

## Oepi Immanence 2 no compromise musical veracity

Friday, October 25, 2024  
David Vivian



### Oepi Immanence 2 loudspeakers

A red pill kind of speaker. Anyone who's seen the film *The Matrix* probably won't need further explanation but here goes anyway. Protagonist Neo is given a choice: take the blue pill and continue with the safe, unremarkable, comfortable life that's being fed to you; take the red pill, though, and prepare to experience the true meaning of reality. Discover how deep the rabbit hole goes.

Most speakers on sale are blue pill speakers. Nothing wrong with that. They're engineered and voiced to sound agreeable to the largest audience and play well with a wide range of kit. A solid business model no doubt. Much rarer are red pill speakers that simply seek honesty without sanctioning the usual sonic sweeteners. They're rarer than you'd suppose. Merely wearing a high-end price tag might guarantee material treasures and seductively impressive sonics but not necessarily the will and focus to present the unvarnished truth.

For Joakim Juhl, however, musical veracity red in tooth and claw is the only thing that matters. The founder and head of Danish speaker and cable maker Oepi believes it's the one true path to lasting musical satisfaction. There are certain caveats. Given the goal of maximum transparency, dynamic realism and temporal precision you'd better be prepared to take the rough with the smooth. It's an approach that won't be to everyone's taste. But, if you're okay with strong medicine and have deep enough pockets, Oepi provides gateways it says will take you all the way. There are three levels: Ascendance, Transcendence and Immanence. Well, four if you count its £25k Reference 3.5 apex floorstander. But all, including the synergistically matched range of cables, are on the same mission – "to offer low distortion, large bandwidth and unhindered dynamics combined with perfect phase-transition and time domain performance".

### Not plain sailing

So far, the editor has tackled the mid-tier Transcendence 2 standmount and top end (excluding the Ref) Immanence 2.5 floorstander – the latter, with its large true ribbon tweeter, inherently still less compromising than the dome equipped Transcendence standmount. Jason's findings have been, by turns, startling, thrilling, even revelatory. I've spent some time with the Transcendence 2 as well and share much of his enthusiasm. I've spent even more time with the ribbon-equipped Immanence 2 standmount and, I'll admit this now, it hasn't all been plain sailing. But perseverance has its own rewards, and there is a happy ending.



The spec sheet is promising. Unchanged from the Transcendence 2 – a mid-sized, two-way, ported design – is the custom spec 165mm mid-bass driver sourced from Purifi. With its asymmetric surround designed by Lars Risbo and looking not unlike a shredded tyre, it addresses the problem of changes in radiating surface area of conventionally smooth half roll surrounds as the driver's cone moves in and out. This, says Joakim, inevitably leads to second order harmonic distortion but, with the Purifi surround, there is virtually no change in the surface area as the cone travels, thus greatly reducing the offending colouration. Damping and suppression of cone edge resonances are said also to benefit.

The major hardware difference is the presence of a properly large true ribbon with 110mm of vertical radiating area and, to be blunt, it's a fussy item, much more sensitive to positioning and room factors than the SEAS-sourced dome of the Transcendence 2. Joakim explains: 'The tweeter's dispersion characteristics are unlike what we are used to from dome tweeters. The ribbons have very wide horizontal dispersion, but their sheer length means that they are more directional in the vertical axis. As the wavelengths of the signal become smaller than the length of the ribbon they disperse more directly forwards and less towards floor and ceiling. Above 10 kHz, their dispersion will gradually decrease as you move up or down the vertical axis'.

### Phase matters

Weighed against these considerations are the benefits. Joakim again: "Some claim this trait of ribbons to be a good thing since floor and ceiling reflections are seen as more intrusive whereas this way they are less of a problem in the upper treble. There might not be the optimal uniform dispersion that our hard dome is very close to exhibiting, but the trade-off of using ribbon technology of this calibre goes hand in hand with our dedication to phase behaviour where we have computer optimised the crossover to ensure absolute perfect phase-transition between the mid-bass driver and the tweeter. We found this to be central to making the two drivers behave (and sound) as one, while also revealing even more subtle detail that was otherwise smeared if the phase transition was just a little off (we are talking very, very little phase offset here, but rather huge audible differences).

"The point is that once we have gone to these extra lengths to make our crossovers able to compensate for the drivers, the baffle, the difference in distance between acoustic centres and the listening position, we have also found that even smaller changes in the setup have more

audible effects. My best explanation is that we have greatly reduced the phase smear/distortion associated with most speakers to such a low level that this is mirrored in how much there is to gain from attention to correct setup.”

Or, if you have a modest, well-damped listening space and, without adjustment, simply replace your existing speakers with the Immanence 2s, hooking them up to a particularly juicy and ebullient amp (Leema Acoustics Tucana II Anniversary) and comparably eager, analytical and energetic digital decoding (Chord Electronics Hugo TT2) with notably lean and fast Nordost speaker cables and interconnects, well, you’re asking for trouble. You will hear the tweeter, you will hear transients so hot they could set your eyelashes on fire and you will hear sibilance with an emphasis the like of which you barely believed possible. You may think you’ve made a terrible £8.5k mistake.

Patience. Joakim decides to talk car analogies as a way forward, perhaps appealing to my 40 years as an automotive writer. He starts: “Modern family SUVs [clearly a reference to majority of luxury mainstream speakers] are designed to eradicate variations in road surfaces for a smooth, homogenised driving experience. What we try to do is more towards proper racetrack cars, where subtle changes in tyres, suspension, ride height, fuel etc come to matter a lot more and sometimes make the difference between the most thrilling driving experience and, if these things are not set up right, something less satisfactory.”

### The right road

I suggest the Immanence 2 therefore mirrors the ultra-extreme Porsche Cayman 718 GT4 RS, a car that, on the right road – and it must be smooth and sinuous – is capable of shattering, brutal moments of clarity unmatched by its peers. But it’s the briefest of glimpses on the rarest of roads leading to one question. Do I embrace the ill-starred traits exposed by regular, pock-marked Blighty tarmac to experience the ultimate high on track or a very special, far flung ‘destination’ road?



## Oephi Immanence 2

Joakim acknowledges the dilemma but is undeterred: "There is also something to be gained from going those extra miles where system matching becomes more paramount as the revealing qualities of the speaker are dialled towards 'take no prisoners' and partners more naturally with equipment at the more expensive end of the market. However, there are exceptions as we have an Immanence 2 customer who is extremely happy using his simple Naim Unity Atom to drive them (admittedly with matching Immanence speaker cables and



Transcendence mains cables). When well setup and paired, the speakers should play all sorts of recordings well. I often prefer non-audiophile recordings that have been less manipulated." It's helpful guidance. I swap the Tucana II Anniversary for an even more muscular and effortlessly imperious Hegel H600 later handing over to an especially sweet sounding Newotech pre-power combo (also Danish). The Chord DAC moves over for an identically priced but warmer and silkier Newotech DAC 8. And, perhaps most tellingly of all, the Nordost cable loom is sidelined for an Immanence level alternative from Oephi. Big uptick. I don't think we've quite hit peak Immanence yet, but at least we're cooking with gas.

UK Oephi distributor Fraser Robertson provides a deeper dive into the 'science' of the cables and the differences they can make. "As passive components cables cannot add bandwidth to that offered by the electronics and the speakers, only reduce it" he begins. "With the Immanence cables, that reduction in bandwidth is significantly less than anything else I have encountered in the market – even Nordost by an order of magnitude! This is genuine bandwidth achieved without overshooting the top end as many high-end cables do to sound 'faster' or more extended than they really are."

Joakim takes up the theme: "The effect of true high bandwidth capability is another level of transparency that doesn't compensate but exposes potential tendencies in the partnering equipment. High bandwidth and low phase distortion doesn't equate to more high frequency output but rather that the high frequencies sound more natural, better resolved with proper silence between the transients which gives the pauses in the music new meaning etc. In other words, a more relaxed, yet more nuanced rendition where subtle differences between recordings and the gear become more evident."

### Optimum set-up

So, the optimum set-up. Firstly, it isn't in my preferred listening room which, admittedly, is on the small side: perfect for LS3/5as, Immanence 2s not so much. Given some space to breathe

in the lounge, the previous perceived fierceness largely dissipates. Team Hegel/Newontech is a stabilising influence, too, especially used with the Oephi cables. Speaker placement?

Absolutely key – perhaps more so than any other speaker I can recall. You almost need a theodolite to establish the exact degree of (mild) toe-in and tweeter height is ear-level or bust. But boundary clearance requirements are modest. A couple of feet either side seem to be fine.

Finally, and rather triumphantly given the amount of experimentation, everything starts to gel and the impression of immediacy and deep field transparency is truly uncanny. Streaming the recent release of Robben Ford's at Montreux (*Live At Montreux 1993*), the portrayal of space, energy, drive, dynamic expression, timing and the sheer rhythmic physicality of Ford's playing has a raw, unfiltered quality that simply elevates the feeling of performance and 'being there'. It's intoxicating, elevating and dangerously addictive. Hearing what the Immanence 2 can really do, it quickly becomes obvious that definition, dynamics and, above all, timing alacrity beat the hell out of superficial razzle-dazzle.

Here is a speaker that will keep you up half the night exploring familiar music for hitherto unrealised insights, nuances and textures. They furnish a spacious, structured soundscape with a real sense of depth and image solidity. With jazz pianist Julian Joseph playing *Blueprovisation* in a lightly damped acoustic, it all hangs together beautifully. Just a Steinway grand and a sparkling fountain of notes. The big instrument's weight, timbre and dynamic freedom are beautifully captured in three dimensions, rich and resonant.

At first, that level of dimensionality is almost spooky, as if there must be more than two speakers playing. Then, with acclimatisation, what I'm hearing sounds so right, so natural and so 'unsurprising' I simply relax into the music's location and momentum. Seems obvious but it's amazing how many quality speakers, however talented in the individual hi-fi arts, fail to make the final connection. Once again, the skinned-back honesty, the palpable impact of realism, room for only the necessary beauty inform the listening experience. Nothing short of startling.

### Conclusion

To be honest, I didn't think it would come to this. That a speaker so unforgiving, so doctrinally averse to a little benign manipulation, so ruthlessly an expression of its maker's singular vision would seem so, well, 'normal'. But, just as Neo discovered, once you've swallowed the red pill, there's no going back.

