



THE PARAGON OF ITS KIND

A name synonymous with unparalleled quality in sound system, Steinway Lyngdorf, unveiled a new audio beast, the S - Series, set to become the next standard bearer in the home audio system market. By HAFIZ RASID

Photography STEINWAY LYNGDORF

“When you hear a piano being played live, its sound is distinct; you can hear the sound board of the piano as the pianist is playing. This is the minor nuance in sound that does not translate well in a sound system.”

The first thing you notice about the Steinway Lyngdorf Model - D is not the high-gloss lacquer finish of the sound system reminiscent of Steinway's grand piano; nor is it by the hefty price tag – costing up to a whopping US\$188,000. But it is in the sound itself. Distinct, natural, and life-like. In other words, an almost accurate replication of the original sound.

“When you hear a piano being played live, its sound is distinct; you can hear the sound board of the piano as the pianist is playing. This is the minor nuance in sound that does not translate well in a sound system. You can hear the difference between the sound of recorded piano played through a sound system or a real one,” explains Peter Lyngdorf,

founder of AL Audio A/S. That is the Model - D's calling card. Named after Steinway's concert grand piano, it is one of the first completely digital, high-end audio systems.

The brand, now in its fourth year, has expanded its portfolio to five new product ranges. “When we first launched the Model - D, that being the flagship product, it was intended as a product that really delivered the ultimate,” shares Suguna Natalie Madhavan, president, Asia Pacific & Middle East and member of the advisory board for Steinway Lyngdorf, “but by virtue of its size and also the relative price, we think it's very value for money; but the price does not make it affordable for most people out there and it limits itself as a niche product for a niche market.”



S-SERIES
5.2 MATTE
BLACK
FAMILY

Steinway Lyngdorf's latest sound system, the S-Series, opens up a new market segment for the brand to explore. "The S-Series is very different. The idea is actually to make the slice of extraordinary Steinway Lyngdorf experience available to almost any ordinary home at approximately S\$22,000. Many Singaporeans as you know spend \$5,000 on television alone, so at that price range, it is very accessible.

"By opening it to a wide market, it is still at the very apex of a mass prestige market. In fact we've started a marketing initiative; we have a whole new product advertising campaign. We have already started taking presence in some of the key magazines which are much wider in terms of reach and exposure to our buying market. We will actually open our first retail showroom in Singapore in the EFG Bank Building, co-located in our office. It allows for the first time, a walk-in traffic. We'll be much more retail with the S-Series. It'll be a first system by us that you can walk in and buy and have it delivered right away, and doesn't require any special installation," adds Madhavan.

After a long discussion on the philosophy and the technologies behind the brand's sound system, Lyngdorf put on several CDs of various musical styles to display the range and performance of the new S-Series sound system. "Close your eyes and listen to the music as it is being played," Lyngdorf instructs, "our sense of hearing is clearer if we cut the visual distractions."

Listening with your eyes shut or wide open, the quality of sound is apparent with the S-Series. It's succinct, clear, and very realistic. Every nuance and note – from the vocal ranges in an opera piece to the guitar strings of a folk melody – is audible and feels as though you're sitting in front of a live performance.

If replicating life-like sound consistently is the brand's mission, then it has done well. Superbly well.

THE S - SERIES

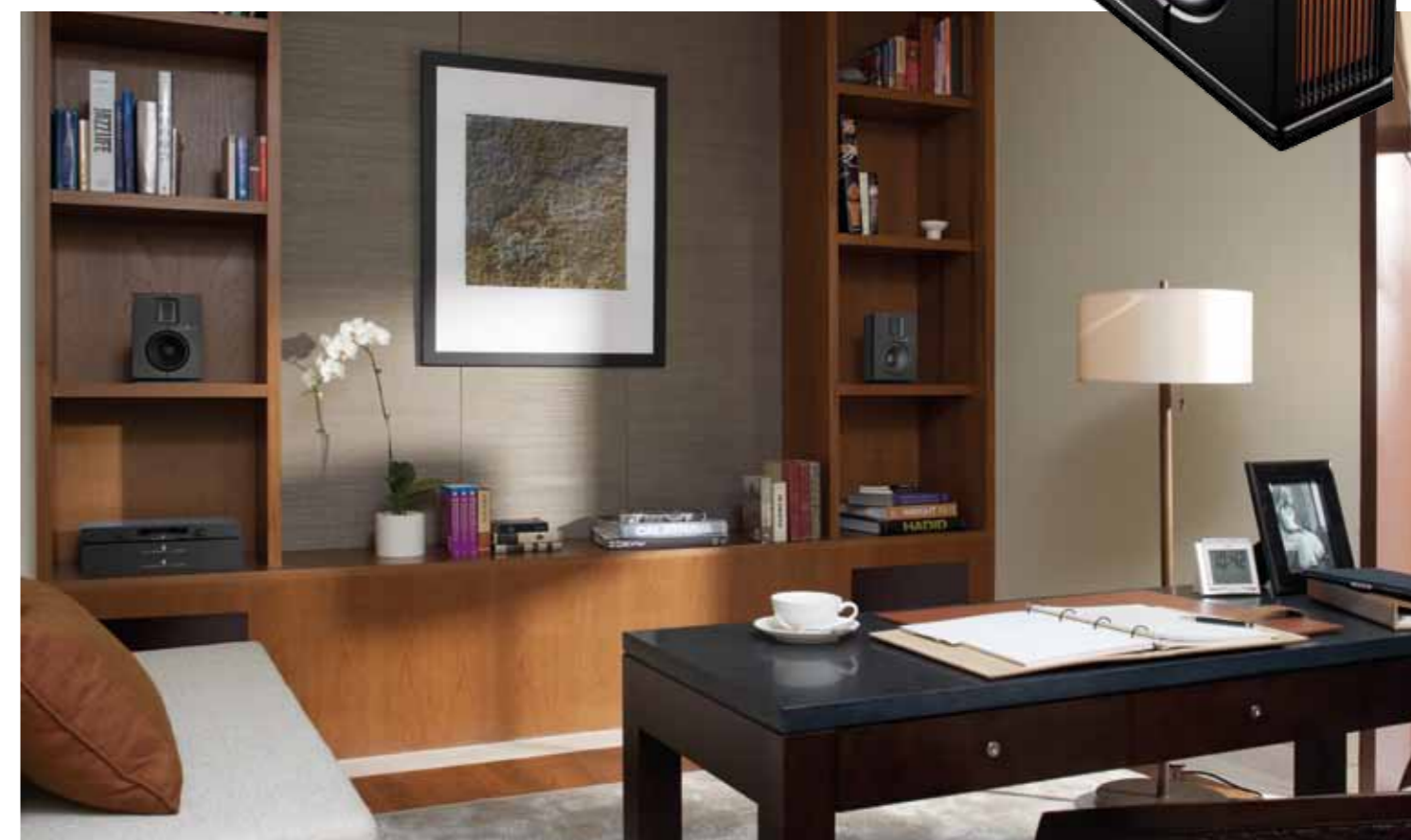
Retaining Steinway Lyngdorf's core DNA, the new S-Series delivers the brand's signature true-to-life sound in a surprisingly compact size; but the brand takes the line one step further from being just a miniaturized version of the flagship Model D Sound System. The series features an innovative patent-pending Ambience Enhancing Radiation (AER) dipole tweeter design powered by an Air Motion Transfer (AMT) driver, dispersing the treble across the space to achieve an enveloping and ambient sound throughout the entire room.

"The objective of S-Series is to create a sound system that is a tenth the cost, size, and weight but as close as the performance of a Model D," shares Lyngdorf. "To do that we had to come up with new technologies, of course we do have some core technology which is unique to my company that helps to calibrate a room's acoustic. We can take an awkward room and our technology can compensate for that."

The idea behind the S-Series seems simple enough. Take state-of-the-art technologies found in Model D, shrink it to fit smaller urban dwellings and other rooms as supplementary sound system for their clients to provide continuity of experience, in turn opening up to an even bigger market for Steinway Lyngdorf.

"To do that we had to come up with new technologies, of course we do have some core technology which is unique to my company that helps to calibrate a room's acoustic. We can take an awkward room and our technology can compensate for that."

"Starting from second half of 2008, a lot of our existing customers worldwide started asking us to develop a product that has a signature sound of Model D – they've fallen in love with the enveloping ambient sound of it, but they want it in smaller rooms for instance, but to retain the quality of the sound of the Model D. That is a big challenge for the research and development team and Peter (Lyngdorf). It allowed us to retain all the hallmarks of the Model D and utilise all the core principles in digital technology that we have in Model D, replicate that, and introduce a whole lot of innovation with the S Series," says Madhavan.





“Nobody heard when we started playing on the sound system instead of the piano. That is proof of concept that people can’t tell the difference between the recordings because it’s so close to perfection. The sound is completely transparent, you can hear the original performance. It is the most accurate reproduction, and by accurate it doesn’t mean clinical, but beautiful and life-like; true to the original.”



Traditionally, says Madhavan, the home audio system industry is divided into two almost extreme sectors: on one end of the scale are the high-end audiophile brands that deliver superb performance but decidedly lack focus on design and aesthetics, with many producing only specific components. On the other end are respectable brands well-loved for their designs, but do not deliver the sound performance as expected by serious audio enthusiasts. This is where the S-Series fills the gap, fusing uncompromisingly stylish aesthetic with superior sound quality.

“The idea is to create fantastic sound in a small living environment. Even if you’re living in an apartment building, where you have a small living room and hard floor, system performance has to be really good. It has to create a grand scale sound even in a confined space. That gives us a number of additional challenges,” Lyngdorf explains. “We found a new way to design a loudspeaker that can be placed on the wall, shelves and still performs better than speakers standing freely on the floor. Until we did this, it was considered an impossibility. All the electronics and control systems are the same level of quality as we have in the Model D. Even though the system is much more compact, the level of quality is the same as for our more expensive systems, so we don’t degrade the quality. It’s compact in size, thus produce less sound pressure level, but it will be the same level of quality and same basic purity of the sound.”

“We found a new way to design a loudspeaker that can be placed on the wall and still performs better than speakers standing freely on the floor. Until we did this, it was considered an impossibility.”

THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

The most important element in a home theatre system is perfect audio for sound and music, a major failing in most home theatre systems, according to Lyngdorf. “Traditionally, if it’s really good for movies, it’s bad for music, but ours is good for both. For our system, there’s no compromise for our music system; the single most important thing is intelligibility. Even though we use the highest definition screen, the picture quality is low compared to what the sound does. The sound is much more three-dimensional than the visual experience.”

The S-Series has its audio advantage over its similarly priced competitors. “Some

consumers buy maybe a \$20,000 home theatre system; which at that amount, you can’t get something that performs very well for both home theatre and music. So we have customers buying our stereo system instead of a home theatre system, because it sounds more realistic. People don’t realise that they don’t need many channels and all the complications to get good sound for a movie. This is where the S-Series becomes quite accessible, both from not necessarily just the price, but how we focus a best product from an experiential standpoint rather than making a product that sells at a certain price point.”

The perfect sound system, according to Lyngdorf and Madhavan, is something that replicates the original sound as accurately as possible. “If there’s a recording of a symphony orchestra, I want it to sound as the original performance. I believe the sound of Steinway grand piano for instance is a perfect sound, so is a Stradivarius. We don’t want to change the sound. There are some audio companies that want a signature sound, so they have their own twist. I don’t believe in that. If you close your eyes and hear music as though you’re in a concert hall - that’s what I want to achieve. In fact we’ve done it on a number of occasions where there’s a live piano music versus live recording, where we had some famous Steinway pianist listening to a recording versus live and they couldn’t tell the difference.”

The most famous example of this was at a concert hall in Moscow, where in an audience

of more than 500 people, 10 pianists from a school of music in Moscow performed on stage with Steinway & Sons pianos and Model D speakers. Unbeknownst to the audience, two of the pianists’ performances have been recorded earlier, and their live performance is gradually switched to the recorded audio played on the Model D sound system. As the speaker took over, the pianists slowly lifted their hands off the piano and walked off the stage, much to the amusement of the audience. “Nobody heard when we started playing on the sound system instead of the piano. That’s proof that people can’t tell the difference between the recordings because it’s so close to perfection. The sound is completely transparent, you can hear the original performance. It is the most accurate reproduction, and by accurate it doesn’t mean clinical, but beautiful and life-like; true to the original.”

Excellent craftsmanship is what the brand prides itself on. And with Lyngdorf, excellence in craftsmanship involves a personal element in the product development. “When we designed the new product, S-15 new mid-high speakers, I put the first ones together in the factory; I tightened the individual screws, and ensured that the first product of every new product is personally put together by me to ascertain that everything works as it is supposed to do. I remember it clearly - 690 screws!” exclaims Lyngdorf.

“That’s why the engineers don’t want Peter (Lyngdorf) in the factory anymore,” Madhavan adds in jest. ■

ICONIC PARTNERSHIP

When Steinway & Sons approached Lyngdorf for collaboration, the possible union seems to be a coming together of similar minds. A name synonymous with the ultimate in musical instruments, Steinway & Sons could not have found a better partner in Lyngdorf. As the founder of SL Audio A/S, Lyngdorf is one of Europe’s most successful entrepreneurs and a leading force in the audio industry for over three decades, leading some of the most significant audio breakthroughs to date; including the patented RoomPerfect, one of the largest single patents ever filed in the history of audio.

With Lyngdorf’s three-decades’ worth of experience and several proprietary state-of-the-art technologies under his belt, he knew he had the potential to develop the world’s best sound system.

“I got a call from a gentleman who was very close to the management of Steinway & Sons,” he explains. “He knew they were approached many times by electronic companies to collaborate on some high quality audio products. Most of the requests got declined because they don’t deem it interesting. This gentleman owns some Lyngdorf product and he felt that the partnership between the two brands would be a good match. They wanted to expand their brand presence from being just the best piano, to have a wider appeal, but remain in the realm of music. So I explained what I could do and we agreed on a partnership. I made a promise to them that every system we deliver can reproduce a Steinway grand piano such that they can’t tell the difference; it has to be very faithful to the music and very consistent.”

