solid and powerful bass in my living room as with the room corrected BW-1 subwoofers. The bass range is totally free of booms, resonances and other undesired effects that can mask the tones from a double bass and other instruments. And they go deep enough to reproduce the lowest tones from a church organ without problems. The BW-1 subwoofers lack a little of the raw push that we know from really big woofers. On the other hand, they are incredibly precise, without any tendency towards distortion or other problems, even during listening at neighbor-hostile levels. Nevertheless, the worst bass fanatics will probably prefer Lyngdorf's bigger W-210 subwoofers, which have been designed for corner placement.

Competition

You can buy a lot of very fine hi-fi for this kind of money. A complete Linn system, an attractive package from Classé and B&W, sophisticated design from Densen and Audiovector – the list goes on and on. All these solutions will almost certainly sound better than whatever your neighbor has in his living room, but none of them will demonstrate refreshing new ways of thinking like Lyngdorf. We believe that those who will be most attracted by the Lyngdorf products will be people who want a top

modern, flexible and placement friendly system with the most accurate sound possible. It does cost a small fortune, but luckily it is possible to build the system step by step. You can begin with the amplifier together with your existing loudspeakers and CD player, and most likely you will experience a significant improvement of your sound quality.

After that, according to your budgetary constraints, you just have to add separate subwoofers, a bass amplifier and better source equipment.

Conclusion

Lyngdorf gives you a taste of the sound of the future with the RoomPerfect system – a music system that really plays in tune with the listening room and, under optimum conditions, can match twice as expensive systems. We are not suggesting that the sound is perfect – many people will probably still prefer the sound from a more conventional stereo system. The Lyngdorf system is namely frightening honest, and therefore you must brace yourself for ups as well as downs in your music collection. But the ups outnumber the downs!

The amplifier

The heart of the Lyngdorf system is the integrated digital amplifier TDAI2200 – a very special amplifier without traditional analog technology. Instead of a conventional amplifier section to attenuate the input signal, this amplifier employs a special D/A converter to control the output stage directly. This ensures a most accurate sound reproduction with unprecedented low distortion. The TDAI2200 comes with only digital inputs as standard, but it may be ordered with analog inputs, in which case the signal is converted into digital form before the room correction is applied. However the analog inputs cost more than many people pay for a complete amplifier, and it is an open question if you really need them. Today, most things take place in the digital domain, and if you own a different brand of CD player or use a Squeezebox or other music players with digital audio outputs, you may connect them directly to Lyngdorf's internal D/A converter. Rather obvious, you might say.

The loudspeakers

The loudspeaker models DP-1 and BW-1 have been specifically developed to exploit the potential of the RoomPerfect system. With the DP-1, Lyngdorf has eliminated the enclosure and designed a dipole solution – or an open baffle, if you prefer that term. The driver units are mounted in free air on an exquisitely shaped faceplate with high gloss lacquer finish. This baffle is stabilized by a very heavy plinth standing on four solid spikes. The units come from ScanSpeak and Seas, and are of very high quality. An enclosure is normally a necessity to realize a decent bass but also suffers from unwanted side effects such as resonances. But since the Lyngdorf system includes separate woofers, the DP-1 can manage without an enclosure, with cleaner sound as a result. The separate woofers are at least as exciting. They must be placed in direct contact with a wall and measure no more than 18-cm (7 inches) in depth – the flattest subwoofers we have tested. By the way, Lyngdorf prefers not to call them subwoofers, since their frequency response extends well into the upper bass range (500 Hz). Each sub features a 25-cm (10-inch) bass driver with long excursion capability and a powerful magnet system. These woofers have no built-in amplifier or crossover network, and must therefore be driven by a separate amplifier in connection with room correction.