



# THEOPHANY

tōne ★★★★★

## M3b Stand-mount Speakers \$2999

Back in January 2007, After Gary Pearce returned the Theophany M2 stand-mount speakers he'd reviewed for issue 55 of *Tone*, they mysteriously found their way to my place for a few weeks. I distinctly remember a feeling of bewilderment when I fired them up, and wondered how these Kiwi-made speakers had bigger and tighter bass than any stand-mounts I'd previously heard.

I had a similar reaction with Theophany's new M3b stand-mount speakers. The bass convinced me that the subwoofer in the corner of the showroom was on but it turned out to be as inert as a lump of coal. Theophany's Garth Murray has again managed to extract more from a compact speaker design than the immutable laws of physics would seem to allow; or maybe such laws just don't apply in Christchurch.

The M3bs are unmistakably from the Theophany school of design: curvaceous, elegantly sloping and well built to the bargain. Driven by Audiolab's 8000 series components or even a Pioneer LX AV receiver and Blu-ray combination, they exhibited the trademark Theophany character, sounding big, dramatic and involving.

The M3bs are plainly impressive performers but it was only when I got them home that I actually grasped how towering their abilities are. With the sources and amplification moved up a level by my Yamaha A-S2000 integrated amplifier, Marantz SA8260 SACD player and modified Technics SL1210 turntable, the speakers absolutely vanished into the soundstage, disappearing even more completely than my Theophany M5 Series 2 floorstanders do, hanging musicians in the air with disconcerting solidity and lifelike effect.

This combination proved captivating, hooking me over and over. The first night I had them, I wanted a quick listen to relax after arriving home close to midnight. More than an hour later, I realised I'd just burned through all seventeen tracks of one

### TECH SPECS

**TYPE:** Two-way stand-mount loudspeaker  
**TWEETER:** 25mm ferro-cooled silk Torridial with neodymium magnet  
**BASS/MIDRANGE DRIVERS:** 2 x 130mm twill woven glass fibre  
**POWER HANDLING:** 150W RMS  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 34HZ-25KHZ (+/-3DB)  
**IMPEDANCE:** 90dB/1W at 1m  
**DIMENSIONS:** 442 x 238 x 345 mm (H/W/D)  
**WEIGHT:** 9kg each  
**FINISHES:** Various real wood veneers plus painted finishes

### PROS

- + Sonic excellence
- + Big-hearted performance
- + Stylish looks
- + Kiwi made

### CONS

- \* Pass

### VERDICT

An amazing small speaker. At this price I'd give them five and half stars if I could

### CONTACT

www.theophanyloudspeakers.com



### DIVINE INTERVENTION?

Theophany director Garth Murray had an idea that there might be a market for a higher end bookshelf speaker (he calls them bookshelf speakers, hence the "b" designation. I say they're stand-mounts but we agree to differ) and decided to dissect an old pair of M3 floorstanders to see what kind of results he'd get. Minutes after he'd started the saw, the phone rang with an enquiry for the as yet nonexistent product. The first pair was sold then and there, with a second set following almost immediately. They're now in such demand we had to nick our curvaceous brown oak veneered review set from the Auckland Theophany showroom during a quiet period. Giving them back was a sad day indeed.

The current production run will have the new Theophany Torridial tweeter. Apparently even better than the silk dome on this set, the new tweeter would make them an even more rock solid proposition than they are now, if that's at all possible.



of my desert island discs, Nils Lofgren's *Acoustic Live*. I worked through my music collection searching for weaknesses but I came up short. From a wide range of acoustic music playing quietly late at night to carefully selected dynamic workouts with the throttle cranked wide open, the Theophanys were up to any challenge, being mellow or wildly bursting with sound and rocking out like crazy as required.

When I put my Viganoni and Viganoni Sachel power amps into the system the M3bs went ballistic, lifting their game still further to display clarity and dynamic agility that made a Saturday afternoon listening session into one of the most enjoyable I've ever had at any price. I was so exhilarated that I ended up wondering if I could award them five and a half stars.

Besides the driving musicality and tight bass (they go down under 40Hz, according to Murray), there's a wide soundstage and tangible imaging courtesy of the upward-firing drivers. The super-quick transient response makes for startling dynamics and attack, and the levels of resolution and transparency expose the textures and detail of the music like good headphones, especially with vinyl.

The M3bs are best in a moderately sized room as they don't sound quite as titanic as the M5 floorstanders, but like most stand-mounts, you won't notice that the very bottom of the frequency range is missing, and the M3bs go as low as many floorstanders. In any event, the flagship M5s are a much bigger and more expensive proposition that will appeal to a different buyer.

This review could have been short and sweet but the editor insists on us actually doing some work, so you had to read the screed above. The short version reads as follows: the Theophany M3b speakers are nothing less than the superb M5 Series 2 floorstanders shrunk in the wash, with a major portion of the performance of their big brothers for well under the half the price. If for some reason the floorstander selection from Theophany won't work for you, these will. ■ BRETT GIDEON



### THEOPHANY IN AUCKLAND

So that's what a \$30,000 sofa or \$12,000 cabinet looks like. Is it all right to pop my feet on this \$6000 dollar coffee table? Those were some of the thoughts that flew around my head when I visited the new Theophany showroom in Auckland. No, Garth Murray and his Theophany team have't gone wildly overboard with the furnishings; they've partnered with Ashton Grove, an upmarket furniture store in Newmarket, with one of the upstairs rooms being dedicated as a showroom for Theophany's speakers.

Murray says he's found a good portion of his clients aren't hardcore audiophiles and they don't often frequent hi-fi shops, they just really appreciate good music. So rather than opening a dedicated Theophany store in Auckland, he's come up with a partnership that creates a luxurious, relaxing environment that won't intimidate and which is very acceptable to significant others. With that, you know he's won half the battle.

The room is set up with M5 Series 2 floostanders, M3b stand-mounts and a Sub 12 subwoofer, with the little Epiphany speakers being used as rear surrounds for multichannel demos. Other models from the range will be brought in on demand. The AV components are an Audiolab CD player and integrated amp for stereo, and a Pioneer LX series home theatre receiver, LX series Blu-ray player and one of the awesome 50-inch Pioneer Kuro plasma panels *Tone* likes so much. The big room allows the system to really sing, reproducing a massive soundstage that the various speakers fill with indifferent ease.

Demonstrations are by appointment only at this stage, as the commute between Auckland and the Theophany head office in Christchurch is still a little long.



Theophany boss Garth Murray with his wife, Steph.