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## Product Review

### Song Audio Type II Silk DM Loudspeakers

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February 2003



[http://www.soundstagemagazine.com/measurements/song\\_typeii\\_silk\\_dm/](http://www.soundstagemagazine.com/measurements/song_typeii_silk_dm/)

### Review Summary

#### Sound

"The Type IIs' midrange had an uncanny ease that made vocals intoxicating"; "imaging was also splendid; there was good lateral spread, excellent soundstage width and depth, and always outstanding center fill"; however, "the highest frequencies are truncated slightly," which is "hard to notice at first because the treble is so smooth."

#### Features

Attractive minimonitor that mates a 6 1/2" woofer with a 1" soft-dome tweeter; manufacturer-stated 90dB sensitivity and tube-friendly impedance.

#### Use

As Doug discovered, "the Type II Silk DMs work well with tubes *and* solid state."

#### Value

"A unique loudspeaker with its own set of sonic strengths"; but "at \$2000 per pair, the Type II Silk DM certainly has competition."

I first encountered Song Audio's products at Son & Image 2002 in Montreal. The company didn't appear to be big, but there was a surprising array of Song Audio products on display: tube-based amplifiers and preamplifiers along with two speaker models. But more importantly, the system on demonstration was producing very good sound.

Because my interest always gravitates towards loudspeakers, I was first drawn to the Type II Silk DM speakers on display— attractively shaped piano-black loudspeakers that retail for \$2000 USD per pair. The Type II Silk DM is a fairly large two-way monitor that measures just over 16" high by 9" wide and 12" deep. The cabinet appears very solidly built, and on the back

side is a brass plate with the speaker's technical details, serial number, and point of origin—Thailand. Song Audio is, in fact, a Canadian company. The design work, though, takes place in both Canada and Thailand, with the manufacturing done in Thailand. So this little company is multinational. The company also produces a Type I Silk DM—a smaller, similar-looking speaker that costs less: \$1600 per pair.

The DM stands for Domestic Monitor (versus SM for Studio Monitor, another version of the speaker intended for a non-home-based environment). The DM version has an all-MDF cabinet with a piano-black finish. It's eye-catching, and while the slick black finish is not up to the standards of, say, Verity Audio or Wilson Audio—catch the light right and you can see a bit of waviness—the Type II Silk DM doesn't cost as much as speakers from those companies either. The Type IIs are also available in a wide assortment of exotic wood finishes, which are created by fitting 4mm-thick plywood onto the panels, at no additional cost.

The cabinet is attractively shaped, straying from the regular ol' rectangular box we see so often. The woofer is oriented on the vertical part of the front baffle, but the tweeter's orientation angles back. Two grilles come with Type II: one snapping over the woofer section and the other for the tweeter area.

Along the sides is a double groove to give the speaker a little more visual pizzazz—and it does. The speaker's base also juts out a little bit, forming a lip at the bottom that lines up perfectly with the grille when it's attached. Overall, the Type II Silk DM is quite attractive.

The Kevlar woofer is from Davis Acoustics and measures 6 1/2" across. The tweeter is a 1" Scan-Speak soft-dome unit. A single pair of J.A. Michell Big Mother rhodium-plated binding posts flank the back, so you can't biwire or biamp these speakers. The Type II Silk DM is a vented-box design with a

# SoundStage!™

## Product Review

third-order crossover implemented at 3.5kHz. The speaker's sensitivity is quoted as 90dB/W/m—if true, at little higher than most speakers on the market—and the impedance as 8 ohms. The -3dB point for bass extension is 60Hz—not necessarily something that will break any records, but this is respectable extension that can be sufficient enough to satisfy music listeners. The review speakers came individually boxed—no lugging a single large packing carton around.

### System

Because Song Audio produces tube amplifiers (and *only* tube amplifiers), you might think that you should only use these speakers with tubes. Never jump to conclusions. The most you can say is that the Type IIs are *tube-amplifier friendly*, because, as I found out, the Type II Silk DMs work well with tubes *and* solid state.

I used the Type IIs with what I call the “Orpheus stack”—Orpheus One DAC, Orpheus Two preamplifier, and Orpheus Three 40Wpc stereo amplifier. All the Orpheus components have very low profiles and can be stacked neatly on top of each other. The only thing missing, of course, is an Orpheus transport—which was shown at CES and will soon be available. My Theta Data Basic transport supplied bits to the DAC via the outstanding i2Digital X-60 digital interconnect. Speaker cables were Nirvana Audio S-L series, and interconnects were also Nirvana S-L series from preamp to amp. A specially made interconnect cable that is XLR terminated on one end and RCA terminated on the other ran from the Orpheus One DAC to the Orpheus Two preamplifier. And, of course, I also tried the speakers with tubes: the wonderful Zanden Audio Model 5000 Mk II DAC running into the 35Wpc Zanden Audio Model 5000 all-tube integrated amplifier. I used the speakers on 24” stands.

In both cases, the Song Audio speakers were used with a world-class front-end. And both amplifiers are not high-powered—these speakers don't take much power to sing.

### Sound

The review pair of Type II Silk DM speakers was already well used, so no break-in was necessary. As a result, the speakers' sonic strengths were immediately apparent.

The Type IIs' midrange had an uncanny ease that made vocals intoxicating. The imaging was also splendid; there was good lateral spread, excellent soundstage width and depth, and always outstanding center fill. Even with the speakers spaced a little wider than normal for my room, there was never a hole in the center of the stage. As a result, voices hovered in space with reach-out-and-touch dimensionality.

Bass was tight and reasonably deep, but as with all smallish stand-mounted speakers, the low end can only go so low. The high frequencies, though, get interesting again. On the one

hand, the Type IIs are not the airiest speakers you're going to find—the highest frequencies are truncated slightly. This is hard to notice at first because the treble is so smooth; but the subtle reduction is there if you compare these speakers directly to others that are flat to the stratosphere. On the other hand, the Song Audio speakers do not sound dull. As I said, they have an easy quality about them. And although that last bit of high-frequency extension is reduced, on the bright side (so to speak) the Type IIs *never* come across as hashy or edgy. Overall, this speaker is quite seductive, and that's exactly the sound I heard in Montreal.

I've been playing Norah Jones' “Shoot the Moon” (*Come Away with Me* CD [Blue Note 32088]) on virtually every system combination of I've set up recently. I like the way Jones' voice is so starkly placed in the mix and the way the engineers captured the sound of the piano—with a bell-like purity. The Type IIs laid out the stage perfectly: the voice dead center and the instruments placed firmly around it with depth of stage that was easy to perceive. The Type IIs don't thrust vocals as far forward as the Ruark CL10 loudspeakers I reviewed some time ago, but voices do tend to be at or in front of the speaker plane. This indicates to me that the midrange frequencies are likely a touch more prominent than the rest of the spectrum. Jones' voice was exceedingly clean and without a hint of excessive sibilance, and her piano had the sort of clarity I hear with the better speakers that come into my listening room.

Mark Knopfler's *The Ragpicker's Dream* CD [Warner Brothers 48318] has gorgeous sound too. “Why Aye Man,” the opening track, starts slowly and then revs up. There's some deep bass near the beginning, and I'm sure that a speaker that can reach to the very bottom would pressurize the room. The Type IIs, though, are not that type of speaker and can only hint at what's really down there. Yes, they commit the “sin of all small speakers”—limited bass extension compared to floorstanders with good-sized woofers—but they certainly don't sound lightweight. And they do other things to help you overlook this fact.

Vocals are a highlight with this speaker. Knopfler's thick, textured voice is planted firmly in the center, and there's crispness to the reproduction, giving it great presence. Knopfler's guitar and the other instruments are sprinkled in the stage around him, easy to dissect from the recording, just as with the Norah Jones CD. When the drums kick in, they're placed far back, creating a stage with knockout width and depth. Separation between the instruments is decisive, indicating good overall resolution. Guitars and harmonica play key roles on the sixth track, “Fare Thee Well Northumberland.” The guitars leap from the Song Audio speakers with the same kind of texture and detail that I heard in Knopfler's voice. The Type IIs do an excellent job of avoiding cabinet colorations; they have a quick and nimble sound that results in reproduction of string-based instruments that is clean, fast, and incisive.

# SoundStage!™

## Product Review

As I mentioned, I learned early on that this speaker diminishes the topmost frequencies a tad, so I used portions of “Fare Thee Well Northumberland” to determine how this characteristic affected most music. The sound of the topmost region of the keyboard on this recording was smooth, refined, and very clean. The Type IIs have the kind of clarity and purity way up top that the best speakers have—no quibbles there. But there is that reduction of the extreme highs, and it results in some air and sparkle that go missing. While the keyboard sounds as extended as it needs to be, when you put this speaker side by side against another that doesn’t hold back on the top end—the Revel Performa M20 and the Amphion argon2, for example—you’ll find that although the main portion of the sound is there, that infinite bit of airiness is lacking. Thus I classify the Type II as being a “softer”-sounding speaker.

Noting the angled baffle on the tweeter and thinking that more than likely it had something to do with the speaker’s overall mellowness, I tried something to get to the heart of the matter. The eighth track of the Knopfler disc, “You Don’t Know You’re Born,” has some well-recorded, airy-sounding cymbals. I first stood up, ears on axis to the angled-up tweeter’s center; I then sat back down, effectively off-axis from the tweeter (how the speakers are designed to be listened to). Sure enough, in the standing position, I heard greater treble extension and air. When I sat back down, these were again truncated a notch. Which sounded better? That depends on what you like and what kind of recording you’re playing. The speaker was obviously voiced to sound the way it does.

Blue Rodeo’s latest, *Palace of Gold* [WEA 2 44915], is recorded in a manner more indicative of a lot of pop and rock—too thin, dynamically compressed, and with a top end that borders on being bright. Musically it’s great, but sonically it’s simply not up to the standard of the band’s 1994 gem, *Five Days in July* [Discovery 77013]. But the Type IIs’ softer top end made this recording sound *just* right. Yes, something was lost, but in this case that something was simply excessive brightness that would have normally had me reduce the toe-in severely to keep the tweeter from firing right at me, or alternatively—as a lot of audiophiles do—go searching for cables that roll off the top end to make it a little more palatable and pleasing on my ears.

While dissecting a loudspeaker’s sound in “compartments” can be enlightening, you should always go back to the way it sounds as a whole. In other words, forget the bits and pieces and ask yourself: *Do I enjoy the way this speaker sounds?* This question was answered for me when I went into my listening room to make some more notes for my Zanden Model 600 review. With pen in hand, I cued up the Knopfler disc again, but when that wonderfully huge and detailed stage was laid out in front of me and Knopfler’s very present voice was dead center—as though he was in the room—I traded my pen for a coffee and ended up listening to the album straight through.

In fact, I took notes on the intricacies of the disc, forgetting the speakers entirely.

Yes, the Type IIs sound good—very good, in fact. They’re one of the most pleasant and involving speakers I’ve had in my room, but one, admittedly, with a signature of their own.

### Comparisons

Two of my favorite upper-end bookshelf-style speakers are the Revel Performa M20 and the Amphion argon2. The Revel M20 is about the same price as the Song Audio speaker. The argon2 has no grille, but is priced from about \$300 to \$500 cheaper depending on the finish.

Visually, all of these speakers look different, and preference of styling will be a personal thing. The Type IIs’ strength here is that in the black finish they’re rather elegant-looking set up in a room.

Sonically, the three sound good, and if you just threw a dart you couldn’t go too wrong with any of them. Of course, the pursuit of high-end sound is about sonic differences, and discriminating listeners will pick out those differences in a flash because these speakers all have their own character. That said, let me start by saying that no one will likely buy one over the other for the bass they provide. They all have small-speaker bass, so they’re limited in that way. The positive aspect is that they’re all sufficiently weighty-sounding to stand on their own. Sure, you can add a subwoofer, but you don’t *need* to—at least I don’t think you do.

Overall, the argon2 and the M20 are the more linear-sounding speakers—conveying the most in terms of ultimate neutrality. They’re more precise, and from top to bottom no one area jumps out or recedes. They’re also more extended in the top end, sounding airier and more detailed compared to the Type II. The Type II, though, tends to project the mids more—probably because that region is a little more prominent—and this probably accounts for its pleasurable way with voices.

If you want a speaker to simply hand you the recording “as is”—more or less a true monitor—the argon2 and M20 are great choices. But if that’s not important to you and you care more about obtaining a pleasing “sound,” even if it strays from a rigid set of rules, then certainly have the Type II on the audition list. Of the three speakers, the Type II was consistently the most pleasing with a wide range of material.

Finally, there’s one more consideration: the amount of power these speakers need. Depending on the amplifier you choose to use them with, this issue could sway you one way or another. Our measurements show the argon2 and the M20 to have sensitivities of 85dB and 86dB, respectively. Song Audio claims 90dB, and in my room they play like it. The 35Wpc Zanden Model 600 proved to be a good match, and at my

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## Product Review

normal playback levels, the amp never ran out of steam. I can't say that amp would be as good a match with the argon2 and M20 given the bit of juice they need to get going. So while the Type IIs aren't for tubes only, they are seemingly tube friendly and more or less suitable for lower-power amps in general.

### Conclusion

Loudspeakers are a growth sector of the high-end industry, so putting out a successful design is a formidable task no matter a company's size. In order to succeed in terms of sales, a speaker must perform to a high level, and it must differentiate itself from the crowd.

Song Audio is a new company, but they obviously know how to carve out a niche. With the Type II Silk DM, they've put to market a unique loudspeaker with its own set of sonic strengths—excellent soundstaging, a gentle but involving overall personality, an easy-to-drive constitution—along with elegant and graceful styling. At \$2000 per pair, the Type II Silk DM certainly has competition, but every speaker in this price range does. If you like your music easy on the ears, put these speakers on your audition list.

...Doug Schneider

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### Company Info

#### **Song Audio Type II Silk DM Loudspeakers**

Price: \$2000 USD per pair.

Warranty: Five years parts and labor.

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### Song Audio responds:

The Song Audio Type II Silk DM acoustic monitor is the second model after the landmark Type I reference minimonitor. The primary emphasis in the design was critical listening, with measurements or specifications being a secondary target. The DM Domestic Monitor speakers have been voiced for absolute musicality, while the SM Studio Monitor speakers are unforgiving monitoring variants. The SM series have radiused frontal edges, slightly slimmer but deeper cabinets, and no grilles (so are not suitable for environments with smokers, young children, or pets). They also have external crossovers, which do complicate system setup. As exemplified in this review, musicality and accuracy are different paths to the same goal.

All my best,

Song Kim  
Song Audio