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No. 70 February 2015

Getting to Know Eggleston's Emma



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The EgglestonWorks Emmas

ALL YOU NEED

By Jeff Dorgay

Great things come from Memphis. It's the BBQ capitol of the world. Elvis is from Memphis. My wife is from Memphis. And the Eggleston Emmas are from Memphis. Though the price of gasoline and big screen TVs keeps going down, speakers seem to be getting more expensive all the time, so it's refreshing to hear a pair of speakers that cover all the bases for \$3,995.

EGGLESTONWORKS



Of course, my priorities are warped, and I'm sure we'll get plenty of sniping about "considering a \$4,000 pair of speakers affordable," but I do. In a world of six-figure speakers, four grand for a pair that accomplish this much is a major bargain. Infected Mushroom's latest release, *Friends on Mushrooms*, proves that these little southern belles can rock the house, even with a modest amplifier—in this case, a 35-watt-per-channel PrimaLuna ProLogue Four sporting a set of EL34 output tubes. Wow, wow, wow! Wu-Tang's "Ruckus in B Minor" has plenty of boom (the record, not the speaker) and though the mix is somewhat compressed and harsh, the Emmas can cope, even at high volume, keeping the mix intact; it never sounds pushed or polite, with the speakers reproducing only what's on the recording.

Slowing it down a bit with She & Him's "This Girl's in Love with You" reveals the delicate side of the Emmas, which do a smashing job of exposing inner detail and female vocal texture. Even a really shitty-sounding record like the Aquadolls' *Stoked on You* proves palatable with the Emmas as a conduit; they wring every bit of information out of this playful yet dreadfully compressed exercise in slightly surf punk.

If the Shoes Fit, Find a Dress to Match

As I've said time and again, all you need to enjoy music is a Tidal subscription, your smartphone and a pair of earbuds. Sure, a few hundred well-spent bucks will get you an old receiver and a great pair of vintage speakers—but if you really want to unravel what's lurking deep in your recordings (and get a glimpse at what the folks with mega systems are hearing), you're going to have to shell out some money. *(continued)*

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I won't call \$10K a point of diminishing returns; it's more like the point where the excitement begins in earnest. Yes, that is serious money, but it's no more than what a six-year-old Harley Davidson or a 10-year-old Miata would set you back. And unless you live in a really sunny area, you'll probably spend a lot more time listening to your audio system than you'll spend riding a Harley or driving a Miata with the top down.

Though I feel every part of a system is equally important, I've always been a firm believer in making the speakers the first major component purchase, because they interact with your environment more than anything else. There's no point in blowing a fortune on source components and amplification if you can't buy speakers that keep up with the rest of the system. In a perfect world, I'd suggest finding the speakers you love first, spending as much as you can, and then building the rest of the system around them.

Also in a perfect world, a manufacturer's time and money spent on researching ultra-high-performance machines trickle down to the hardware the rest of us can afford. EgglestonWorks builds some major speakers—like its Andra IIIs, which are used in recording and mastering studios around the world and as reference speakers at hi-fi shows.

Having heard the Andras numerous times (and being a big fan), I was shocked when I heard the Emmas last summer at the Newport Beach hi-fi show. When EgglestonWorks' principle Jim Thompson demoed the speakers, I was expecting a \$10K-to-\$12k price tag and couldn't believe that they were only \$3,995. I don't usually get fooled to this extent, but the more time I spend listening to the Emmas, the more I'm convinced that they are one of those rare components that perform well beyond what is normally offered at a given price. *(continued)*

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Simple Setup

With a footprint of only 7.5 by 14 inches—less than the majority of stand-mounted monitors—the Emmas occupy little floor space, and at about 3.4 feet tall, they place the tweeter at ear height for most listeners when seated. Thanks to a 4-ohm nominal impedance and 91-dB sensitivity, the Emmas don't require much power to sing. The 20 wpc from either my Nagra 300B push-pull amplifier or 845 SET does the job nicely. EgglestonWorks does not provide a "maximum power" spec for these speakers, which are able to play incredibly loud without distortion—a hallmark of the company's monitor speakers. I can't imagine needing more than 100 wpc of clean power to achieve high sound-pressure levels with these speakers.

Thanks to considerable vertical and horizontal dispersion, the Emmas are not terribly room dependent, nor are they tough to get sounding good quickly, even if you have an environment that doesn't allow optimum placement. I'm able to achieve excellent results in both my small (11-by-14-foot) and large (16-by-24-foot) rooms, though for obvious reasons it's a little bit trickier to achieve a balance of bass extension and imaging in the small room. That being said, I would still not shy away from using the Emmas in a small room, and with their efficiency, you certainly won't need much amplifier power.

As with every speaker we audition, achieving bass balance in the room is paramount, with everything else usually falling into place once the speaker is locked in. In the large room, the Emmas end up about 8 feet apart and slightly toed-in, while in the small room, they are only about 6 feet apart with no toe-in and GIK 242 panels at the first reflection points. After about an hour of jiggling the speakers back and forth, I install the machined spikes for the final bit of room synergy. *(continued)*

The speakers' two 6-inch woofers move a lot of air, with a lot of speed. Thomas Dolby's "My Brain Is Like a Sieve" proves instrumental in finding the perfect sweet spot of maximum bass output without sacrificing soundstage width and depth. Once optimized, the Emmas disappear into the room as easily as our little KEF LS50s, but with a lot more full-range heft.

The current Aphex Twin album, *Syro*, doesn't have a single sound that could be considered accurate, but its electronic wonder (if you're an Aphex Twin fan, that is) is a massive ball of electronic effects, showing off the spatial abilities of the Emmas to full effect. Yes, violins sound great played through the Emmas too, but they also can create a huge musical landscape—especially in a moderate-sized room, again fooling you into thinking that these are much more expensive speakers.

The Emmas' fit and finish is at the top of the class. While these don't have the Aston Martin-like finish of a pair of Wilson speakers, they still have a smoother paint job than my neighbors' new C-Class Mercedes. The Emmas we have in for review come in a gorgeous olive-brown color that has everyone arguing whether it is actually green or brown. Of course, white, black and silver are also available.

Relax and Enjoy

To recap, with the Emmas for four grand, you won't get the same performance as with EgglestonWorks' flagship Audra IIIs, which offer a level of resolution that you'll have to spend the big bucks to get; there's no free lunch in the world of high-end audio. However, what they *have* done at EgglestonWorks with the Emmas is make some very intelligent choices. If you don't need the massive dynamic swing that the Emmas' larger siblings provide, and can live with a bit less bass extension and high-frequency dreaminess, you'll be amazed at how close the Emmas come in a modest-sized room at moderate to less than ear-splitting levels.

The Emmas are so easy to set up, drive and pair with ancillary components that they will be the last part of your system you'll ever feel the need to upgrade. And if you never feel the need to spend \$50K on a hi-fi system, they could easily be the last pair of speakers you'll ever need.

I'm keeping the review pair for my home system, and I believe that's the highest compliment I can pay them. And we are awarding the Emmas one of our first Exceptional Value Awards for the year, too. These are great speakers. ●



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