

## The fab audio Stonehenge Loudspeaker

Anthony Kershaw

One of the endearing attributes that I admire in audiophiles is their absolute faith in all that is good in high end audio. Snake oil merchants, charlatans, sellouts, and no-talents apart, true audiophiles espouse our avocation anywhere and everywhere. I bump into these missionaries all the time - a real perk of the job. One such memorable occasion was at the [2001 Toronto Audio Show](#). Wandering the dull halls of the local Holiday Inn, I heard very pleasant sounds being described by a couple of passionate faces. I had stumbled upon ingénue, fab audio, dream child of Jim Fabian and Michael Thompson. Both Toronto guys, the fellas told me excitedly about their two designs, the splendid-looking, piano black Model 1 and the Stonehenge, stentorian in a lovely wood finish. I asked for a couple of CD selections, the guys complied, and a short time later, I asked when the first review pair was available.

Jump a couple of years. It took a while (it always does in this business), but I got an email a few months ago saying the Stonehenge was ready for the requested review. During the time between show and delivery, a tremendous amount of hard work has been done on fab's part to get their fledgling company up and running, with a line ready for market and marketing. A new [website](#), a balanced (and well-tested) line, with distributors and dealers ready to sing the new Canadian's praises.

Fabian and Thompson were very accommodating, delivering the speakers directly to the house, and spending a lot of time suggesting setup and discussing the intimacies of the design. It was a very pleasant evening. The speakers that arrived were gorgeous piano black lacquer (the guys are justifiably proud of the company's cabinet maker). The two inky monoliths pose quite a formidable picture, with just a delicate touch of silver jewelry - a beautifully crafted aluminum faceplate for the dome tweeter. Fab!

They looked great, were a snap to set up, and, saint's be praised, were already broken in. Seldom, in this writer's experience, are the serious listening sessions allowed so quickly! During the delivery visit, listening was achieved above the conversation, while the typical pleasantries were offered from cynical critic to wide-eyed designers. Yet, if truth were told, the speakers did have some special qualities that were readily apparent, even as amplified instruments and voices darted in and out of polite conversation.

Over the next two months, I got to cozy up to these speakers for hours on end. When they leave, the quality time I spend in my listening space will be diminished. Yup, Messrs. Fabian and Thompson are on to a good thing here. They have produced a speaker that is both visually and aurally seductive. The Stonehenge accomplishes excellent sound through a variety of means, the primary benefit of these, near distortion-free sound. I could, and did, listen to these speakers for days at a time.

The Stonehenge design has been carefully thought out. It is a floor standing tower, with a



dynamic 2-way speaker system and bass reflex loading. The frequency response is 38 Hz - 20kHz +/- 3db, has an impedance of 8 ohms, and a sensitivity of 96dB (at the Toronto Show, I heard the Stonehenges driven with an 8 watt SET tube amp to very high levels). The speaker is a substantial 11 ¼" w x 13 ½" d x 43 ½" h in dimension and weighs 80lbs. The aluminum dome tweeter is surrounded by a precision-machined aluminum faceplate with phase plug. Braided lead wires and a powerful magnet system (without liquid cooling) are used for maximum transient performance and efficiency. The 10-inch woofer has a cast basket, rough molded heavy paper cone, doped and pleated cloth surround, massive focused 90oz. magnet and 3" voice coil. The crossover (crossed at 2,200 Hz acoustic) uses audiophile, premium grade components and wiring tuned for a smooth frequency response with minimal off axis variation and low system distortions. The wonderful cabinet is front wall constructed with a proprietary 1 ½" laminate of MDF, plastic and cotton -- this combination has a broadband attenuation of 46 dB. Select panels are damped with a lead, rubberized bitumen laminate and extensive internal bracing is used throughout. For good measure, the crossover compartment is isolated. The speaker is single wired -- fab chose high-quality, five-way binding posts commensurate with the rest of the build quality. As such, the Stonehenge fit and finish is on par with the best in the business.

The essence of the Stonehenge sound is effortless musicality. Huh? Fiddle sticks! What about soundstage, imaging, power handling, and the rest of the 'good stuff' we pay for? Well, the Stonehenge has all the 'good stuff' and a lot more. The 'more' is a substantial and emotive way for listeners to experience the music. For sure, critics (and all audiophiles) have their checklists at the ready. I have mine. Yet, for much of my time with these speakers, I laid the list on the floor beside me and allowed the pure joy and spirit the Stonehenge portrayed to flow over an appreciative body.

The Stonehenge is very well balanced - pristine highs, refulgent mids and solid lows. The bass response, however, is room placement dependant. Interestingly, I heard the most powerful bass (it is always accurate and detailed) when the speakers were 36 inches or more from the wall - I heard less bass energy when the speakers were placed closer to my back wall! That was a first. The offset tweeters sounded better placed closest to each other. The Stonehenge sound seemed impervious to poor placement. I liked them angled toward the listening chair, firing at my shoulders. My favourite position? Dead ahead. Another first.

Do they rock? Well, yes and no. Yes, they can power up a room with the best of them, but these ever-so-musical brutes sound best when playing beautifully recorded acoustic music. I did enjoy a recent rock demo sent my way (the band is named Clarma - superb stuff!) - great energy, thundering drums and charismatic vocals, but what the Accoustic Arts CD player (review forthcoming) saw the most was classical and jazz.

The Stonehenges do throw a large and detailed soundstage, images placed firmly in their seats. Instruments and voices jump out of the speakers and dance around as if liberated from the confines of physics. Great to hear. But once again, I stress, you'll forget the gobbledygook, and hear the music. The rhythm. The tonality. The melody. The sheer bloody brilliance of it.

If you check out the CD reviews on [Audiophilia's front page](#) you'll read all about the play list I used - everyone does double duty at this magazine. Michael Boublé, Paul Anka wunderkind, singing his heart out and wringing every ounce of my heart along the way (*The Way You Look Tonight* - wow!), the audiophile's favourite pianist, Bob Silverman, banging the hell out of his Steinway in a superb acoustic (the Liszt *Sonata* is fantastic), and young cellist Adam Grabois trying to break into the industry with a self-published recital (worth the money for the Debussy *Sonata* alone). In their own way, each CD tells a much better tale about the special qualities of the Stonehenge than my prose ever could.



An unqualified rave? Well, I've heard more detail, more refinement and better image specificity from other speakers. Sadly, they cost many thousands more than the Stonehenge's very reasonable CDN\$3500.00. Moreover, very few I have heard get to the heart of the music the way the fab does. Super sound, excellent build, and reasonable cost. An audiophile's trifecta. Fabian and Thompson mentioned that their top of the line Model 1 speaker has everything the Stonehenge has, but more of it. Bring it on!

[It is with great pleasure that we award [The Audiophilia Star](#)

[Component Award](#) to the fab audio Stonehenge Loudspeaker. Congratulations! - Ed]

**Manufacturer's Comment**

*We at fab audio are extremely happy to receive the star component award for our Stonehenge model, and moreso, that you have been able to enjoy the speakers for precisely the reasons intended. Mission acomplished!*

*Audiophilia....thanks for the ability to get it!*

*Jim Fabian (fab audio)*

**The fab audio Stonehenge Loudspeaker**

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Price: Sandstone or Blue black/USD\$3,599.00 High gloss USD\$4,799.00

Source of review sample: Manufacturer loan

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