

Mambo Number 2

LAST YEAR OPHIDIAN CELEBRATED ITS FIRST DECADE AS LOUDSPEAKER MANUFACTURER, AND THE COMPANY HAS BUILT UP A FINE REPUTATION FOR BUILDING GOOD SOUNDING DESIGNS AT REASONABLE PRICES. THE SLENDER MAMBO 2 SOON HAS CHRIS KELLY DANCING

Based on the Wirral, Ophidian is led by Gareth James, who designs the products and oversees their assembly at their headquarters in Hoyle, Lancashire. Although aware of the brand I had not, prior to this review, had an opportunity to hear any of the Ophidian range. This consists of the M Series 2, of which the Mambo 2 is the largest and the only floor-stander, with the stand-mount Mojo2 and Minimo2 completing the triptych. Recently the company has announced the Voodoo, a true flagship model with a price-tag to match, and which will no doubt feature in a future edition of HIFICRITIC.

At £2000/pr, the Mambo 2 is a slim floorstander, measuring 893 x 158 x 191mm (HxWxD). The review pair were finished in an oak veneer (the other option is walnut), and the craftsmanship of the cabinetry, made for Ophidian in Sheffield, and indeed the overall build quality of the loudspeaker, seemed very high. The base of the cabinet attaches to a black plinth, which provides a stable platform, and the speakers are supplied with black grilles which affix magnetically and cover the two coated paper 115mm drive units and the offset 27mm Sonolex coated fabric diaphragm which sits between the

bigger drivers. Within the cabinet is a third 115mm driver, whose purpose is to augment and enhance bass response through the company's unique AEROFLEX technology.

Internally, there's plenty of evidence of the company's commitment to quality, with the use of Mundorf audio grade capacitors, pure oxygen-free copper coils and metal-oxide film resistors. At the bottom rear of the cabinet is an open metal grille which covers the bass port, using the AEROFLEX technology to keep port velocity as low as possible while maximising the capability of the drive units.



The cabinet is internally braced for added strength and to minimise resonances, and a pair of good quality binding posts are located above the bass port grille towards the bottom of the cabinet.

The rated impedance of the Mambo 2 is 4 ohms, but in a dialogue with Gareth James he confirmed that the impedance never drops below 3.3-3.4 ohms, meaning that they are not unduly challenging for any amplifier provided it can produce at least 40 watts of power. During the review period I mostly paired the Mambo 2s with my own Lyngdorf TDA1 3400 integrated amplifier which had no issues. It is rated as giving 400 watts into 4 ohm loads, so I expected no problem. I also had in-house a more modest NAD C700, with a quite respectable 80 watts available for both 4 and 8 ohm loads, about which I was slightly more concerned. In practice, neither amplifier had any problem driving the Mambo 2s.

I used TelluriumQ UltraBlackII speaker cable, which worked very well with the Ophidians, and sources were a Vertere MG1 turntable with a Vertere Mystic MC cartridge, playing into my Gold Note PH10 phono stage, my Yamaha CD-S3000 SACD/CD player and the streamer built in to the Lyngdorf. I positioned them with a slight toe-in facing my listening chair, with the inside corner 50cm from the rear wall, which experience has shown me is where most loudspeakers give of their best in our relatively modest sized room.

Regular readers will know I have a several albums which I use regularly for review purposes and I started the listening process with one of

those, the Mobile Fidelity vinyl pressing of Bob Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks*. As 'Tangled Up in Blue' started it was quickly apparent that Mr James has pulled off quite a feat with these slender floorstanders – they sound like a big loudspeaker, creating a generous soundstage with very good height and depth, and pinpoint location of players within it. It is rare in my experience for a speaker at this price to create a real sense of the musicians being in the room with the listener, but the Mambo 2s definitely managed it.

Dylan stepped out of the loudspeakers and into the space in front of me, with the acoustic guitars, bass and drums all in their place but sounding like a true ensemble. First impressions definitely count for a lot, and these elegant loudspeakers impressed from the outset.

Heavy metal

With the power on tap from the Lyngdorf, I wound the volume up to levels that were well beyond comfortable (for my ears!), but the Mambo 2s kept their composure extremely well. Switching musical genres, it delved into the hard rock of Iron Maiden's 2015 major release *The Book Of Souls* on the Parlophone label. Of course Parlophone was the Beatles label, but we're a very long way from 'Love Me Do' on this three-disc epic, folks. I rapidly found myself turning into my late mother and reminding myself to turn it down, but even at less ear-shredding levels, the Mambo 2s did a very good job with this dense material.

Ophidian claims in its website description of the Mambo 2 that AEROFLEX is designed to give a precisely controlled bass performance, and extended listening confirms that this is no idle boast. For a small column, the Mambo 2 always delivered very tuneful and well-judged bass, which integrates seamlessly with the rest of the music despite the position of the port on the bottom rear of the cabinet.

As luck would have it, the position at which I had placed the loudspeakers turned out to be the best in my room. I tried moving the cabinets further back, but when they were closer to the rear wall the bass seemed to become more uneven, whereas moving them further out resulted in a loss of bass energy. I would strongly recommend new owners to experiment with placement - it does make a difference with this design.

Going back to the music, I found myself having extended listening sessions with these Ophidians. They offered a most enjoyable and unfatiguing listening experience.

As a firm believer that one is never too old to appreciate new things, in the past few years I have started to listening to jazz a lot more than I did as



a younger man. The Mambo 2s are in their element reproducing small ensemble jazz works.

For example, the Paul Chambers Quartet's *Bass On Top*, which was originally recorded in a single day in July 1957 by Rudy van Gelder and then reissued in 2020 in the Blue Note Tone Poet series, has the leader's double bass is supported by three exceptional musicians, Kenny Burrell on guitar, Hank Jones on piano and Art Taylor on drums. Through the six tracks these four men created something very special, and through the Mambo 2s I got a sense not only of their technical prowess but of their sheer pleasure in playing together.

Switching to CD replay, I turned to my gold disc of Gary Karr's *Adagio D'Albinoni* on Cisco reissue of the original 1994 Japanese recording on the Firebird label. This is a good test for any system, given that it is Karr's double bass supported by church organ, played by Harmon Lewis. The rich sonority of the main instrument was very well portrayed through the Mambo 2s, with a real sense of the space in which it was recorded. This was impressive for what is essentially a modestly-sized loudspeaker.

Musical flow

Large orchestral pieces don't quite have the scale that would come with a larger design – it would be unreasonable to expect it. However, when I played my CD of the Christopher Hogwood/Academy of Ancient Music recording of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, on the Decca subsidiary label l'Oiseau Lyre, there was certainly a sense of the grandeur of the piece and I was definitely able to hear into the recording, as these original instrument practitioners recreated the sound that would have been similar to that experienced by the audience in Vienna in 1824 at the very first performance. The music flowed through the first three movements and the majestic fourth had all the power and emotion that makes it such a perennial favourite.

Later in the Mambo 2's residence here I received for review an NAD C700 network audio system, which is a half-width all-in-one unit with an 80 watt per channel Class D amplifier and a BluOS controlled streamer contained within it. The NAD's specification state that it delivers 80 watts into both 4 and 8ohm loads, as is common with amplifiers from this stable, and I was slightly nervous that it would struggle a little with the Mambo 2s and their 4ohm load. However, having consulted with Gareth Jameson this point, I proceeded with confidence.

He was quite right, although to replicate the same sound levels as I had been getting with no strain from the Lyngdorf I did have to advance the volume to about 75% of its maximum on the C700 – a little nerve-wracking! However, the music

continued to flow as before and created a most agreeable three box system, and one which would put even the budget-constrained purchaser in touch with really good sound.

During the review period I listened to the Mambo 2s both with and without their magnetically attached grilles in place. They made no audible difference (which is of course a good thing) so for the most part I left them in place. I am just a grille-on sort of guy, while others like to see their drive units at work. *Chaque'un à son goût*, as they say across the Channel.

The last comment I would make is that the Mambo 2s do an excellent job at reproducing the spoken word. My own loudspeakers come from a British manufacturer with a rich heritage of building on BBC design ideas, and which are exceptional at conveying the spoken word. Through the Mambo 2s I had that same sense of realism, which made radio listening a real pleasure and enhanced our television viewing as well.

Conclusion

It is very hard not to be extremely impressed by the Mambo 2s. They do so many things really well. They seem to be very well made and the only hint of budgetary constraint is in the simple choice of finishes - oak or walnut are available. This pair were in the oak finish and the cabinetry was flawless.

Unusually, there's nothing in the Ophidian catalogue between the Mambo 2s and the recently launched Voodoo model, which costs seven times the asking price of the Mambo 2s. I've not yet had a chance to hear the Voodoo, which I hope to correct in the coming months, but it seems to me that it makes one realise just what a genuine bargain is on offer in the Mambo 2. I can think of few loudspeakers at £2000 that I would choose ahead of them. They sound terrific, which is of course the whole point, but they also look good and create a far large sonic picture than their modest dimensions would lead you to expect.

The challenge for many loudspeaker companies is finding sufficient retailers to give their products exposure to potential customers. Here in the UK there are just 10 retail outlets listed on the Ophidian website, with half dozen more beyond these shores. If you are in the market for a pair of loudspeakers that do most things exceptionally well it would be more than worth your while to seek out one of those dealers, book an appointment and go and hear them. I very much doubt that it will be a wasted journey.

We are very fortunate here in the United Kingdom to have so many gifted and dedicated designers of audio products. I would add the name Gareth James to that select list.

HIFICRITIC
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Specifications

Ophidian Mambo 2

Type	Floorstanding speaker
Price	£2000/pr
Drivers	27mm neodymium tweeter with Sonolex coated fabric diaphragm, two 11.5mm coated paper mid/bass units, plus 'hidden' 11.5cm woofer
Claimed Frequency response	38hz to 25khz (-3dB)
Sensitivity 87dB (2.83V/1m)	
Recommended amplifier power	40-160W
Nominal impedance	4ohms
Finishes available	Oak or walnut
Dimensions (HxWxD)	89.3 x 15.8 x 19.1cm, plinth 21.8cm wide x 23.9cm deep

www.ophidian.co.uk