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# Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 439 August 2018

# Fyne tuned

Bargain floorstander from start-up with audio pedigree



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# Fyne tuned

**David Vivian** tries out this affordable floorstander from a new British company featuring one or two familiar faces

**A** clue might be in the name, but to be honest, it isn't much of a clue. Fyne Audio. Considerable pun potential apart, a manufacturer with a Scottish HQ seems a fair bet – not unlike legendary Scottish loudspeaker maker, Tannoy. More than just a coincidence? Absolutely. The tortuous machinations that accompanied 'old' Tannoy's acquisition by The Music Group are very much related to the genesis of the entirely new speaker brand you see here. So, moving straight to go, target acquired.

Fyne Audio isn't your average start-up. The name might be new, but the ex-Tannoy personnel behind it bring with them a combined 200 years of experience in the hi-fi

## It tracks shifts in tempo with a light touch, delivering bass in a fast fashion

industry. Safe to say, the old cliché 'hits the ground running' has seldom seemed more apt.

It's probably not stretching things too far to speculate that the two model ranges launched so far suggest a design direction Tannoy might have taken had not almost the entire senior management, design, engineering, sourcing and sales team elected to leave and advance their ideas under a new flag. Put it this way: Fyne Audio's head of design and engineering, Dr Paul Mills, was responsible for the way the last 30-years' worth of Tannoy loudspeakers turned out.

Echoes of Tannoy are, perhaps, inevitable and nowhere better illustrated than the point-source IsoFlare driver utilised in the more expensive 500-series, the range that also showcases an advanced type of downward-firing bass reflex port going by the name of Tractrix, which refers to a mathematically derived, cone-shaped diffuser that outputs more evenly than a conventional port and is less fussy about positioning.

Neither innovation figures in the lower-priced 300-series, the larger floorstander of the five-strong range we're looking at here. But that doesn't mean Fyne Audio is out of fresh initiatives or tantalisingly up-market flourishes. The F303's brace of 150mm mid/bass drivers – above and below the tweeter in a d'Appolito arrangement for smoother integration – have multifibre paper cones with phase plugs at the centre to smooth midrange roll-off characteristics. Useful, but hardly ground breaking. The new thinking here is called FyneFlute technology and refers to the driver's unusually contoured, 'variable geometry' roll rubber surround, which is said to provide a non-homogeneous interface to provide a more effective barrier for the cone's energy, leading to a cleaner, more precise sound.

Uniformly black, and natty sunk into a glossy black 'head band', the 25mm tweeter's key parts are a polyester dome and a powerful neodymium magnet system. Again, nothing we haven't seen before. But integrated with the protective mesh cover is a 'phase loss compensator', which delays output from specific areas of the dome to promote a smoother and more extended frequency response. Similar attention to detail and quality has been paid to the computer-optimised (but fine tuned by ear) crossover board, which uses high-grade components usually found in more expensive designs. Also rare in this price bracket are chunky gold-plated, bi-wire binding posts.

The F303 is surprisingly light for a tower standing 962mm tall, but that shouldn't be confused with flimsy. It passes the knuckle-rap test, responding with a dull, short-lived, thud that carries no obvious ringing note. Fyne Audio says that exceptional rigidity is achieved through a combination of internally braced MDF panels and coupling the main drivers' magnets to the cabinet's bracing using a resonance-absorbing mastic.

The supplied spikes can be wound into the cabinet's base with no critical

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Fyne Audio F303

**ORIGIN**  
Scotland

**TYPE**  
2-way floorstanding loudspeaker

**WEIGHT**  
14.6kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
190 x 962 x 271mm

**FEATURES**  
• 1x 25mm polyester dome tweeter  
• 2x 150mm multifibre mid/bass drivers  
• Quoted sensitivity 91dB/1W/1m (8ohm)

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stability issues, but for complete, wobble-proof security, plastic outriders are supplied. There's a limited but classy choice of finishes comprising walnut, black oak or – as here – light oak. Each speaker has two magnetically attached grilles straddling the tweeter but, unlike the 500-series, they can't be 'stored' on the back of cabinet when removed from the front. Such a neat idea.

### Sound quality

As luck would have it, Q Acoustics' 3050i (*HFC* 438) – at the time of writing, arguably the circa-£600 floorstander to beat – is installed in my larger listening room, so it makes perfect sense that it should be the act the F303 follows. Initially, front-end duties fall to my usual Yamaha CD-N301 network CD player (*HFC* 401) acting chiefly as a CD transport with an Emotiva BasX PT-100 preamp's on-board AD1955 24/192 chip from Analog Devices taking care of digital conversion and the matching A-300 power amp (both reviewed *HFC* 429) driving the speakers. That setup is later swapped for a Cambridge Audio CXC CD transport (*HFC* 401), Chord Electronics Hugo 2 DAC (*HFC* 428) and Rega Elex-R integrated amp (*HFC* 420). ▶

**Fyne's 'phase loss compensator' is integrated into the grille of the 25mm tweeter**



## Q&A

### Dr Paul Mills

Head of design and engineering,  
Fyne Audio



#### DV: What's the secret to the finely detailed treble?

**PM:** We matched a 25mm polyester soft dome, chosen for its controlled and well-damped behaviour, with a powerful neodymium magnet system designed for high efficiency and ability to reduce thermal compression effects. A phase compensator disc is integrated in the tweeter's protective mesh. This is engineered to delay the output from specific areas of the dome to deliver a smooth and extended frequency response. The challenge was to create a crossover to maximise the tweeter's potential without pushing up the price. After auditioning, we chose components that delivered the best transparency with minimal colouration.

#### Most similarly sized floorstanders are heavier – do they need to be?

Thanks to starting with a clean sheet at Fyne Audio, we had the opportunity to look at things differently. While increasing the mass of the panels helps reduce unwanted vibrations they can also store a lot of energy. When that energy is released it can cause as many colouration problems as it solves. A more intelligent approach is to carefully damp the cabinet panels with internal bracing at critical nodes, both minimising unwanted vibration and significantly reducing stored energy in the panels. We also resistively couple the rear of the drive units to the bracing spars, which further improves overall system damping without the need for super heavyweight panels.

#### Can you tell us about how the Fyne portfolio will expand in the future?

With the F300 and F500 series in shops now and the F1-10 in production, our next launch will be a mighty new range-topping flagship, the F1-12 using a 12in IsoFlare driver. That will be followed by a smaller F1 model using an 8in version, the F1-8. Filling the gap between the mid-price F500 and high-end F1 ranges, the new F700 series is in advanced stages of development and a premium F900 series is already on the drawing board.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 150mm multifibre mid/bass driver
- 2 Rear-firing bass reflex port
- 3 Gold-plated, bi-wireable binding posts
- 4 25mm polyester dome tweeter

## HOW IT COMPARES

As already mentioned, the most obvious rival is Q Acoustics 3050i (HFC 438). The two speakers sound quite different and neither lands the knockout blow. If you want an effortlessly large, bassy, naturally detailed and comfortably upholstered presentation, the QA is persuasive. The F303 is lithier and faster with tauter low frequencies, a more incisive and open treble and marginally more transparent midrange. But, for £100 less, the Monitor Audio Bronze 5 (HFC 402) is hard to beat, combining much of the F303's clarity and brio with a decent dose of the QA's bass power.

But first, setup. The Q Acoustics 3050i is bigger and bulkier than the Fyne Audio F303 and effortlessly drives the large room with the 150W per channel US power amp doing its bidding. Impressively, it's a huge, walk-around sound that doesn't want for bass weight and extension or naturally delivered detail and has a sort of huggable, over arching warmth that's oh-so easy to relax into. A tad lush with slickly produced jazz in the Gregory Porter idiom? Just a hair.

The F303 fixes that. No, it can't quite match the QA's scale, authority and sumptuousness of bass, but as an opening proposition it sounds more agile and assertive, up on its toes, tracking shifts in tempo with a lighter yet more incisive touch, delivering its bass in a tauter, faster fashion. Singing *Hey Laura*, Porter sounds somewhat leaner and meaner and less like he's just necked a tin of golden syrup and, thus encouraged, soon the urge to progress to harder-hitting true blues proves irresistible.

Chris Bell's *Elevator To Heaven* from his *Real Bluesman* album is properly slow and smoky, his guitar's steely edge cutting through the mix like a sabre with a stunning 'live' rawness

and presence, even though it's a studio track. Santana's live version of *The Healer*, sans John Lee Hooker, is just as scintillating, the F303 balancing the track's laid back, chug-chug tempo against the searing virtuosity of Mr Santana's sprinting guitar runs to perfection. Again, the sheer, free-flowing energy of the performance isn't sapped, hyped or otherwise manipulated by anything too overtly 'hi-fi', with the spirit, drive and dynamics taking centre stage, precisely as they should.

Easing back to a spot of softly lit Diana Krall and *California Dreamin'* from her *Wallflower* album while taking the opportunity to usher in the

## It easily passes the knuckle-rap test, responding with a dull, short thud

Cambridge/Chord/Rega front-end, it's much the same story, the 3050i projecting the grand stage for Krall to perform on with just the merest hint of a rosy glow filter, the F303 sounding a little less romantic and full bodied, but more insightful and intimate. It can't quite pull off the same trick with *Desperado*, though. Although Krall's diction is marginally clearer on the F303, the subtle wash of massed strings way back in the mix that gives the song its emotional tug is more gorgeous via the 3050i.

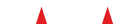
## Conclusion

Good news. Here's a new speaker savvy enough not to take on a well-loved class stalwart at its own beautifully honed and polished game. Instead it offers an attractive alternative to Q Acoustics 3050i, living life a little faster and feistier with a clear penchant for fun but just as much respect for the music ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Clear, agile, dynamically expressive sound quality; smart design

**DISLIKE:** Finish is not as neat as some

**WE SAY:** More quality sonics in a highly competitive sector, a terrific debut

### OVERALL

