

Totem Acoustic Rainmaker Loudspeaker System



Totem Acoustic is a Canadian-based company whose two-channel roots run deep. Although Totem first adopted a wait-and-see approach toward multichannel, its DreamCatcher system, recently rave-reviewed in TPV, proved that it was an exceptionally fast learner. And its larger Rainmaker System is another worthy multichannel family member.

The Rainmaker is a two-way bass-reflex design with a rear-firing port. It uses a 5.5" woofer and 1" aluminum-dome tweeter chambered in its own compartment. The review system—identical Rainmakers for all five chan-

nels—arrived in a natural semi-gloss mahogany finish. Build-quality was excellent by any standard—edges were as seamless as if the enclosure were made from a single, hollowed-out block of wood. Tipping the scales at a mere twelve pounds and barely 14" tall, the Rainmaker won't be mistaken for the brutish Krell LAT-1 or the voluptuous Wilson Sophia. But that doesn't mean Totem Acoustic isn't obsessive about design. Conventional wisdom says that most of the manufacturing money is spent on a speaker's drivers. In fact, it's the enclosure where most of the big money goes. Acoustic instruments unto themselves, every enclosure interprets music to greater or lesser degrees. Lesser, those from Totem Acoustic. In model after model, Totem seems to have mastered the alchemist's trick, turning the cabinet's molecular structure into thin air.

The Rainmaker is no exception. It's constructed of variable density 7/8" MDF for the baffle and back panel—5/8" for the side panels. Lock-miter-joint bracing throughout contributes to a rigid yet light structure. Neither the Rainmaker nor the Thunder subwoofer has internal foam or fill, the use of which, Totem thinks, subtracts from the signature "speed" of its products. Rather, for internal damping it uses internal veneers (which equalize stresses over time) and a Borosilicate compound. The Rainmaker's crossover is hard-wired, and it comes with dual speaker posts for biwiring.

Dimensionally the Thunder subwoofer is not your typical bass box. Retaining the narrower baffle and greater depth of the Rainmaker satellites, the Thunder is a sealed-box enclosure with 7/8" cabinet walls. It's fitted

with a 10" metal-cone driver and a carbon-graphite dust cap. To reinforce bass response a pair of 10" passive radiators are arrayed on the side panels. Each passive is loaded differently for fine-tuning, and acoustically emulates the lower compression of a dual-port configuration. The Thunder's back panel features a pair of line-level inputs for both filtered and unfiltered connectivity. The crossover is adjustable between 40–120Hz. Phase is variably adjustable, as well.

Letting the Sun Shine In Stereo

Sonically the Rainmaker puts on a display reminiscent of a Cirque Du Soleil performance. Let me explain. Its sound is characterized by colorful micro-dynamics and an almost acrobatic, rhythmic nature. Totem loudspeakers generally have a propulsive "in front of the beat" personality. Music retains a lively snap and momentum that challenges listeners not to tap a toe. The soundstage is spacious and imaging more detail-oriented than a contestant on *The Apprentice*. But transient speed is the Rainmaker's forte. Its aluminum-dome tweeter may not rival the grainless purity of a ribbon or the finest soft domes, but its whip-crack reflexes certainly bring these others to mind.

The Rainmaker is smooth and predominantly neutral through the midrange, with an invitingly forward push of energy in the vocal ranges. Images neither sit in your lap nor wall-flower-like in the distance. For instance, during "The Nearness of You" [*Come Away With Me*, Blue Note], Norah Jones' head-tones had an added rush of lower treble energy and some mild added sibilance, but the Rainmaker elicited natural octave-to-octave transitions from the piano

accompaniment and a reasonably robust lower midrange that suggested the weight of this instrument.

The Rainmaker is at its best recreating the intimacy of an unadorned vocal, like Eden Atwood singing "Blame It On My Youth" [*This Is Always*, Groove Note SACD], accompanied for the most part only by Darek Oleszkiewicz's acoustic bass.

The Rainmaker's lower-treble frequencies are slightly more forward than I like, adding a greater sensation of cymbal sizzle, a leaner clarinet tone, and a more emphatic transient "blat" from the trombone to David Douglas' "Waltz Boogie" [*Soul On Soul*, RCA]. This forwardness could also be heard on upper-octave piano passages as a dry coolness that robs the instrument of some of the fleshy tactile "feel" that should be heard each time a piano key is struck. However, except for this dryness, which sometimes shifted my attention back to the speaker, the Rainmaker performed a virtual disappearing act within the soundstage.

The Rainmaker doesn't merely pay lip service to bass, acoustic, electric, or otherwise. This speaker makes good on its claim of genuine 40Hz performance. Test tones in my smallish room revealed that the Rainmaker was smoothly outputting usable bass into the mid-30Hz range. But size still matters, and the small drivers don't quite move enough air to reproduce the full chest resonance of bass-baritone Bryn Terfel on "Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn" [*Sings Favourites*, DG]. On the other hand, the Rainmaker is superbly articulate. Terfel's impeccable diction, the ripple of his rolled r's, every pluck of the accompanist's harp seemed suspended dramatically in space.

The only issue I have with the Rainmaker's enclosure/port—and it's a relatively minor one—regards a midbass prominence that, during complex musical passages, seemed to homogenize the unique characters of instruments playing in this region. For example, a trio of vamping piano and drums being doubled by acoustic bass might lose some individuality and congeal into a more generic bass "pulse." It's the only area where the otherwise seamless Rainmaker became a little discontinuous. This

issue, however, is all but settled when the Thunder subwoofer takes over deep bass responsibilities.


Thunder-Struck in 5.1



In 5.1-channel, the Rainmaker proved that from movie mayhem to Mahler it didn't play favorites. Although Totem will be producing a dedicated center channel later this year, there is still no substitute for identically matched speakers in all five home-theater "corners." During *Master And Commander, The Far Side of the World*, life aboard and below deck on the HMS Surprise became an absorbing and immersive auditory experience of the highest order. The complexity of this DTS mix continually revealed details missed during previous viewings. I felt like Jonah inside the whale, listening to the distinct groans and creaks of the ship's wooden hull, the gurgles and lapping of water against its sides, the sound of sea spray in the distance heard somewhere between a front and surround channel. When Captain Aubrey commands "Beat to quarters," the drums change tonal character and soundstage positioning as the film quickly cuts to different shipboard locations as the crew prepares for battle.

The Rainmaker also makes for a gratifying multichannel high-rez music system. With merely a foursome of Rainmakers (no sub, no center), I was able to take a pristinely recorded large-hall acoustic performance like the *a cappella* one of mezzo Laurel Massé [*Feather And Bone: Premonition*], process the stereo PCM track through the DSP of the NAD T163 controller, and hear wonderfully immersive surround emulation. This is where the fortified bass extension of the Rainmaker—paramount in recreating hall ambience—puts most mini-monitors to shame.

The Thunder was such a pitch-perfect subwoofer that it almost seemed a waste to just play movies through it. Its response was solid and fast, and extended without protest into the mid-20Hz range. During *M&C*, it propelled a couple of ripping cannon shots from the rear channels to the

fronts, momentarily making me feel as if my couch were being torqued diagonally. Likewise during the teen angst drama *Thirteen*, the bass beat of heavy hip-hop underscoring was impressive. As in *M&C*, the Thunder and the Rainmaker sats sang with a single voice—a compliment to the speed of the Thunder but also to the extension of the Rainmaker.

In my Infinity review (p. 59), I likened the Primus 360 speaker system to a broadsword rather than a scalpel. The Rainmaker/Thunder rig is nearer the reverse of that analogy. It offers a rewarding combination of precision and heft, quality and refinement far beyond what one might expect at its price and size. It's one system that can rain on my parade any day of the week. 

	Dynamic, fast and extended satellites	
	Spacious surround performance The Thunder's a wonder	
Some mid-bass port coloration Tweeter is a little dry		

SPECIFICATIONS

Rainmaker

Drivers: 1" tweeter, 5.5" mid/bass
Frequency Response: 42Hz–20kHz
Impedance: 4 ohms
Sensitivity: 87.5dB
Crossover: 2.3kHz, second-order
Dimensions: 14" x 6.8" x 9"
Weight: 12 lbs.
Price: \$900 pr.

Thunder

Drivers: 10" woofer, 10" (2) passive radiators
Frequency Response: 20–200Hz
Power: 500 watts
Dimensions: 12" x 18" x 18.5"
Weight: 42 lbs.
Price: \$1495 (black ash or mahogany), \$1595 (cherry or maple)

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

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