

hardware review



Piega Coax 311

Thursday, April 16, 2020

standmount loudspeakers

Chris Kelly

I have been aware of the Swiss loudspeakers brand Piega for a few years now but had never previously had the opportunity to hear a pair, so jumped at the chance to review the Coax 311, a handsome stand (or shelf) mount model, which sits in the second tier of Piega's hierarchy, below the Master Series.

As you can see from the accompanying pictures, the Piega design ethic breaks away from the notion of the oblong wooden box beloved of so many speaker designers. Weighing in at a hefty 15kg for its 41cm/16inch high cabinet, the Coax 311 has an elegantly curved aluminium body with Piega's own coaxial ribbon unit for the midrange and high frequencies, a 16cm woofer provides the bass. The quoted frequency response is from 35Hz to 50kHz. No that is not a typo - 50kHz is the quoted and very high treble reach, I shall have to take Piega's word on that. On the back there are two pairs of high quality binding posts. Matching metal grilles were supplied but after experimentation I conducted

most of my listening with them off as I felt this gave the most open sound. The Coax 311 is rated at 4 ohms and 90dB efficiency, which makes them an easy load for most amplifiers, solid state or valves with a reasonable power output.



It is unusual for me to have metal bodied loudspeakers at home so I was not sure if they would be a good match for the HiFi Racks oak stands, which usually sit beneath my Harbeth P3ESRs. Luckily my friend Richard Trussel of Kingscote Audio was able to lend me a pair of Solid Steel SS stands for comparison, and it was immediately obvious that the Coax311s were much better served by the metal stands than the wooden ones. Likewise visually they made a much more coherent statement mounted on the Italian steel tripods.

I connected the Piegas to my Yamaha A-S3000 integrated amplifier using the TelluriumQ Ultra Black 2 cable which has taken up residence in my system, and just to get the speakers warmed up dialled in one of Tidal's rock playlists via the Naim NDX and left them to their own devices for the best part of the first day. But curiosity dragged me into the listening room a few times and I was impressed with what I heard.

That first evening Mrs Kelly and I sat down and watched a movie. The TV is connected to the NDX via a Toslink optical cable. She immediately commented on the clarity of the dialogue and the amount of detail that was coming through. It had us both sitting up and taking notice.



The Listening Experience

With my appetite whetted I was eager to start listening to music the following morning, and selected my usual slightly eclectic mix of vinyl, SACD and CD for that day's session. There was Bob Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks* on Mobile Fidelity vinyl, Love *Forever Changes* on Mobile Fidelity 45 rpm vinyl and SACD, Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* on vinyl and SACD, Iron Maiden's *Book of Souls* on vinyl, my original stereo copy of Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Axis: Bold As Love*, the classic Dave Brubeck *Take Five* on vinyl and Handel's *Messiah* on Linn's SACD release by the Dunedin Consort.

Before I realised it five hours had slipped past and I had not left the listening room. When that happens I know that I am truly engaged with the system – time becomes something of an irrelevance. The Piegas handled everything really well but I felt that they were at their very best with acoustic material, ironically the heavy metal of Iron Maiden was less well served. I felt that the clever full range ribbon design did not sound as good as it undoubtedly did with music that allowed it to breathe. Bear in mind that this was with the volume set at antisocially high levels, which would have made conversation impractical had there been somebody else in the room. At sensible listening levels, and when turned down for some late night jazz, the Coax 311s proved to be delightfully musical companions.



The integration of the conventional SEAS woofer with the ribbon main driver is exceptionally well executed, and for a relatively small enclosure the bass was fast tuneful and deep. I never felt the need to bring my REL sub into play with the Coax 311s – that 35Hz bass is impressive. As for the high frequencies, whether they go up to 50kHz I cannot possibly say, but what I can tell you is that high frequencies in the audible range are delightful – free of any hint of harshness and with that airy spaciousness which I so enjoy. The Dunedin Consort's Messiah made for a delightful listen.

In the following days my favourable first impression of the Piegas was confirmed. They offer a very different listening experience to my usual BBC-derived standmounts, but having become accustomed to their many strengths I really enjoyed what they were doing. My usual suspects came and went from the turntable and digital sources – JJ Cale, Eric Clapton, Pink Floyd, Dire Straits, Traffic, The Bonzo Dog Band, plus quite a bit of classical music and the Piegas brought it all to life. The sound does not have the warmth you get from my Harbeths which others might describe as colouration, which I have come to enjoy, but it does have loads of detail and plenty of rhythm and timing too.



Conclusion

If you like the aesthetic of their curved aluminium cabinetry, then these loudspeakers do make a compelling case for themselves. Pair them with appropriate stands and drive them with a good amplifier and source and they will give years of great musical service. Although I am strictly a two channel guy, if I was ever going to get into the multi-channel home cinema world I would definitely short-list the Piega Coax series for it – I think that is when they would become jaw-droppingly good. But even for a die-hard stereo guy like me, these were a fascinating alternative to the more orthodox designs to which I am accustomed.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Type: 3-way bookshelf loudspeaker

Tweeter/midrange: coaxial ribbon

Bass: 160mm UHQD with titanium voice coil

Power handling: not specified

Sensitivity: 90dB

Nominal impedance: 4 Ohm

Frequency response (-6dB): 35Hz – 50kHz

Connectors: bi-wire terminals, Piega multi connectors

Dimensions (HxWxD): 410 x 220 x 2500mm

Weight: 15kg

Finishes: polished aluminium, black anodised, white lacquer

Warranty: 6 years

PRICE: £6,200