



The Avantgarde Mezzo G3 Tall, cool and (musically) refreshing!

by Roy Gregory

At the end of *Ice Cold In Alex*, our intrepid heroes line the bar, eyeing the beers they've just crossed the Libyan desert to reach. When the Avantgarde Mezzo, finally turned up, that was the image that flashed, unbidden into my mind. Since the company unveiled the totally re-engineered Trio G3 with its ground-breaking iTron active amplifiers, the Mezzo, one model down in the line, has been a mirage, floating enticingly just out of reach, while various Uno and Duos have come and gone. It's been a long, long wait, which inevitably leaves space for questions: will it be as good as you expect? Will it actually deliver on the promise? Well, it's finally here and I'm finally able to scratch that itch...

It's strange how often reality gets inverted. Most audiophiles will be aware of the Avantgarde Trio, with its separate horn arrays and horn-loaded subs, as demanding of space as it is impressive. Most will

be familiar with the Avantgarde Duo, its two trumpets vertically aligned above and supported by a conventional box sub-woofer, a compact approach that presents a different set of challenges. But somehow, the model in between – previously the Duo Mezzo, now just the Mezzo – gets overlooked, despite actually promising the best of both worlds. Its footprint might be bigger than the Duo GT's, but its space demands are broadly similar. It might only carry two of the distinctive Avantgarde spherical horns, but the substantial box they sit in/on is also horn loaded, making this a full-range horn rather than a hybrid (at least in terms of driver loading). On paper, this is the Trio you can actually accommodate (and afford), the Duo without the bass integration challenges (but still with bass). All of which should make this the most interesting model in the range – at least for the majority of serious listeners.





►► I covered the installation and set-up of the Mezzo in an earlier piece <<https://gy8.eu/blog/inter-mezzo/>> so I'm not going to cover those things again here. However, some of the developmental niceties bear repeating, while further experience has helped those initial impressions evolve.

Any way you slice it, the Mezzo certainly ticks a lot of boxes. It combines a fully active capability (using the superb iTron current drive amplification) with the proven mid and treble drivers/horns from the Duo GT. It combines a full-range horn output with a vertically disposed driver array, an arrangement that's far easier to work with than the Trio with its offset tweeter and displaced bass cabinets. When it comes to set up, it offers the latest low-frequency control software and other user-friendly niceties. It has two bass drivers per cabinet compared to the Duo GT's one, driven by twice the bass amplification. But, it also sees a substantial increase in price, from €57,500 to €89,700. Given that – on paper at least – the two systems offer exactly the same bandwidth, sensitivity, mid and treble drivers/horns and essentially the same iTron electronics package, that bass cabinet clearly warrants some serious attention.

Filled-out footprint...

Viewed from the front, the Mezzo's base cabinet (yes, the spelling is intentional) is wider but offers a similar overall appearance if squatter form factor compared to the slimmer column of the Duo GT. Yet I remember being surprised by the substantial bulk of the Duo GT when it first arrived – a massive step up in volume and visual density over earlier 'space-frame' Duos. The bass cabinet, which once sat as a separate box, supporting the skeletal structure that carried the mid and treble trumpets, now extended up, wrapping around the tweeter horn and visually connecting to the lower arc of the midrange trumpet. But sit the Duo GT next to the Mezzo and it looks positively slender in comparison. The Duo GT's midrange trumpet blooms above its narrow, supporting column. The Mezzo's base cabinet has swollen to the full 670mm width of its Duo-identical midrange horn, effectively doubling the frontal aspect of the speaker, even if its actual space demands are not dissimilar. It's also 160mm/6" taller. It's a bit like standing a left tackle face to face with a linebacker: the footprint might be roughly similar, but the physical



▶▶ presence is very different indeed. There's no getting away from the fact that visually (if not practically) this is a far bigger speaker than the Duo GT. Having said that, to these eyes at least, it looks more planted, more balanced and more attractive.

This presentational difference is directly down to the Mezzo's horn loaded low-frequencies. Look at the footprint of the Mezzo and its low-frequency cabinet is essentially T-shaped, the broad frontal aspect backed by shallow shoulders that quickly narrow to a tapering 'body' that extends 70mm/3" further back than the Duo GT. Like the other current Avantgarde speakers, the rear face of the cabinet consists of a full-height heat sink. The 1000W Class D amplifier that drives the twin 12" bass units is installed at the bottom of the cabinet. In front of that sit the two, vertically arranged XB12 bass drivers. These Avantgarde drivers are not your average 12" units. The long-fibre paper and carbon-fibre composite cones are attached to a massive 153mm/6" voice coil, suspended in a motor with magnets so strong that they generate an 11.5 Tesla flux density in its magnetic gap. In front of the drivers, extruded aluminium cheeks flare out to load and augment their output, accounting for the wide shoulders at the front of the cabinet. Clearly, the length of the horn is pretty short, meaning that the bass output is also heavily equalised (the Spacehorns are that size for a reason!) but even so, the acoustical advantage of horn loading the mid/upper bass in particular, will pay massive dividends in terms of dynamic continuity and integration with the midrange. I don't know that extending the low-frequency baffle right up beyond the edge of the midrange horn also helps when it comes to system integration, but I'm betting that it does, visually and subliminally if nothing else...

The cabinet volume is reflex loaded by a pair of massive, downward firing ports, the internal mouths of which are arranged horizontally, precisely between the two drivers, creating a balanced acoustic load. This arrangement, combined with the horn loading, increases efficiency substantially (when compared to the single, forward firing port arrangement that loads the same driver/amp combination in the Duo GT). Given that both speakers offer the same 107dB overall system sensitivity, the implications are clear. This isn't about how

loud the speaker system will play. It's about how much effort it takes to do it. The significantly more complex construction of the bass cabinet in the Mezzo allows it to match the bass output of the Duo GT at a given level while using around one quarter of the amplifier power. That gives the amp in the Mezzo a far easier ride and greater headroom, allowing its dynamic tracking to get far closer to the almost shockingly sudden response capabilities of the iTron amps, further aiding not just low-frequency quality but integration too.

Finger tip control...

When the Trio G3s first arrived, along with their massive, matching Spacehorns, the integration of satellites and subs was conducted using a fearsomely complex control programme loaded into a laptop. Undoubtedly powerful and effective, this was definitely a manufacturer/dealer function and might reasonably have been described as 'user-hostile'. Considering that it can take days if not weeks to really dial in a sub or pair of sub-woofers, this was, by Avantgarde's own admission, a far from ideal scenario. They subsequently came up with a far simpler, more intuitive and downloadable solution: one that owners can easily drive from their own PC or Mac laptop. I first came across the software package while reviewing the Uno SD, but the far more demanding context of the Mezzo set up really underlined just how easy to use and effective this control software really is.

RJ45/Ethernet ports on the bass amps allow you to daisy-chain the two speakers together and thence onwards to the laptop. Note that current Macs don't have RJ45 sockets, so you'll need an adaptor. Fire up the software and it will take a moment or two to register which products are visible. In most cases that's going to be the two speakers, with a separate control panel for each. At this point you need to decide whether to keep the speakers separate and independently adjustable (a real boon in asymmetric or just plain difficult rooms) or tie them together so that adjustments made are automatically applied to both speakers. Then you can set about working with the clearly laid out control screen(s) to optimise low-frequency integration and system performance, using the comprehensive tools available on the display. These consist of:



- ▶▶ • An eight-band graphic equaliser, allowing continuous adjustment in a $\pm 4\text{dB}$ range in discrete steps between 30Hz and 320Hz, with the five 'bands' between 30Hz and 110Hz being the most useful in most cases.
- An overall LF level control.
- Bass boost or tilt, allowing you to apply an overall slope to the low frequencies.
- LF roll-off – adjustable between 80Hz and 320Hz, covering pretty much all eventualities for any speaker in the Avantgarde range.
- A pair of notch filters that can be adjusted for frequency and set to 0, -3dB or -6dB, designed to combat dominant room modes.

Look at the picture of the laptop and you'll see the two speaker control panels, one for each speaker; one behind the other (although in this case, they're synched, as per the window header) and the small software control panel that allows you to access status information and choose which unit (or both) you want to control. You'll also notice that the laptop is sat on the sofa. Use long enough leads and you can adjust the bass from your seated listening position. Just be aware that hooking up the software/computer has a detrimental affect on musical performance as a whole, so don't be tempted to leave the laptop permanently connected. Set up – disconnect the laptop and Ethernet cabling – check the results – re-connect and adjust as required. Even with that caveat, set up is a breeze with the new software. It isn't a substitute for proper positioning and I'd always suggest balancing placement against EQ adjustments, with the aim of applying as little EQ as possible. But it does offer considerable flexibility in terms of room matching and, if you need to tailor the bass to compensate for limited positional options, you can. As you can see from the settings on the screen,

in my large and well-vented space, with no restrictions and careful positioning, relatively little adjustment was required.

Those familiar with subs will wonder where the phase adjustment is. The vertical, staggered, co-planar (or time-aligned) arrangement of the drivers in the Uno, Duo and Mezzo models means that they don't require the facility. However, for anybody using the Trio and Spacehorns who doesn't want to place the subs between and level with the satellites, the software also includes a dealer mode, where (amongst other things) time delay can be adjusted to compensate for placement. Under the circumstances, I can see why it isn't an option on the user control panel.

The upper section of the rear panel is occupied by either the iTron electronics pack, or the passive crossover if you opt to go that way (the review/demonstration speakers carry both options and offer the ability to compare the two). Despite assumptions based on the



supposed relationship between horn speakers and SET amps, or on the relative cost of the iTron package compared to other high-end amplifiers, the active/passive comparison is one you need to make. The whole SET/horn argument is one I've never bought into. All too often it's a case of sluggish, bloated and overly-warm amps drawing not so much a veil as a theatre curtain across in front of system failings that the horns will otherwise ruthlessly reveal. Either that or those curtains are masking discontinuities or colourations in the speakers themselves. There are exceptions, notably the pairing of Vox speakers with original Kondo or SJS amps, but that has more to do with the actual quality and overall coherence of the products involved, than their essential natures.

The advantages of current drive amplification are



►► more than just theoretical: sonically and musically they are very real indeed. If you are not familiar with the topology, you can read more about it in the Duo GT review <<https://gy8.eu/review/coup-de-foudre/>> but there's no substitute for listening. The astonishing rise time and response to input dovetails perfectly with the dynamic capabilities of the spherical horns, brutally underlining just how dynamically challenged the vast majority of audio components really are. Fortunately, if going active is a step too far, financially, sonically or temperamentally – the audio equivalent of swearing off sugar when you usually take six spoons in your tea – you can always upgrade a set of passive Mezzos to fully active, iTron amplification at a later date.

As well as a balanced input and daisy-chain output (to feed the bass amp) the iTron input panel also offers adjustments for relative and total mid/treble gain. The mid and treble output can be adjusted by $\pm 1.5\text{dB}$ to help balance the speaker's in room response, while overall system gain can be adjusted from $+1.5\text{dB}$ to -10.5dB (in 1.5dB steps) to help gain matching to your preamp and driving system. This is especially useful if you are suffering noise issues from your pre-amp, or want to optimise the output level within a particular range.

“Smooth operator...”

But the most important (if not most obvious) development in the Mezzo is the implementation of its fore and aft tweeter adjustment. It's not simply a case of making the tweeter module moveable, it's the

ease and continuous nature of the adjustment that makes this such an important evolutionary step. The Mezzo uses the same long-throat tweeter horn as the Trio G3, built into a similar, cylindrical housing. Except that in this case, that housing is installed in a sliding mount, smoothly extended by a large, rotary knob mounted in the top face of the base cabinet. Turning the knob winds the horn mouth in or out according to

requirements, staggering the relative planar position of the mid and treble drivers, effectively allowing the user to tilt or rake the speaker's output, compensating for seating height without having to physically adjust the angle of the speakers themselves: Clever, simple and attractive, it's an arrangement that eases set up considerably. The cylindrical tweeter housing has a scale etched on its side to make repeatable adjustments easier, which helps, but this is one area that could still use some work. The fact that the well in which the housing sits is sunk inside the bass horn means that you have to view the scale at an angle. Throw in the necessary gap to allow movement and things become rather less precise than they should

be. The scale itself is graduated in 5mm segments, with no numbering. Avantgarde do provide a simple gauge that sits against the tweeter housing to give a 'contact' reading, but I'd like to see a better tool and a much more finely graduated and annotated scale. Finally, and if I'm being picky, a little less resistance and finer gearing in the heavily damped movement would make small adjustments easier. Fortunately, these are easy fixes.

During the final stages of set up, two things became almost brutally apparent. The first was just how



The familiar rear panel of the iTron amplified/active bass Avantgarde speakers (bass amp bottom, iTron middle and passive inputs at the top).

► revealing the recent Trifonov/Babayan *Rachmaninov For Two* discs are (DGG 486 4805) when it comes to overall system linearity, integration and the evenness of the top-to-bottom energy spectrum. The second was the massive impact made by fore and aft adjustment of the tweeter housing. Rotating the control knob on the top of the cabinet to alter tweeter position affects not just timing but also perspective. The superb understanding between the two pianists creates a single yet contrasting musical whole from the two separate parts. Adjusting the tweeter control(s) brings the intimacy of that understanding into sharper focus, locking the two parts together in terms of timing, the attack and riposte so critical to not just this music, but this arrangement of it. Playing the *Symphonic Dances* (unquestionably the highlight of the second disc) the complex, interlocking parts fall into place, the musical momentum builds, the crescendos don't just explode dynamically, they punctuate and accentuate musically. The results are as irresistible and spectacular as they are musically compelling – when you get it right...

Getting it right depends on several things. The first and most obvious is that the toe-in/listening axis and apparent 'rake angle' on both speakers must be identical. That means working with the base cabinets to get them precisely positioned and angled before addressing the tweeter control. I set the two speakers with identical listening distance, toe-in (angular off-set) and rake angle. I actually tilted the front face of the bass horns very slightly forwards (0.3 of a degree) as

experience suggests this improves low bass propagation in all speakers, not just horns or subs. With those details locked in, it was time to trim the bass controls and finally adjust the tweeter distance. With the bass dialled in, this proved remarkably straightforward, with clear audible cues to tell you when things are approaching correct. Which is where the timing, the sense of ensemble/conversation within the music and the overall

perspective come in. The temporal aspects of performance should be obvious, but what was really surprising was the affect of the tweeter control on the perceived seating position or angle of view. Pushing the tweeter forwards (towards the listener) audibly tilted the stage, just as if your seat at the concert had been hoist into the air – and not by a small amount! Then, as the tweeter moves backwards, so your seat settles



Note the rotary 'tweeter distance' control nestling between the midrange support uprights.

into its natural position – a fascinating opportunity to fine-tune your home listening experience to match a preferred concert seat, assuming you have one. Final step is to ensure that both tweeters are set identically. You can rely on the scales etched on the side of their housings, but your ears are going to be the final arbiter. Once again it's all about focussed energy, note density and timing.

How critical are these settings? Put it this way: I have a writing desk immediately behind my listening seat. ►►

►► The desk chair sits me 75mm (3") higher and roughly 1 metre (39") further back. It's a seating position that destroys that preternatural intimacy between the players and, as a result, the drama and musical momentum in the performance. This isn't one of those 'head in a vice' speakers: the lateral listening window is actually pretty wide, but vertically it is far narrower, to the extent that my wife needs a cushion to sit on if she's going to get the same stellar musical presentation as me.

With the Mezzos, getting the set-up right really matters. If you (or your dealer/set up guy) doesn't take the time or trouble, you won't reap the benefits that the speakers' unique mix of acoustic and electrical technology offers. It makes judging the speaker at a show or even in a dealer's showroom a slightly hit and miss affair. The seated ear-height of the listener is all-important and whilst it's easy to experiment, simply by sitting taller or slumping in the seat, you need to know to do it. The Avantgardes are far from alone in that, but such is their potential performance that it becomes that much more critical. If you aren't hearing explicit dimensionality, presence, immediacy and a coherent space from a recording that should exhibit those qualities, you aren't hearing what these speakers can do.

The Rachmaninoff discs are interesting or illustrative for another reason. While the Mezzos were in situ, we got to hear the *Symphonic Dances* arrangement played live. The question of live versus recorded is one that hangs over audio as a whole and high-end audio in particular. Are we trying to reproduce the original event, its sense, the facts of the music or the relationships within the performance? Is live sound the gold standard by which audio should be judged? Can audio ever match live sound?

Reality check...

After setting up the Mezzos, all of those questions were hovering in my (not so) sub-conscious as we took our seats for the concert. On paper, the Ólafsson/Wang pairing should be interesting – at least if reputations are anything to go by. Interesting is one word for it... Ólafsson's diffident, contained and thoughtful approach was either going to complement or clash with Wang's more 'wham-bam' pyrotechnics. Sadly, the musical

disconnect was as yawning as the visual and aesthetic contrast between these two high-profile performers. (As the wife would say, "Don't wear 6" heels if they make you walk like a duck"). 'Disappointing' really doesn't cover it. With Ólafsson's poised restraint making Wang sound like a wind-up toy that's been wound way too tight, the overall musical result sounded like two people playing different, unconnected pieces at the same time but different speeds.

Returning home, playing the recording on the Mezzos was a restorative experience. The two pianos were presented big, solid and vibrant with a real sense of weight and physical presence, sat in a single contiguous acoustic space, a space that reached out to envelop the listener. The contrasting character of the Steinway and Bösendorfer instruments was immediately apparent, adding another layer to the complex exchanges between the two performers. Here were impressive dynamics combined with subtlety and a deft, perfectly poised beauty in the slower passages. Note weight and spacing was a clear yet integral part of the process as a whole, adding expressive depth and range to the music. This simply sounded like life: not a facsimile of the live event, but recognisably the same thing, generating energy and energising the space in the same way. More importantly, as a performance, as a musical experience, it was way, way better than the live event we'd sat through. Here was a living, breathing example of an audio system surpassing the live performance. Okay, so this is one case of a great audio system being better than a lousy live event, but even so, it's a really good example of just how musically impressive these speakers can be. An example that should give you pause...

Two consummate pianists beating a pair of concert grand pianos within an inch of their musical lives should generate considerable energy. More than that, the very nature of the instruments means that energy is going to be complex and layered, full of varying attack, redolent with harmonics, yet built on the spacing and placing of individual notes and chords. As always it's about patterns – patterns painted with musical energy. The Mezzos project that energy, its scale, colour and texture, with unimpeded gusto and an incredibly even output. They go big, they go small and they can switch between the two with the same suddenness that you'll hear live. But what makes them truly special is that





they can project that energy equally well across almost all of their (and almost all of the musically important) bandwidth. The mid and treble horns are proven performers and are, if anything, even more seamless in the Mezzo than the Trio. The execution and integration of the latest 'Short Basshorn' (my nomenclature, not Avantgarde's) is in the same league, a critical consideration if you want genuinely coherent musical (and system) performance.

A single wide-band instrument like a piano (or two) is one kind of acid test. Another is the ability to bind together a group of instruments operating at different frequencies, be that an original instruments baroque ensemble, a full orchestra or a new-wave rock band. There again, maybe you just combine the two? Joe Jackson's live album, *Summer In The City* (Intervention Records 2x 180g, IR-018) does just that, Jackson's piano at the heart of a trio combining his talents with long-time collaborator Graham Maby on bass and Gary Burke on drums. Intervention has done its usual stellar job on the vinyl transfer, aided and abetted by Kevin Gray – and as usual, the bass is deep, fat and weighty. The off-beat tempo of 'For Your Love' could easily be dragged back and rendered sluggish by the preponderance of low frequency content (bass guitar,

kick drum and the piano's left hand), especially given the deep, throbbing and repetitive bass guitar line. But instead of weighing things down the way it so often can, the bass had a motive, forward-moving energy and momentum, the Mezzo's bottom-end picking up on the attack, texture and rolling shape of the guitar's notes, the repetitive, pulsing, rhythmic pattern. The kick drum and left hand lock together, binding the voice and three instruments into a single musical whole, temporally and spatially contiguous despite the spread of frequencies. The subtlety, timing and placement of Jackson's piano notes, the shape and emphasis in his phrasing, leave you in no doubt as to his capabilities and classical training. As an album, whether you listen to 'Fools In Love' or 'Mood Indigo' it demonstrates the Mezzo's ability to capture both the shape of individual notes or instrumental phrases, but also the even energy spectrum and dynamic resolution that allows even slow-tempo numbers to breathe with a vibrant life and energy. There's nothing earth-bound in the relaxed and confident playing, nothing earthbound in its reproduction. It's this effortless ability to capture the nature and scale of each element in the performance, to mirror the pattern and spreading ripples of musical energy that allows the Mezzo to sound so like life.

►► Nail that tune!

When the band picks up the pace for the familiar 'The In Crowd' opening, there's a natural urgency to the groove, a rhythm that is so secure that the transition into 'Down To London' passes without so much as a bump in the road. Sonically it's a mighty impressive performance: lively, present, plenty of detail and resolution, immediate with startling dynamics. But despite the hi-fi credentials, this is all about the performance that's happening on that stage. As impressive as the audio qualities are, what's more impressive is the way the speakers integrate them into a single, coherent whole, suborning them to the musical purpose and goal. Yes, you can dissect their performance, marvel at their separate attributes, but I suspect you'll be too busy enjoying the music to keep that up for long.

Whether you play Art Blakey (the *Moanin'* re-issue) or Lisa Batiashvili's stunning Tchaikovsky *Violin Concerto* (UCCG-41048), something small and intimate

like Anastasia Kobekina's *Ellipses* (Mirare MIR604) or something completely over the top, like Cheap Trick's *Live At The Budokan* (Epic/Sony 25.3P-5) you'll enjoy that same, performance first, musical integrity. From the insistent rhythmic and temporal precision of 'Along Came Betty' to the hitch-kick pace changes of Nanci Griffith's 'Listen To The Radio' (*Storms*, MCA/Alto AA004), the music is allowed to pick its own path, driving the system rather than the other way around. The only word that fully captures the musical fluency of the Mezzo (and the Trio G3) is "literate". These speakers understand - and allow you to understand - the music as few others do. It's a function of the current drive amplification with its unimpeded dynamic response and ability to track the demands of the input signal. It's a function of the system's lucid musical clarity and unforced sense of organisation. But it's also a function of the continuity between the horn-loaded upper registers and low-frequencies, the ability to both discriminate and project shifts in level, a broad dynamic range, and instrumental texture right across the musical range. ►►



Not all trumpets are equally shiny! Avantgarde offers a number of interior design(er) friendly, matt finishes for their horns.



►► This seamless projection of musical energy is what places the Mezzo adjacent to the Trio G3 and separates it from the Duo GT – not exactly Siamese twins but definitely brothers in arms. In that familial context, the Duo GT is more of a first cousin, with plenty of shared DNA, but plenty that's not.

“Moving on up...”

How close does the Mezzo get to delivering Trio G3 performance? It is close to matching the immediacy and communicative qualities of the bigger system, abilities that might have you questioning the value of the flagship – until you listen to the two side by side. That's when you realise that the added bandwidth and headroom of the Trio delivers an unmatched sense of scale, dimensionality and sheer physical presence. That fully developed bottom-end supports even more intimate and transparent upper-registers, more fully developed textures and harmonic development. But that's okay, 'cos the Trios, even with a single pair of Dual Spacehorns weigh in at two-and-a-half times the

price of the Mezzo. You'd like to think you are getting something for the extra money – and you are. But the neat trick here is that, in terms of musical insight and presentation, the Mezzo sits so far ahead of its immediate price peers that it's easy to imagine that you can't do better – or certainly that you don't need to.

Does that make the Mezzo the Trio-lite? That would be to mischaracterise its musical achievements. Rather, it's as much of the Trio's performance and absolute musical authority as you can shoehorn into a speaker of this size. Given that few of us can afford or accommodate the Trios, that's a significant consideration. The Mezzo might not be small, but it is a lot smaller than the Trio, it demands less space and ultimately, you can get away with less of a system if you must. It's built on the same musical structure, with the same lucid, clarity of pattern and vocal/instrumental juxtaposition. It offers much of the same insight into the what and the why of a performance, if not quite matching the sense of where. What that gives it is the same musical literacy as the flagship, the ability to shift language and vocabulary with different material, to fasten to the



▶▶ sense and intent in the music and the performance rather than getting distracted by the more mundane facts and cosmetics. Detail and resolution? You've got them in spades – especially when it comes to micro-dynamic textures and harmonics – but this is detail bound to a meaningful musical whole, detail that makes sense and adds to the event, as opposed to detail that simply is.

I ran the Mezzos from the full Wadax Reference digital front-end, via the CH Precision L10, along with the GPA Monaco/PI0 for vinyl replay. But I also scaled down to the L1/PI, with and without the XI power supply, along with the Wadax Studio Player. The L series ain't the I0 Series and the Mezzos will certainly

gives the L1 somewhere to hide. The Trio's superior bottom end and the midrange detail, dimensionality, presence and textural intimacy that go with it, feed on the L10's lower noise floor. The L1 isn't in the same league – but nor is the Mezzo, making them happy bedfellows. But the real takeaway here is just how important a genuinely quiet pre-amp is to realising the Mezzo's full potential. Adding noise at the front of the system is the surest way to undermine this speaker's musical performance.

In the spirit of adventure I also tried driving the speakers directly from the variable output of the Studio Player. It works, but that's as much as I'm prepared to offer. (Re-)inserting the L1 came as



tell you that, but not with the same almost casual brutality that the Trios deliver that message. You can use the Trios with the L1, but once you've heard what the L10 does, there's no going back. That performance imperative isn't nearly as emphatic with the Mezzo. Yes, the L10 still shows its clear superiority, but the L1/Mezzo combination presents a more than comfortable fit – both performance and price wise. In part that's down to the more constrained low frequency depth and transparency available from the speaker, which

such a relief, instilling such range, authority and scale to proceedings, along with a sense of musical drive and purpose that anything less than a quality line-stage is going to be a compromise too far for these speakers. Given their bandwidth, that should come as no surprise – but you just know that some tightwad is going to try it or digital evangelist hail it as the second coming... Be happy that the iTron stomps on any conventional amplifier anywhere even close to its price and sink the funds you've recovered/saved



►► into the line-stage these speakers really do demand. Your ears will thank you for it while prolonged listening pleasure will be your just reward.

I started out this review with the proposition that, "On paper, this is the Trio you can actually accommodate (and afford), the Duo without the bass integration challenges (but still with bass)." It's a description that largely holds good. But it's also a description that short-changes the Mezzo in one important regard: This is a speaker system that can also grow, not just from passive to active, but one that begs for and will reward the addition of separate subs, if and when the opportunity arises. In part that's about how deep the speakers go, but it's also about how much air they really move at low frequencies. Although Avantgarde specify the subs' extension as 18Hz, they don't specify level limits on that number, or how it's arrived at. The Mezzos go deep, but they don't do it with the rib-rattling weight or move as much air as the Space Horns, or other genuinely wide-band subs, like the PureLows (at least not if you keep the bottom-end in proportion with the rest of the range).

That's why they don't project the same presence, dimensionality and astonishing transparency as the Trios. But adding that extra air to the bottom-end might not be as difficult as you think. Keep the budget reasonable and you probably won't extend the bass in any meaningful way, but you will reinforce it. I haven't tried it, but a pair of comparatively modest subs might be just what the doctor ordered if you want to take the Mezzos' performance up a level. Bearing in mind that the bottom end of the speakers already uses digital amplification and a pair of carefully selected active subs from any number of mainstream brands could easily do the job, although I also find myself casting covetous eyes at a pair of Colibri C18s. They don't go subterranean but they will move air and that's the name of the game in this case.

Can anything costing this much represent a bargain?

In many ways, the Avantgarde Mezzo really does exactly what it says on the tin, delivering a healthy slice of high-end performance in a manageable and adaptable package. But what's just as impressive as its

performance is the way it doesn't so much undercut the competition as chop it off at the knees. If you want evidence of its close relationship to the Trio G3, this is where that DNA hits home. The Mezzo offers way more musical performance than the likes of the Wilson Alexia V or Stenheim A5 SE, yet is way cheaper than the Wilson Alexx V or the Stenheim Ultime 2. And that's before you factor in the matching amplification! In a world where price so rarely equates to performance, the Mezzo delivers value to match its inimitable style. Just like Jerico, these trumpets could bring plenty of solidly established pillars of the audio community crashing uncerimoniously to earth.

Like a lot of products that perform well beyond their price level, you'll need to treat the Mezzos with the care and attention to detail that goes with their actual performance potential, rather than what's written on the sticker. Short-change them in terms of set-up or driving system and they'll repay you in kind. But treat them like the best speakers on the planet (or at least, the best speakers you can possibly accommodate) accede to their system demands (as far as you can afford to) and you'll be pleasurably surprised at just how far the Mezzos can take you. This is a full-range horn speaker that's easy to live with and even easier to enjoy. The Mezzo might have been the last G3 model to arrive but they were, as Sir John Mills so famously (and emphatically) stated, "Worth waiting for!" 

Manufacturer:

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Prices and availability

Avantgarde Mezzo (with passive crossover) -
€72,400 / \$108,600*

Avantgarde Mezzo (with active iTron amplification)
€89,700 / \$132,800*

*All prices plus local sales tax.