



# The Arc angels

**Wilson Benesch Arc** Speakers £2400

**For** Detail resolution, dynamics, composure; stunning build and finish

**Against** Considering their compact dimensions, nothing

**Verdict** The very best of Wilson Benesch speaker magic in a pint-pot design: the Arcs are a truly stunning achievement

It's hard to categorise the Arcs. They look like standmounters but come ready-bolted to hefty yet stylish stands, which takes the top of their compact curved cabinets to 95cm from the floor. So these are, if you follow us, floorstanding standmounters.

The Arcs are available without stands (for £400 less), but their downward firing ports mean that the dedicated supports are likely to give the best performance. Let's face it, when you spend this much money, performance has to be high on the priority list.

So are they worth it? You bet. Properly set-up and partnered these small speakers deliver a performance that belies their dimensions. It's easy to hear the absence of cabinet coloration. An extra layer of fine detail emerges from familiar recordings and overhang is minimal.

The start to the theme from *Jaws* is a good example: most speakers cloud the low-level string notes, making the piece hard to follow. Not the Arcs – they deliver the subtlest of sounds with superb clarity, and retain control regardless of complexity. Stereo imaging also impresses, as the physical presence of the Arcs is lost in an expansive yet clear soundstage.

So, the Arcs can do the finesse thing but can they boogie? They can indeed, as Massive Attack's *Angel* shows. This track has one of the most demanding basslines around, but these tiny monitors cope admirably. Their small

cabinet limits ultimate low frequency extension, but as far as they reach – it's claimed 45Hz – bass is solid, powerful and articulate.

Rhythmic drive is also full throttle, so Madonna's *Music* grooves while Erykah Badu's *Baduism* glides along with determination. High volumes are also no problem, as the Arcs handle extreme levels with all the refinement you'd expect of thoroughbreds. And that's exactly what these speakers are.

Technically, the Arcs are unusual. The twin downward-firing ports make the speakers less sensitive to position than if they fired rearwards, and what's more chuffing and other port noises are harder to hear firing down than forward.

As with most products from this Sheffield-based firm, carbon fibre has found its way onto the spec sheet. A large U-section is used to form the rear part of the Arc's enclosure, while the top and bottom panels are acrylic-lined MDF. The front corners look like wood but they are in fact alloy sections with a veneer finish. These are available in a range of options.

This sophisticated design aims



Unlike most rivals, the Arcs are an easy electrical load with sensitivity rated at 87dB/W/m and impedance 6ohms.

While the Arcs sing when fed by our reference Krell KRC-3/FPB 300c combo, they also do a fine job with lesser amps like Roksan's Caspian. While the latter won't push the speakers to their limits it's enough to prove their talents.

Despite the Arcs' unfussy nature, a free-space siting maximises their openness and stereo imaging without spoiling the even tonal balance. Unlike most Wilson Benesch products, they sound best with a slight toe-in to boost spaciousness and preserve sparkle at higher frequencies. It's also well worth biwiring as this adds top-end air and reinforces outright dynamics.

These are Wilson Benesch's most affordable product to date but they still manage to pack in most of the magic that makes their £7000 ACT One big brothers our reference speakers.

Insight, low coloration and fine dynamics are all major strengths, while flaws are few, especially given the size. The Arcs prove great sound, designer looks and excellent build aren't mutually exclusive.

| WHAT HI-FI? says |       |
|------------------|-------|
| sound            | ★★★★★ |
| build            | ★★★★★ |
| facilities       | ★★★★★ |
| verdict          | ★★★★★ |

to minimise cabinet coloration while giving the in-house 17cm mid/bass driver and custom-made tweeter a firm foundation.

The Arc speakers will benefit from being biwired, as it will add top-end air and reinforce outright dynamics. They're also best positioned with a slight toe-in, unlike their big brothers