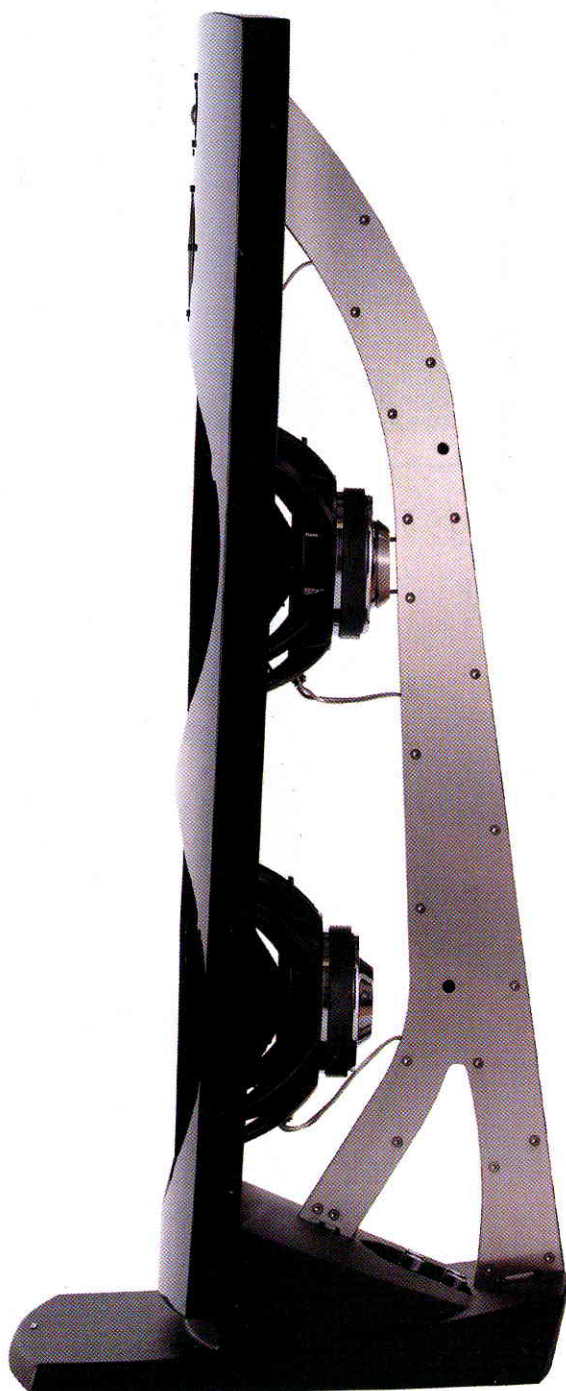


Jamo R 909 Loudspeaker

A speaker that transports you to a recording's acoustic space

Robert E. Greene

I've often visited Baltimore, which is where my wife Paige is from. I have felt patriotic at Fort McHenry, admired the musical traditions of the Peabody Conservatory, and had the crab cakes that are the city's culinary specialty. But I had never been to Baltimore Symphony's Meyerhoff Hall. Never, that is, until some weeks ago when the Jamo R 909 speakers arrived and took me to Baltimore for an acoustic tour. I still do not know what the Meyerhoff looks like, but I do know what it sounds like—after listening to the Jamos play the Rachmaninoff Second Symphony recorded there by Telarc.



All right, so allow me a little rhetorical flourish. But what I wrote is not really an exaggeration. The Jamos do a truly remarkable job of recreating space, of “transporting” you to the acoustic venue of the recording. Properly set up, the Jamos let surprisingly little of your own listening room into the picture. Sit quietly for a while with your eyes closed listening to them, and a sudden sound in your room can bring you back with a disconcerting jolt, so much are you likely to feel as if you’re somewhere else. The manual clearly explains how to achieve this and why it happens. These are my kind of people—they really tell you how things work.

The Jamos are dipole speakers in the bass and midrange. Physically, they consist of two 15" woofers mounted one above the other on a 48" high by 19" wide, slightly curved, rigid baffle, with the midrange driver and tweeter mounted on the same baffle above. Rather than being in an enclosure of any kind, the two woofers and the midrange are open in the back. The baffle is supported behind by a central metal brace, and the whole back is covered with a grille cloth so one does not see the working back ends of the drivers. The speaker is unusual but elegant looking. The review sample had a spectacular yellow baffle, with black grille cloth behind and removable black front grilles. The tweeter, while baffle-mounted as noted, has by its nature a closed back. But up into the treble, the whole speaker really operates as a dipole, so there is the usual dipole acoustic null to the side. This absence of sideways radiation opens up the possibility of greatly minimizing sidewall reflections.

The crucial ingredient is to delay the early reflections from the room boundaries. Peter Walker, himself a designer of dipole speakers of course, used to like to talk about how he hoped that nothing but direct sound would arrive for at least 10 milliseconds. The trick was and is to aim the dipole null at the side wall, angle the speakers and set them far from the wall behind, and yourself far from the wall behind you, and voila, nothing but the floor and ceiling—and, on account of the dipole pattern, those will be quite weak and can be damped out. The Jamos do this, as do Walker’s Quads.

But there is this important difference,

The Jamos have glorious, full, yet precise and extended bass



and obvious it was, too, from the first note of the Rachmaninoff. The Jamos have glorious, full yet precise and extended bass, a bass undreamed of by any but truly enormous electrostatics. They are also free of the middle-bass “hole” that afflicts so many point source speakers. And as the symphony proceeded, the Jamos turned out to have a dynamic capacity beyond electrostatic realms. I was tempted to subtitle this review “the electrostatic perfected.” And while that might have been a bit mean-spirited it would not have been inappropriate, for the Jamos do have the same kind of low distortion, transparency, coherence, and smoothness ‘stats have, but with a power and fullness that electrostatics can only dream of. Though the orchestral range is fully covered, you’ll still need a subwoofer for earthquakes and pipe organs at full volume—even dynamic dipoles do have limits. By the end of the Rachmaninoff symphony, I was quite swept away, as if I had been at a concert.

I tend to reserve the word “great” for things like the works of Beethoven and Michelangelo, but if I were to relax this rule, I would say this is without doubt one great speaker. It joins in my experience a select few—the McIntosh XRT28, the DALI Megaline, my Harbeth M40 (with subwoofer), the Gradient Revolution (with active, doubled bass units)—at the outer reaches of actually reproducing the live experience of large-scale music in a domestic environment, including a convincing sense of the original acoustic venue.

The Jamo is not just superb at reproducing large-scale music. With its cost-no-object midrange and tweeter it does superbly well with the small-scaled music, too. The Water Lily recording of Arturo Delmoni playing solo violin was right on the mark as to tone, while the reverberant acoustics of the church where the recording was made were revealed naturally, with clarity but no exaggeration. (The disproportionateness of a pair of 15" woofers to the 5.5" midrange and 1" tweeter is only visual.) Ulf Bastien’s voice in Schubert’s *Winterreise* [Ars Musici] sounded natural and integrated, and very much like my memory of Bastien’s voice (I have heard him sing this from close range in a domestic environment). And Ella Fitzgerald’s *Let No Man Write my Epitaph* [Classic/Verve] sounded beautifully natural.

All this superlative performance of the Jamos is, however, available only with careful set up. In my experience, dipoles are actually rather easier to set up in the bass than are box speakers. But in the midrange, the opposite is true. The Jamos do indeed reproduce bass quite well almost anywhere you put them as long as they are at least a few feet from the back wall. But the midrange was all over the map unless I gave them lots of space behind. (These remarks do not apply to the highs, which radiate forward only.) I ended up with the speakers seven feet from the back wall with nothing behind them except some acoustic treatment on the wall. And leave the grilles off for serious listening (with the grilles on there is a not-unpleasant but not quite neutral balance that leaves the 3–4kHz region a bit recessed).

The balance between the bass and mids is sensitive to listener position. Up close the speaker is warm, with ample bass and a little extra fullness in the lower mids (around 200–300Hz). Further back, with proportionately more room sound (and less proximity effect, I suppose), the balance shifts to the middle midrange while making the speaker sound less smooth. I sat quite close to listen yet one more time to Barenboim's *Tristan und Isolde* [Teldec], which then had its true Wagnerian character of depth, fullness, beauty, and power.

The Jamos really appealed to me, but nothing is quite perfect and I have to admit that even in the best position they did not quite offer the automatically nearly perfect mid and treble flatness of, say, the BBC-heritage box monitors or of a born-to-be-flat professional monitor like the Mackie HR 626. The Jamos are a little extra-full-sounding, as noted. They also slightly recess, even with grilles off, the upper mid/lower treble regions. These are amiable deviations, and the Jamos certainly give one a natural, convincing, and indeed beautiful tonality. But if you are in the (unlikely) business of, say, checking out microphones, you might want to back up your results with one of the absolute flat-liners. And if you are really touchy about materials coloration, you might be able to feel that the SEAS magnesium drivers, for all their magically low distortion, have a little color, a slight "sheen" I would call it, of their own, not

The Jamos really
appealed to me,
but nothing is
quite perfect



obvious and not disagreeable, but audible with enough exposure. Still, talk about picking nits on a wonderful product—overall, the Jamos give so much of the truth and beauty and strength of real music that one's critical faculties are all but disarmed.

Jamo has been a well-established brand in Europe for a long time. But has not been a major presence in the U.S. until now. From here on out, though, they should be a high-end force to be reckoned with. The Jamo R 909s are poised to become a legend in their own time. And they deserve it. I haven't had such a good time with a review sample in a month of Sundays. **TAS**

Specs & Pricing

JAMO U.S.

3502 Woodview Trace, Suite 200
Indianapolis, Indiana 46268
(877) 878-JAMO
support@jamo.com
jamo.com

Type: Three way baffled dynamic driver
dipole (monopole treble)
Driver complement: Two 15" woofers; one
5" SEAS magnesium midrange;
one 1" Scanspeak Revelator tweeter
Frequency response: 25Hz–30kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Nominal impedance: 4 ohms
Dimensions: 21" x 50.2" x 19"
Weight: 139 lbs.
Price: \$14,999

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Nakamichi TX1000 turntable; Morch DP-6
tonearm; Bang and Olufsen MMC1 cartridge;
Classé Audio CD-1 transport and DAC-1
converter, Benchmark DAC1 converter; Plinius
and Bryston BP-25 preamplifiers; Z Systems
RDP-1 and RDQ digital preamplifiers/ EQ
devices; Bryston 14 B ST and Carver A-220
amplifiers; Harbeth Monitor 40 and Gradient
1.3 loudspeakers; Audio Physic Minos
subwoofer; Liberty Audio Suite and Liberty
Praxis measurement systems