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MartinLogan Stealth Series Vanquish and Axis Speakers Reviewed

By: **Greg Handy**, February 29, 2016

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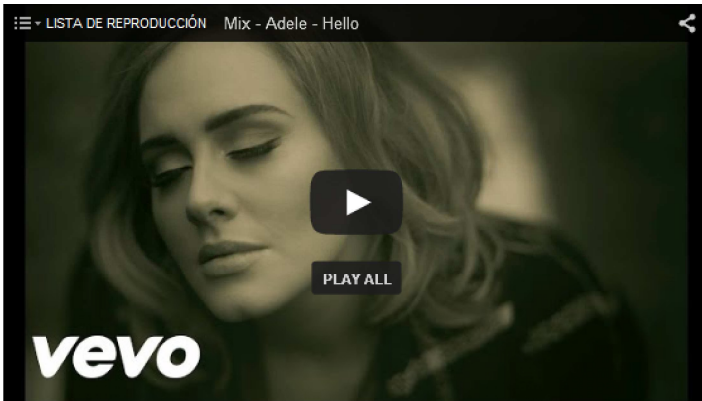
Overall

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Performance

I broke in the speakers for several days, then I began critical listening with Adele's new song "Hello" from her latest album 25 (XL Recordings). I immediately noticed that the speakers imaged exceptionally well. While the sound was emanating from a higher place, it was not originating from the ceiling--it was more like a sonic image hovering in the balance of the room. There was a clear center image, and the overall sound extended beyond the physical location of the speakers. The soundstage was very large, with more depth than what one would expect from such a system. The midrange was good, but the bass was thin, causing the desire to push the volume higher.



I moved on to the song "Take Me to Church" by Hozier, from the album of the same name (Ruby Works). Vocals sounded clear and detailed, portraying the artist's tough voice wonderfully. The dramatic mood of the song was well communicated by the Vanquish speakers. But again, there was a lack of presence in the bass and perhaps lower mid-bass range. With a few changes on the Anthem receiver, I engaged bass management and directed frequencies of 80 Hz and below to the [MartinLogan subwoofer](#). I repeated those first two songs and experienced a whole new dimension of sound; the system came alive, filling the necessary voids. Even mid-bass from the Vanquish improved.

Lastly, I listened to Aaron Neville's take on "Everybody Plays the Fool" (RCA Records). Aaron's voice sounded warm and balanced with exceptionally natural tones and clarity. Instrumentation was silky

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smooth with no edginess. The overall sound was not in-your-face, nor was it overly relaxed. It was just right.



For movies, I started with my standard pod-race scene from [Star Wars Episode 1](#). The pods circled my room with precision. Even channels six and seven were contributing well, creating a fantastic effect. The Vanquish continued to image the sound in the middle of the room. The presentation was superior to the Totem [Dream Catcher](#) 5.1 system that once resided in my family room, even though they had the benefit of being freestanding speakers.

I moved to the movie *Furious 7*, and the Lykan Hyper Sport sky-rise jumping chapter. The characters Brian and Dom jump the Lykan Hyper Sport racecar through two high-rise towers. Crumbling statues, shattering glass, and twisting metal joists cycled through my room, putting me smack in the middle of the action. It was hard not to get consumed by the action and theatrics, but I had to move on.

The movie *Avatar* was next, advancing to the Ikran Initiation scene where the Avatars actually fly these wild pterodactyl-type creatures that they refer to as Ikrans or Banshees. The Stealth speakers really showed off their capability here. I could swear there was wind blowing in my family room from the fluttering wings of the banshees. The overall size of the soundfield was large and compelling.

The Downside

The only criticism of the Vanquish/Axis combo that I could identify is the lack of bass and perhaps midbass ability without the assistance of a [subwoofer](#). I suspect, with open-back speakers like these, that results can vary wildly based on installation limitations. For example, in my room, the ceiling joists run parallel to my front wall. Therefore, the front left, center, and right speakers share the same air cavity between the same set of joists, causing interaction between speakers. Of course I installed insulation around the speakers, as instructed by the manufacturer, but I doubt that would solve the problem completely. If I had the wherewithal and time, I could have built solid wall barriers within the joists; but, as you can imagine, this would not be easy. If this were a pre-construction situation, of course you'd have options. Alternatively, if the joists ran from front to rear, each speaker would receive its own joist bay and perhaps less interaction between speakers would exist, allowing for more bass response. So, it is entirely possible that the lack of bass could be resolved in a different installation—or by adding a good [subwoofer](#), as I did.

Comparison and Competition

There are many architectural speakers on the market today. Listed here are a few speaker models that intrigue me with their design, quality, or perhaps value.

As an alternative to the Vanquish [in-ceiling speaker](#), MartinLogan's sister company Paradigm offers the [Sig-1.SR-30 v.3](#) (\$1,000). These speakers use technology from Paradigm's highly regarded Signature Collection floorstanding speakers.

Revel offers the [C763L](#) (\$750), which has a similar appearance to the Vanquish in that it is a large, round frame to hold various drivers, but the Revel frame has an integrated enclosure.

The Triad Silver/6 [monitor](#) is an MDF-enclosed ceiling speaker (\$1,450). I have had the opportunity to audition this one, and it is impressive.

The [Sonance LCRIS](#) (\$1,250) is another enclosed in-ceiling option at a similar price point to the Vanquish.



Slideshow: The 23 Most Expensive Audiophile Speakers of All Time



Finally, the **PSB C-LCR** (\$799) is another enclosed option. Stay tuned on this model, as I will be performing a review on this speaker in the very near future.

In regards to the Axis in-walls, there are many competing models, as this is a more common design. **Paradigm's SA-LCR 3** (\$1,375) from the Reference Collection comes in at a similar price point to the Axis. The **PSB In Wall W-LCR2** (\$799) is a consideration, as it has a similar driver configuration as the Axis. Lastly, Sonance has an in-wall offering at a similar price point as the Axis, named the **LCR1** (\$1,250). I could go on indefinitely, as there are no shortages of this type of in-wall speaker, but the models listed here, in my opinion, offer a similar level of quality and engineering as the Stealth line.

Conclusion

The MartinLogan Stealth line of architectural speakers impressed me. Their build and component quality is significantly high. It is obvious that much thought went into the design of these speakers, and the results are **ultra high-end**. MartinLogan has created a quality product that will provide a proud sense of ownership. When coupled with the BalancedForce 210 **subwoofer**, the sum performance was greater than any one speaker's individual achievement.

I used to avoid my family room, opting for my reference Vienna Acoustic and NAD combination, located in another room. However, thanks to the addition of the Vanquish and Axis speakers, I now find myself wanting to watch movies in the family room. I would highly recommend this product if you are considering an architectural speaker solution for your space.

Additional Resources

- Check out our **In-wall and On-wall Speaker category page** to read similar reviews.
- **MartinLogan Motion 60XT Floorstanding Speaker Reviewed at HomeTheaterReview.com.**
- **New Play-Fi Speaker and Amplifier from MartinLogan at HomeTheaterReview.com.**

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