Townshend Audio Seismic Speaker Bars

by Jason Kennedy

Like many things associated with Max Townshend, how the Seismic Speaker Bars work sounds eminently sensible when it's Max explaining things, and complete gobbledegook when that explanation is passed on to someone else. Here's the best we can do: Although they are too weak to feel, we are shaken by an almost constant series of earthquakes at Magnitude 2.0 and below. The horizontal displacement of such quakes is in the order of microns, but when you consider that a loudspeaker cone only needs to move 0.01 microns to emit sound, and that localised displacement caused by traffic has its own effect, it's perhaps not much of a jump to conclude that vibration transmitted from the ground and through the structure of a building can easily undermine that being created by the cone. So much for having a speaker physically spiked to the floor!

Townshend's Seismic Speaker Bars are designed to decouple speakers from the floor, so that all save for the lowest frequencies (as in, those below three hertz) cannot travel between floor and speaker. Until this geophysical explanation came to light, I was under the impression that the bars helped reduce energy travelling from the speaker to the source and amp: but it's very likely a much bigger issue than that.

Townshend's Speaker Bars are available in four widths, from 250mm to 550mm, and seven spring ratings, for speakers weighing anywhere between two and 256 kilos. Each steel cradle sits on two Seismic load cells, which are essentially damped springs supported by flat, felt covered bases. It's a simple but smart solution that doesn't look too out of place, even under a serious loudspeaker.

Installation of the Seismic Speaker Bars requires any spikes or feet be removed and the cradles placed such that the speaker is balanced in a vertical position. This can take a bit of experimentation and can be quite tricky with larger floorstanders; I used them with 20kg PMC Fact.8s and 17kg Cambridge Aeromax 6s, and both required precise positioning of the bars to balance properly.

The effort was more than worth it when I put on some music, however; the effect is a bit like freeing the sound from the speaker. Music seems to be able to escape the boxes with greater ease and form a cohesive, three-dimensional image in the room. For instance, Javier Perianes piano sits behind the speakers in a precisely defined acoustic and the Seismic Speaker Bars help deliver the entire nuance and delicacy that this talented Spaniard is able to muster when playing Manuel Blasco de Nebra's Piano Sonatas [Harmonia Mundi]. This is a fine recording, that much is apparent even without Seismic Speaker Bars, but they take the noise floor down and let the speaker reveal a lot more of the fine detail that goes into producing such a compelling illusion. As mentioned, the speakers better remove themselves from the picture when sitting on these bars. It's a spectacular trick that is achieved through the extra isolation enabling the speaker to deliver a cleaner and significantly better focussed version of events. Overhang is surprisingly well eliminated, ▶

but not by rolling off the bass, which is still extended and powerful. The cradles are designed so that there is very little difference in height when they replace spikes – it's proximity to the floor that has the greatest effect on bass and that is maintained.

With the *Nils Lofgren Band Live* album [Hypertension], it's clear that the pace has gone up a gear. The removal of overhang from the bass means that notes stop and start a lot quicker so you get a faster sound. This is very gratifying with an electric bass and drum workout, because you feel the power of the drum kit and the chunkiness of the bass strings, with less of the 'smear' that usually gets in the way.

The system revealed more nuance, subtlety, and realism across a whole range of music with the speakers isolated on the Seismic Speaker Bars. I really like the way you can hear further into each element of each piece of music. I also like the way that so much more of the acoustic signature of each recording is exposed, but also the treatments used on different instruments and voices. It's proper eye opening stuff.

With the Aeromax 6, also reviewed this month, and the GoGo Penguin track 'Kamaloka' [*v2.0*, Gondwana] both the speed and the overall integration of the musicians increase. The piece makes more sense, sounding more like a tune than a display of technical achievement. This might be hard to parse, but this change in musical integrity entirely relates to the dropping of the noise floor, and the fact that there is less time-smear to distract you from the underlying vibe. Moving over to Herbie Hancock's version of 'The Jungle Line' [*River: The Joni Letters*, Verve], Leonard Cohen's voice has astonishing focus and depth not often heard through most loudspeaker systems. I was quite taken aback by this and had to reassess my opinion of the loudspeaker, or its potential at least. Of course, a set of supports that cost as much as the loudspeakers themselves is an unlikely combination, but perhaps that shouldn't be the case. The performance of both speaker and Seismic Speaker Bars justifies the price of both.

This was another instance of the speakers disappearing atop the Seismic Speaker Bars, and then those same loudspeakers subjugating themselves to the music in the best possible way. With the rather more lively Major Lazer and his ragga hip hop [*Guns Don't Kill People… Lazers Do*, Downtown Music], two things stand out; the horse hoof sound on 'Hold The Line' is more realistic (although still not quite real), and the bass line has more weight and kick thanks to greater dynamic freedom. Impressive!

Townshend Seismic Speaker Bars produce a result that goes way beyond what you might expect from 'speakers on springs'. To get an improvement in absolute resolution, precision of timing and solidity of stereo image from something so apparently simple is extraordinary. These things really do change the game, move the goalposts, and revolutionise the way we should think about speaker support. This is not an accessory… it's an essential. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: loudspeaker isolation system
Width options: 250mm, 350mm, 450mm, 550mm
Load options: 2 – 4kg, 4 – 8kg, 8 – 16kg, 16 – 32kg, 32 – 64kg, 64 – 128kg, 128kg – 256kg
Isolation above 3Hz
Price: from £890/set of four

Manufacturer: Townshend Audio
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