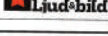


Speaker XTZ Divine 100.49

High-End Steal



PRIS: 44 000 kronor LÄNK: WWW.XTZ.SE

It's almost tempting to call this a budget speaker, but that could cause some misunderstandings as it will cost you 4900 Euros. The explanation for this idea is that XTZ Divine offers an incredible amount of speaker for the money, regardless of what you compare them with. This is budget high end!

"Cheap" is subject to different interpretations in my opinion. A speaker can cost very little so everyone can buy it, or it can be so extremely good in respect to its price tag that customers think the price they are paying is very acceptable and that the product offers an edge compared to competing ones.

Divine has clearly got the potential to make people jump when they see the price tag if they haven't yet heard the speaker.

XTZ call this the best speaker in the world in respect to the price. We like it when manufacturers believe in their products, but going this far is could easily trigger a counter-reaction. XTZ is hardly the only ones manufacturing in China.

Heavy and solid

If you order these you'd better know a sumo wrestler, or two, to help carrying them up the stairs. They weigh in at 70 kgs a piece and come in a box not too easy to handle for one person. The design is also substantial, and it really does everything to mark it as a high end speaker. It's simply solid and quite elegant.

The drivers are usually what draw the most attention, and of course XTZ have invested heavily in these. It has never been possible to buy ceramic drivers from Thiel and Visaton in this price range before, especially not together with these elegant aluminium woofers from the SEAS Excel series.

The driver setup in these speakers should guarantee a super clean reproduction along with the finest transient response, but we are soon to know when starting to listen to some music.

Using ceramic drivers in the midrange and top end you can simply forget all cheap electronics. It will end up the wrong way with a myriad of ear fatiguing details lacking resolution. It's expensive to be a man, and nobody buys a Ferrari and puts on cheap Chinese tyres right? I don't think so.

Unfortunately this is something you have to live with. Super high resolution drivers, with very fine radiation patterns at that, demands quality that you need a certain level of knowledge to handle. Besides, it's always a good idea to know something about acoustic products and how to correctly match cables. The crossover filter is of course very high quality, but even the best components in the world are chanceless if the constructor doesn't know what he's doing. So as usual, I expect nothing until I have heard something. Obviously, the components are top class and the filter is perfectly matched to the components and cabinet. **Anything else would be very surprising.**

Differences between cables?

We are generally "cable sceptical", but here we have reached a level where "everything" becomes audible. You can simply find yourself in a situation where signal, speaker and even power cables can really alter the listening experience. These speakers really are that transparent.

We are still sceptical about anybody who describes differences between cables in terms of levels and different frequencies. The fact that this is actually not true can easily be proved by a relatively simple measurement. Will a cable reduce the volume level at a certain frequency, or is there simply something wrong with it? And then there are those who claim the volume level increases in some parts of the frequency range. How on earth could that be? Is there some sort of passive amplifier circuitry inside the cable? Hardly!

What you can experience however - when the room is good enough and you can distinguish the speaker sound from the room acoustics, which is highly unlikely if you are in a regular living room, regardless how familiar you might be with it - is that the majority of cables will cause some change in the sense of room and sound stage.



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Solid and correct

From the very first bar it's clear that these speakers are something very special for this price range. I immediately have the feeling I'm sitting in front of a pair of true high-end speakers, the same kind we have had in our combined home cinema- and sound room lately.

Let's start with the bass. It's full grown and potent and will certainly cause problems in too small rooms. You can put plugs in the bass reflex ports to solve some of these problems, but I think it almost never works - regardless of speaker.

I find the "drive" and entertainment factor is reduced some when plugging the ports - also in this case. The speaker doesn't get down that much, but it becomes somewhat more "lacy" and stuffed. This would be ok if I hadn't already heard the speaker play without the plugs. You want to bring out the most of having bought a nice hi-fi product for a lot of money.

The bass doesn't only offer volume and foundation, it's dynamic with a brilliant punch that paired with the controlled and dynamic way to play creates a good base to support the rest of the music.

It's no use spending a lot on a fantastic midrange driver if the woofer below messes up the performance causing problems far up in the midrange.

The midrange is a 16,5 cm unit and handles frequencies from 180Hz to 2500Hz. It sounds brilliant, and serves out the sound from this speaker on a gold plate. We can talk a lot about the bass, and some about the treble as well, but this speaker's supreme transparency, accuracy, purity and openness almost bring tears to my eyes.

I'm completely sure I have never heard anything like this among floor speakers in this price range, and perhaps not even if we add another few thousands of Euros. You can get a similar experience from really good stand speakers, but then you have to do without the delicious bass, and I cannot come up with one single argument to defend that.

Big speakers with advanced drivers offer the space for larger constructions and make sure that a lot of things can happen simultaneously without losing control over the sound.

For that reason we are not merciful when playing music. They receive a good round of music, including everything we can think of in terms of orchestral recordings, over-produced techno, choirs, and not the least some problematic recordings that seldom sound very good.

Let's start with the last first:

The challenge for Divine could be to play flat between 2000 and 4000 Hz, where it is contrast to many other speakers - for example B&W - is a bit precaution and perhaps even has a small dip in this range. This can potentially show itself with some recordings with a lot of energy just in the transition between midrange and tweeter drivers. The result may be quite harsh and aggressive for some speakers, regardless of what music is played. Luckily, I cannot make the speaker sound aggressive or harsh no matter what music I choose. I have to say though that the way of reproduction may be a challenge if used in rooms with much glass or other hard surfaces.

The way it categorizes the different parts of the music can cause some instruments to sound quite aggressive really. You just have to place yourself 4 meters away from a string quartet to understand how much some energy we get out of when listening to a system at home.

For that reason I would rather say that this speaker plays incredibly realistic, with fantastic precision. It's then up to the owner to decide if any minor adjustments in the room's acoustics are necessary. Probably, not too much is needed. First thing is to sort the first reflex from the floor and walls, use a carpet and some heavy curtains on the walls, and you have come a far way. The ceiling is a bit more intricate to deal with, but a couple of acoustic sheets in the same colour as the ceiling, placed correctly, is absolutely recommended. We don't demand more than a good sound in the listening position - not even the entire listening room simultaneously.



This can be experienced to some extent also at home. Connect a pair of cables you are used to, try to register the depth, focus and three dimensionality of the sound stage. Then, change to another cable for one of the channels, and have another listen. You will likely find that the sound stage has completely disintegrated. So, there is a difference between cables but none of them will make a piano or a voice to sound completely different. The differences be in our perception of the room and three-dimensionality.

If the sound stage becomes larger with more space between instruments and better focus, you might find the voice in the middle better enhanced. But the explanation is not that the volume has increased.

What does the cable discussion have to do with this review then? Well, that these speakers in many ways approach a performance level where the discussion is relevant. If you have speakers for perhaps 800 - 1000 Euros placed in an ordinary living room with all its acoustic problems, the benefits from better cables are probably a complete waste. It is sufficient using cables only to transport enough current to the speakers, in other words large enough diameter.

While discussing cables, on the back side of the Divines you find more things than usual, at least in this price range. The terminal connections are quite simple, but there are many of them, one set for passive drive and one set for active. On the panel there are also tiny links to enable you to adjust the bass- midrange and tweeter levels to your room. They are clearly marked.

Room and placement demands

Using two 10 inch woofers on each side this speaker will move a lot of air. It plays so large and heavy that it needs more air around it.

When you first see this speaker in real life you can easily understand that they are no simple task for the amplifier. The cabinet measures 130 cm high, and weighs no less than 70 kg sending out a warm-and-so some of "threat". A bit like Chuck Norris.

I claim these speakers need a room of at least 25 m² to perform properly, partly due to the fact that they need to be placed some distance from the walls. If somebody buys these and place them next to the wall the entire thing is a waste.

Regardless of the room's length and that the distance to the back wall should not be possible to divide by 2, 4, or 6, the speakers will end up quite far out in the room. I have seen some recommendations that say 1 m from the walls, but that will turn out completely wrong if the room is 4 meters long, but much better if it is 5 meters.

There is no exact answer how far out they should be placed, it should be tried out for every particular room. You have to consider both the back wall and the side walls. The optimum thing is to reduce the number of possible standing waves, and it doesn't hurt to use a calculator. Glenn who does our laboratory tests writes a lot about this - and believe me, it works!



In this case you should try to get the placement correct using a yardstick. If there is a one centimetre error between the right and left channel you will end up with lots of phase errors and the wrong focus, which will ruin the soundstage in three dimensions.

It should be within millimetres, and you can actually hear that the soundstage opens up completely. As usually, this sweet-spot is fairly small, but is easily audible when you put your head to the neck-rest and just find yourself "there".

There is often a discussion about playing in time when it comes to speakers. In this area XTZ Divine is the complete opposite of everyone else. The supervisors need some time to soften up. Some indicate several hundred hours, but our experience is that most of it happens during the first 24 hours. It's also a widely spread misunderstanding that ceramic drivers, magnesium and other sophisticated materials need much longer time to bed in. It would be quite pointless to use ceramics if they were to soften up after a few hundred hours, like the membrane needs to be played in. But the supervisors of even for more exotic drivers usually need some time to settle.

The sound unbelievably good

When we could finally sit down with the speakers properly placed, with good electronics connected and our music selection, I immediately found reasons to declare these the best speakers I have ever heard in the price range. The experience is unbelievable. And even if there are many competitors in the price range between 4 - 10 000 Euros, there are very few, if any at all, that possess all the qualities that the Divines do. The closest competition would be speakers like Dahl Helikon 800, B&W 803, Pro-sound S-82X, Canton reference 2.2, Sonos 1.1 and 1.1+ and similar. They all cost 3000 - 4000 Euros more, but I claim none of them play as clean in the midrange, so loud, fresh and realistically. If you want that you need to spend even more money!

The midrange is so fantastically transparent, dynamic, clean and realistic that my jaw is dropping. The vocals from Katie Melnick, Kate Bush, Sting, Peter Gabriel and Pavarotti are so present and realistic they send shivers down my spine. Especially my "old love" Kate Bush makes me forget everything around me when she mesmerizes me with her spellbound notes.

Add that, the midrange is seen together with the treble and bass in a seamless way, and nothing sticking out, everything is just pure bliss.

It's like other speakers have to compete in one area at a time, and hand over the victory to Divine as soon as we start talking about impression. We have just had JBL K12 in the listening room, and even if these can play mindbogglingly loud without breaking a sweat, much louder than the Divines, the latter is so close to K12 sonically that the 20 000 Euro price difference doesn't seem like such a wise investment if it's pure sonic quality you are looking for.

K12 is seating with style, but the Divines doesn't, but there are limits for what you can get for 4900 Euros. The SEAS woofers provide a heavy foundation, and the Divines can therefore be used for home cinema without a subwoofer. Just think of setting up an installation with actively driven Divines (there are separate connection terminals for this), connected to a DSP. This offers a chance for home cinema enthusiasts to achieve something extraordinary at a decent price. The question is what to use for the centre. The answer is to run the front system in phantom mode until XTZ comes up with their own centre. Something they should perhaps consider!

The tweeter used in the Divines is good in the sense that it matches the sterling midrange. Some competing brands have solutions that can meet the challenge, but at an awfully much higher price.

Conclusions

I cannot say anything but the fact that I'm quite shocked - wondering what just happened. The impression of music is the same you might expect from speakers that truly cost a fortune coming from truly well renowned high-end brands. And here comes XTZ from Sweden, booming their way into the speaker market with a product that should really scare the hell out of the competitors.

The question we need to ask ourselves is if the speaker is just too cheap to really draw the attention from high-end buyers. Maybe they just look at the price tag and say it doesn't fit their "price profile" - without checking the sonic performance. For everybody else who doesn't care about showing off and buy speakers because they sound good, rather than because of expensive logos in the front, this is really a really good purchase.



Plus:
The midrange is fantastic!
Shockingly good at this price
Heavy and solid

Minus:
Nothing in this world at this price

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