

Lowther C45-based AcousticPlan Veena semi-active loudspeaker system: The Ultimate Lowther Experience

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Specifications:

Type: Dynamic with on-board amplifier for active-woofers

Drivers: Lowther x 1, woofers x 4

Frequency response: 30 ~ 20kHz

Sensitivity: 98dB in active-woofer mode, 88dB in pure passive mode

Impedance: 8?

User selectable active-woofer output: -3, 0, -3dB

Recommended amplifier power: 5 watts + in active mode, 50 watts + in passive mode

Dimensions: 64.4 H x 18 W x 6.3 D (inch) excluding base

Weight: 88.2lb

Finish: Maple, cherry, walnut (standard); special finish available in all veneers and lacquers

Manufacturer:

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Much to the elations of Lowther fans', the adaptations of the iconic single-driver technology by an increasing number of companies worldwide into their own multi-way designs had brought the Lowther name back into the spotlight. One of such companies was AcousticPlan of Germany; yet, unlike all others, Klaus Jäckle of AcousticPlan was not content with the seemingly universal approach of coupling an additional woofer just to augment the Lowther's bottom-end.

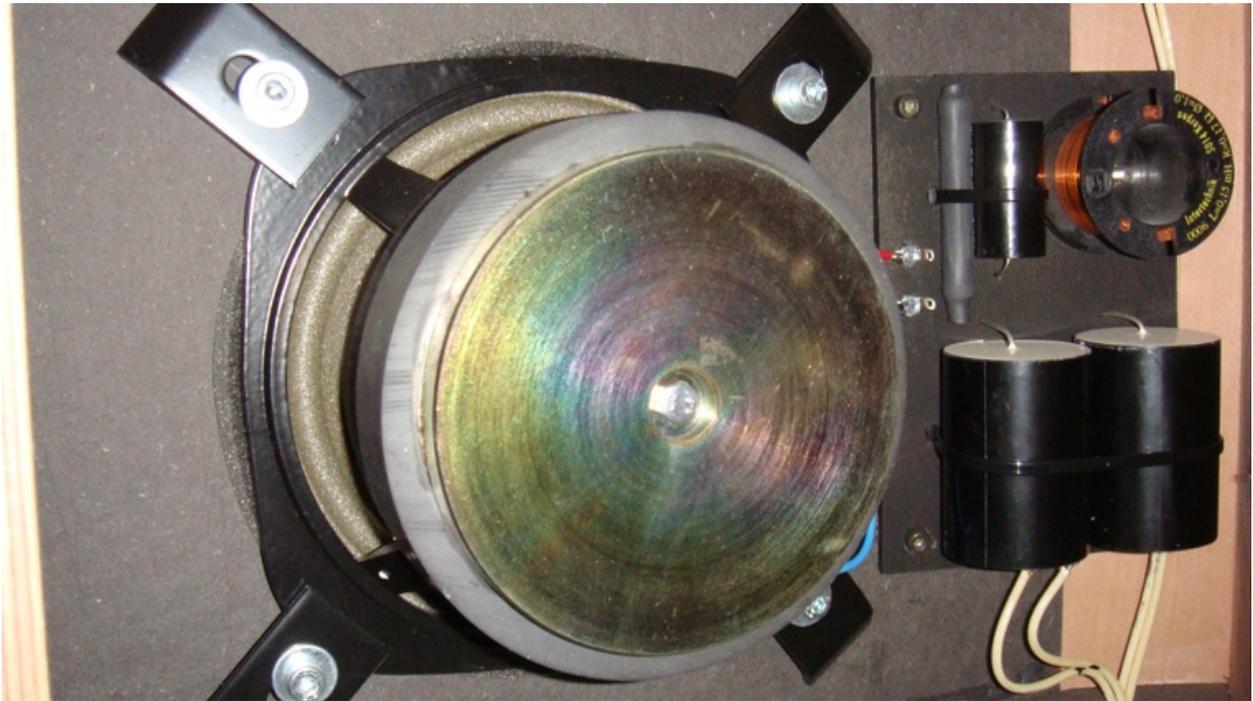
AcousticPlan had been producing a very noteworthy line of electronics that included the PhonoMaster (a phono stage), the Sitar (hybrid integrated amplifier), the Sarod (full preamplifier) and the Santor (hybrid power amp). The Veena was not Klaus' first-generation loudspeaker creation, but it was the most comprehensive loudspeaker design effort by him to date.

According to Klaus, his vision of a flagship loudspeaker would be one capable of such natural sound that it would convey the emotions of the sound to the listener, at the same time possessing no cabinet sound, high sensitivity even at the deep bass, and, for long-term listening pleasure, no artificially induced effects. Hence, Veena, a string instrument from India, known to produce the most complex harmonics of all instruments, became the namesake for Klaus' creation. From the Tangram Audio website, AcousticPlan's U.S. Importer:

"The new Veena from AcousticPlan is one of the most radical loudspeaker designs to be developed in many years. A real cabinet no longer exists, it is reduced to a wooden frame covered on one side with a bended thin board made of pressed and glued veneers. The result is lightness with regard to its optical and physical dimensions. The radiation pattern of all speakers in dipole characteristic allows the music to spread out freely and without energy absorption as in electrostatic loudspeakers.

A Lowther driver with high efficiency and the additional sound energy of the back side allow the connection with small power amplifiers. Multiple bass drivers resulting in huge diaphragm area achieving low frequency power without any compromise. To adjust the level of bass response an additional amplifier is integrated. Basically it consists of a transformer with a following MOS-FET impedance converter unique in minimalistic circuit design. That's why reproduction of the low frequency range excels in precision, immediacy and authenticity.

Avarta and Veena have their own character with regard to the dimensions and especially to their quality of sound presentation. Music will be performed absolutely effortless, which makes you forget all the technique involved. The listener becomes part of the performance - an essential condition for the experience of emotions like in a concert."



Succinctly, the Veena was a 5-inch Lowther C45-based loudspeakers system with four 10-inch active woofers per channel in an open-baffle structure, with the C45 placed at the second position from the top, which was occupied by the first active woofer. The C45 Lowther featured a ceramic/iron magnet and traversed the frequency from 150Hz to around 20kHz. Then, a minimalist crossover network handed frequency below 150Hz, to 30Hz, to four active Beyma BR60 woofers. With the Beymas' unique properties of a low moving-mass, low mechanical compliance, high sensitivity and a Thiele-Small profile that facilitated use in an open baffle, the in-house-designed AcousticPlan onboard amplification would supposedly provide such bottom-end support through the quadruplet of woofers, that the likes of which no Lowther-based loudspeakers had ever achieved.

According to Klaus, the Lowther C45 was selected over others by the way it sounded while being held in bare hands, and the crossover frequency point of 150Hz was reached only after factors, such as the baffle characteristics and shape were taken into calculations. In terms of performance, the Lowther C45 driver adopted by Klaus would be the entry-level design in Lowther's series of products. Yet, because of the inherent phase-coherency of all of Lowther's full-range, single-driver approach, among many other virtues that helped culminated in a superlative level of tonal coherency and purity, even the humble C45 has been celebrated as the quintessential Lowther experience for those seeking a purer listening pleasure.

The Veena accepted only single-wired connection via its binding posts, and the woofer level was connected to the three available taps of the amplifier transformer, hence adjustable in the increments of -3dB/0dB/+3dB via a knob on the amplification module at the bottom rear of the Veena. AcousticPlan offers the optional settings of -6dB/-3dB/0dB at no extra charge for customers with smaller rooms, and the review sample was thus equipped. At the -6dB output setting, I found the woofers to present the most complimentary accompaniment to the lone Lowther in producing the most natural bottom-end. As a dipole, each AcousticPlan Veena required breathing room aft of it and to its sides,

so as to allow for the back and front waves to cancel each other out.

In terms of finish, Klaus appointed maple veneer to the panels flanking the driver column, which was adorned in turn by a full-height grill. Each Veena was threaded through the bottom to a one-inch thick, black laminated MDF stand in the shape of a quadrant of a circle, measuring 18.75 inches long on adjacent sides. Three adjustable spikes were further threaded into the underbody of the stand for decoupling from the floor.



SETUP & AUDITION

The Veena's Lowther C45 driver seemed to have high dispersion at both the vertical and horizontal planes. Measuring from the center of the Lowther driver's cone, it was situated at 46.5 inches from the floor, a full 10 inches higher than my ear level at 36 inches when I was sitting in my couch. Still, listening ten feet away in a chair that raised my body half a foot taller than my couch did not yield any appreciable change in my perception of the Veena's performance in my room. On the horizontal level, toeing the towers in reduced the speakers' interaction with the side walls and reigned in tonal definition.

Measuring from the back of the drivers, as the Veena was an open-back design, the final positions for the Veena towers were a little further from the front wall than my usual arrangement with most other speakers, at 5 feet. The center of the Lowther also measured 3 feet to each side wall.

Amplifications were provided by two pairs of monoblock amplifiers: one solid-state, one tube. The solid-state pair was the Pass Labs XA100.5 monoblocks (\$16,000), and the tube pair was the Red Rock Renaissance SE (\$29,500). Digital front-end was the 47 Laboratory 4704 PiTracer CD transport with two Power Humptys (\$30,000) power supply, and the Wadia Reference Series 9 Decoding Computer System (\$28,000).

Digital cable was a 1.5-meter run of the Combak Harmonix HS-102DGRCA "Harmonic Strings" (\$1,510) RCA digital cable, and the Wireworld's latest Platinum Eclipse 5² XLR interconnect in a 2-meter pair connected the Wadia RS9 to the Pass Labs XA100.5. For the Red Rock Renaissance SE which had only RCA inputs, Audio Note's Sogon™ silver RCA

interconnect provided the linkage. An 8-foot, single-wired pair of the Combak Harmonix HS-101 SLC served as the reference speaker cable.

The AcousticPlan's 5-inch Lowther displayed tremendous dynamic capacity than standard Lowther drivers, most likely a result of the delegation of the lower frequencies to the quadruplet woofers. For the first time in my experience of a Lowther, I heard progressively powerful portrayal of full-size orchestras comparable in output to the Tannoy Churchill Wideband's 15-inch Dual-Concentric™ driver, with a encompassing bottom-end easily the equivalent of what the Tannoy could muster, and then some. One of the most superfluous



CD tracks in testing the dynamic range of loudspeakers is the infamous sunrise opening sequence in Richard Struass' tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The one disc most incomparable, in my opinion, in both artistry and sound of the work is the one from the late maestro Herbert von Karajan's 1984 Deutsche Grammophon CD, subsequently remastered in a higher-bit format and reissued as the Karajan Gold edition in 1993 in celebration of the conductor's 85th birthday. In ordinary circumstances, it would be beyond insane for anyone to put a Lowther through this track. In the case of the AcousticPlan Veena, it was mindboggling.

From the first note where the organ's utterance of a sustained bass line leads us into the world of the intellectual superman, the Veena's quadruplet active woofers reigned in the audience's attention with their highly articulate, unrelenting rendition of the instrument, which had been reproduced with inevitable degrees of obscurity on other speakers. The fundamental virtue in the Veena's deployment of four active woofers tuned to work with a lone Lowther was the incredible level of details in the upper bass that such system projected

into the listening space. The sense of scale was also incomparable, even when compared to the Tannoy's 15-inch driver.

The Veena was made to play powerful tracks like the Richard Strauss tone poem.

In a manner of resemblance to more exotic designs with tremendous upper bass horns and woofer towers, such as the \$192,000 pair of the Acapella Triolon Excalibur, the AcousticPlan Veena pumped more spatial cues into the listening space via its four active woofers in recent memory than any other speakers. Playing the FIM K2 HD edition of the classic Proprius [*Cantate Domino*](#) disc through the Veena conjured up the most surreal musical experience one can have, fully resplendent with the powerful turbulence from the

church organ's colossal pipes as it infused the venue with spatially-rich cues of upper bass details, cunningly recreating the distinct hollow interior of the hallow ground.

But then again, the Veena also illuminated the soundscape most magnificently from the midrange and up via its lone Lowther. In the interim in which the four active woofers were strutting their stuff in sync with the five-inch driver, the modified Lowther traversed the inconceivably expansive frequency range above 150Hz, never breaking a sweat. None of the blazing brass with its horns and tubas, to the collective harmonies of the strings, posted insurmountable challenges to the Lowther. It was mere pieces of paper and a seemingly lowly ferrite magnet of the Lowther that delivered the high-decibel, dynamics-laden experience.

There was one other level of the Veena experience that I never had from any other speakers, and that was instrument size truthfulness. As hard as it was to break myself away from playing orchestral pieces through the Veena, with the subtleties and force of the playing beautifully presented constantly, I would be remiss not to offer, for the record, how the AcousticPlan produced a feeble flute with a most realistic, miniscule scale in contrast to the trio of ground-shaking, background taikos in the JVC XRCD² [Ondekoza](#).

Most readers would know a good thing immediately when they hear one, and when you heard for yourself the realism of instrument size as offered by the Veena in which a flute was reenacted in producing a much smaller dimensionality and dynamic scale than that of a drum or piano, you would know you were in the presence of something extraordinary.



In the end, it was a Lowther, and the Lowther way of vocal realization that was beyond reproach. The FIM K2 HD sampler [This is K2 HD Sound!](#) contained a female vocal track dubbed "Esther/Kinderpiele". Accompanied by an acoustic guitar, and in an instance only applicable to Lowthers, the female vocal was rendered with such delicacy of resonance and lightness of tone, as to qualify as the definitive sample of a female popular-music singing.

Vacuum tube amplification would seem to be the default order of the day in driving the 98dB efficient Veena, but the speed of the four woofers seemed also to demand judicious judgment in choosing amplifiers. The fastest sounding tube amplifier was the Red Rock Renaissance, which I [reviewed](#) in the October 2008 Issue. Despite its push-pull nature, the

RRR's ultra-flat frequency response and superfluous but proven power supply structure endowed the reenactment of signals of the most delicate in nature, which in turn fostered the propagation of an unimpeded musical flow.

Solid-state designs had few alternatives with just the tiny bits of softness necessary to ensure a cohesive coexistence with the Veena, but the undisputed dynamic transients of the designs would shock the first-time Lowther listeners and delight Lowther aficionados with the resultant realism of dynamics. Nelson Pass' XA100.5 monoblocks provided the answer. Unlike the X.5 series, the XA.5s operated in pure Class-A mode and possessed a tonal vibrancy most conducive in driving the Lowther. The monoblocks' 100 watts output was most certainly an overindulgence, thus the smaller XA.5 models would be no less of an ideal choice.

With such speed, the Veena must be equipped with the better of power cables. The difference in the performance of the Veena's active woofers between better engineered power cable and lesser designs was vast. In the instance when two of Furutech's latest Piezo Powerflux power cable allowed the four active woofers to better delineate tonal characteristics of bass instruments and percussions, generic cables homogenized the distinctive shades of bass notes most regrettably and handicapped the Veena's ability to involve the listener.

CONCLUSION

The Lowther driver adopted by AcousticPlan was a thing of marvel. Though it was modified with the addition of a resistor to divert information below 100Hz to the quadruplet of woofers, and that certain concession needs to be accepted for a possible reduction in transparency of its performance next to standard Lowthers, the AcousticPlan Lowther still had few peers, if any at all, in the purveyance of truth of timbre portrayal and tonal sophistication.

An original Lowther with no modification may have been regarded by many as the purist of loudspeakers. Still, the same Lowther aficionados will be astonished to hear what the AcousticPlan Lowther can do. For the Lowther is now joined by four active woofers, the likes of which possessing such dynamic transients in such harmonic integrity with the Lowther, that it is simply the Lowther experience of the most ultimate magnitude.

Some woofers and subwoofers bombard the listening space with artificial, unnatural effects, creating the goose bump moments induced by strong output of the deepest of notes. The important point is, the Veena's woofers did not overwhelm the lone Lowther and were instead providing discreet bottom-end support to musical presentations.

Veena's bottom active woofer presented the largest degree of interaction with the floor than the other three higher woofers, thus could post a concern to readers having bare flooring in their listening room. Carpeted rooms, like mine, mitigated excessive floor reinforcement in this regard.

The Veena's bottom-end definition absolutely improved with the use of better power cables, and the difference was strikingly stark. The Furutech Piezo Powerflux, for example, with a whopping, 68 strands of the company's proprietary Alpha OCC conductors and also equipped with their own mechanically and electronically non-resonant FI-50 Piezo Ceramic connectors, created bottom-ends that were at once drastically more defined in

timbre truthfulness, versus the employment of lesser cables that dulled the rendition of bass notes. In exploiting the full potentials of the \$28,000 Veena, the employment of the two \$1,800 Furutech Piezo Powerflux power cables was crucial.

The most precious musical experience anyone can have is the moment when we first encountered a piece of music so ethereal that our physical being was seemingly dissolving around an emerging sub consciousness, one that seldom is awakened and escalated so resoundingly.

Such an experience traverses beyond the daily sensory stimulation that one can obtain from a gourmet meal or a ride in an exotic sports car. The motion picture medium is perhaps one of the closest venues that is able to impart such an out-of-body experience, most particularly in portrayal of the rarest of beauty, be it of the natural world or of an actress. I would like to think that we all have memory of such moments when a certain star is put under the spotlight.

Listening to music close to my heart through the AcousticPlan Veena often conjured up such instances. In contrast to the AcousticPlan Veena, all companies' previous attempts in their incorporation of a Lowther to their designs seemed less ambitious.

For the longest time in the audio hobby, we had never come across anything Lowther that could perform to this level, or anything Lowther-based that would give no concession in performance in direct comparisons. But now we have the AcousticPlan Veena, and the world is perfect. At least until Klaus comes up with yet another breakthrough.....

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