

# Towerfully Magnificent

By Darryl Wilkinson

## Definitive Technology Mythos ST-L Loudspeaker

PRICE \$2,499 ea

**IT'S HARD** TO BELIEVE THAT THE original Definitive Technology Mythos ST was introduced seven years ago. At the time, the Mythos styling ethos—svelte, curved-back, extruded-aluminum cabinets—had already been around for a while, so the sleek, silvery design of the Mythos ST wasn't a dramatic departure. Sure, it was the largest Mythos speaker to come out to that point, but what made it especially buzzworthy was that the ST was the first Mythos speaker to include a powered woofer section.

Def Tech helped pioneer the concept of tower speakers with built-in powered woofers earlier, in its BP series of bipolar speakers. But, in the eyes of a lot of people, even the slimmest BP towers—deep, rectangular, cloth-covered, with gloss-black caps and bases—didn't look aesthetically appropriate next to a plasma TV. Rather than being solely Def Tech's problem, though, it was an issue for nearly every speaker company. Sadly, everyone simply accepted the fact that, unless you were willing to spend extremely significant amounts of money, you could have either great-sounding speakers or great-looking speakers—but not speakers that were both.

The Mythos speakers broke that paradigm, and with its powered woofer section, the Mythos ST absolutely pounded it into the dust. A reviewer I know well (a.k.a., me) opined: "You'd have to spend gobs more money to get anything else that offers this combination of performance and beauty. The Mythos STs

## AT A GLANCE

## + Plus

- 1,200-watt Class D subwoofer amplifier
- IR remote control for woofer level adjustments
- No support grid behind grille cloth to block midrange/tweeter array

## - Minus

- They're pretty heavy
- Remote control coverage too narrow to reach both speakers simultaneously

are an audiophile's speaker wrapped in an interior designer's cabinet that sells for much less than you'd expect to pay for either." But that was in 2007. Seriously, Def Tech dudes, what have you done for us lately?

## The Mythos ST-Lately

According to Dave Peet, executive VP at Sound United and Definitive Technology (but really just a guy who pretends to work by sitting around listening to music), the new Mythos ST-L is the company's long-awaited answer. Although it has taken seven years, the people at Def Tech made good use of the time (plus advances in technologies and materials) because, as Peet told me, they tweaked and tinkered with damn near every aspect of the original speaker's design in order to "re-imagine the ST" and "really kick some ass." (Crap, I think that last part was supposed to be off the record.)

I won't go into everything (you're welcome), but there are a few technical aspects of the ST-L that deserve mention. First of all, instead of a granite pedestal base, the ST-L stands on a solid, cast-aluminum, X-shaped platform with four top-mounted knobs used to adjust the spikes or footpads installed underneath. Rather than hanging off the back of the tower like a stubborn, skinny turd that refuses to drop, the detachable power cord attaches underneath the speaker through a central hole in the base and is cleverly prevented from inadvertently falling out by a small wire tie.

Then there's the almost nonexistent difference in size. At 53 inches high, the ST-L is only 1.5 inches taller than the ST, while the extruded-aluminum cabinets of the two speakers have the same 6.75-inch width and 9.5-inch depth. I'd have thought that for \$1,000/pair more, the ST-L would have been taller or fatter or deeper—or all three. It's a good thing the ST-L isn't any larger, though, because its current size puts it very close to the border between coexisting within a room and totally dominating it.

## Was Ist Das "Klippel"?

If the name Klippel rings a bell, it shouldn't. That's because the Klippel R&D System is "a collection of loudspeaker measurement tools that precisely analyze various large-scale (large-movement) performance parameters." In other words, it's used for pinpointing ringing and other types of distortion when designing speakers. Def Tech says the new-school Klippel System differs from old-school methods of measuring

## RATING

Definitive Technology  
Mythos ST-L Loudspeaker  
Performance ★★★★★  
Build Quality ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★★

speakers in two ways: 1) It uses both high- and low-amplitude test signals to more closely simulate real-music requirements, and 2) Klippel uses a laser to "map" the surface of a cone or enclosure and identify causes of distortion. Although other companies do these sorts of tests, Def Tech claims to be "one of the few loudspeaker companies" that uses every tool in the Klippel chest.

OK, so the new Mythos ST-L is totally Klippel-icious. That and a dollar (plus tax) will get you a large iced tea at McDonald's. What's the big deal about some German dudes who sit in front of computer screens looking at graphs all day?

The reason Def Tech touts their Klippel testing relates back to Peet's comments about tweaking and tinkering their way to a "re-imagined" Mythos ST. For example, in the Mythos ST-L, the familiar D'Appolito midrange/tweeter/midrange (MTM) array incorporates a pair of new 5.25-inch midrange drivers. (Spoiler alert: Klippel testing had a lot to do with the new driver designs.) BDSS (Balanced Double Surround System) technology, in which both the outer and inner edges of the driver's cone are supported by soft-rubber surrounds, has been a hallmark of Def Tech midrange drivers. The ST-L's midranges are third-generation BDSS, and the list of enhancements is surprisingly long, including: a more powerful magnetic structure; surround material with more linear properties; and a mushroom-shaped, aluminum "Linear Response Waveguide" that is said to keep higher-frequency wavelengths from one side of the cone from interfering with those coming from the other side—and, it does double-duty as a heatsink for the voice coil.

The midrange drivers are slightly different, though. Look closely at the outer surround of the upper midrange (it's easier if you take off the grille, obviously), and you'll see that the forward-bending

## THE VERDICT

Def Tech's updated flagship is an uncannily neutral, disappearing speaker and an amazing value.

## DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY MYTHOS ST-L LOUDSPEAKER

PRICE: \$2,499 ea

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## Hörvergnügen?

Def Tech rejiggered its traditional all-aluminum dome tweeter design for the new Mythos ST-L, too. Among the many changes—such as a larger magnet structure, rubber (instead of silk) surround material, and new faceplate geometry—the most visible is the magnesium-aluminum alloy in the tweeter's 1-inch dome. The alloy is said to help suppress

curvature of that driver's outer surround is the reverse of the surround's inward curvature in the lower driver. Hidden behind the cones, the folds in the spider material that support the voice coils are also in opposite orientations. The asymmetrical design is an attempt to cancel distortion produced by nonlinear movement of one driver's surround or spider with equal but opposite characteristics in the other driver.

resonance modes and ultimately flattens the response of the tweeter in the 12-to-14-kilohertz range, but a close look at the graph of the new tweeter's frequency output reveals a significant rolloff above 18 kHz. What the funk? Does Klippel mean "no high-frequency hearing" in German? I didn't get an answer on that, but Peet did explain that Def Tech "traded off ultra-high-frequency output" in return for "vastly lower distortion and smoother response at more relevant and audible frequencies."

From the outside, the ST-L's woofer configuration looks a lot like the ST's. There's an active, 6 x 10-inch, "racetrack-shaped" cone driver mounted on the front that's pressure-coupled to a pair of front-firing, planar passive radiators. But Mythos ST-L's claimed 1,200-watt Class D internal subwoofer amp is quadruple the rated power of the ST's built-in amp. Exclusive to the ST-L is an L/R switch on the back of each tower. By itself, the left/right designation doesn't affect the output; you and the ST-L's remote control do. The remote lets you adjust the bass output of each tower independently or simultaneously from the listening position. Since the remote uses IR, however, it can be tricky to make simultaneous level changes if you're not far enough away from both speakers. Each ST-L has a row of white LEDs across a panel at the bottom of the tower that provides a momentary visual confirmation of that particular speaker's setting.

On the technical side, it's obvious that Def Tech's re-imagined flagship speaker has a huge amount of test-Klippel-ular fortitude. But, to borrow from an old VW ad campaign, do the Mythos ST-Ls have hörvergnügen? ("Listening pleasure"—if Babylon's online German translation is correct.) More to the point, do they have \$5,000/pair worth of hörvergnügen?

## Disappearing Act

A funny thing happened on the way to this paragraph: Most of the demo tracks below are re-imaginings of

## LOUDSPEAKER



classic songs. Take B.J. Thomas' 2013 release, *The Living Room Sessions*, a collection of mostly "unplugged" duet redos of hits from his nearly 50-year-long career. "Most of All," from 1970, starts with a simple guitar and percussion arrangement before Thomas' vocals come in. It's not long before Keb' Mo' fills in his part in the duet. It's a simple, beautiful rendition that relies on the depth of emotion in the two voices for much of its power. Thomas' mellow voice carries an almost seductive blend of confidence, satisfaction, and contentment. Keb' Mo's vocals, on the other hand, have a bluesy edge of a weary search for happiness that's perfect for the sentiment of the song. "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" (1969) presents an even more dramatic pairing of Lyle Lovett with Thomas. Lovett's voice—sounding burdened and nearly spent—came achingly through the towers. Both songs were acid tests for the new midrange drivers in the ST-Ls, and the towers did more than just pass the test. They made me forget I was even testing them. Essentially, the ST-Ls presented the three distinctly different voices (and accompanying instrumentation) in a way that was naked and uncolored.

The Mythos ST-Ls weren't sexist, either, reproducing female voices just as nakedly. (The ST-Ls would definitely get an R rating from the MPAA—but you'd still let your kids listen to them.) Neither Jen Chapin's remake of "Higher Ground" (*reVisions: Songs of Stevie Wonder*) nor Rita Coolidge's "People Get Ready" (*Play Something Sweet*) are tracks I would normally listen to because of their crawling pace, but the ST-Ls' breathtaking reproduction of subtle changes in tone and emphasis in each woman's voice made me want to play both tracks again and again. The Def Tech



● The slender Mythos ST-L stands a statuesque 53 inches tall.

True to its heritage, the ST-L is a stunning performer.

## TEST REPORT

● The ST-L's tweeter is made of a new alloy to help flatten the driver's response.

midrange sounded so amazingly "simple" and clear that it was hard to find anything to complain about.

Hearing the natural energy and snap inherent in each pluck of a guitar string or hit on a cymbal proved (to me, at least) that Def Tech made the correct choice in optimizing aspects of the new magnesium-alloy dome tweeter other than high-frequency extension. The soundstage seemed to appear slightly behind the speakers rather than aggressively forward. But to say that the soundstage was created behind the ST-Ls isn't quite right. The soundstage and the room were actually one and the same. The Mythos ST-Ls were so effortlessly amazing that they appeared to disappear—even though I was looking right at them.

By the way, the ST-Ls were just as capable of rocking out, too. The Kenny Wayne Shepherd Band's version of "House Is Rockin'" (*Goin' Home*) was stunning in just about every respect. The ST-Ls didn't hold anything back, especially the bass, which was tight and loud. So much



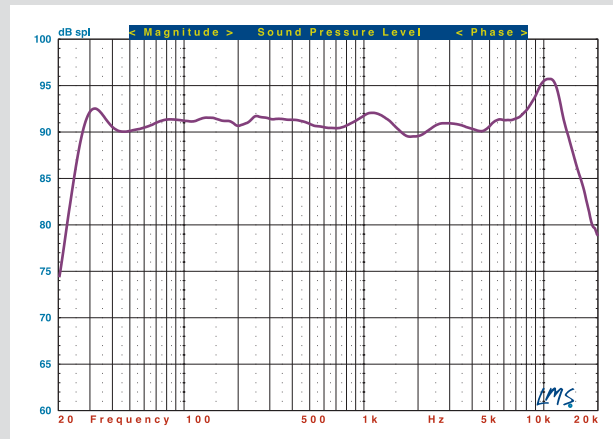
so, as a matter of fact, that it was almost impossible not to believe that a full drum set and piano were in the room. On "Boogie Man," the bass was sustained and deep and, well, so controlled that it was eerie.

### Conclusion

Although it's technically the top-of-the-line of the Mythos series of speakers, Definitive Technology's Mythos ST-L is more—much more—than just a flagship model. One of the aspects I've always loved about the Mythos speakers in general is their ability to *perform*—in other words, to be neutral and, at the same time, exciting to listen to. True to its heritage, the ST-L is a stunning performer, so much so that it transcends the Mythos of old and truly ushers in a new era for Definitive Technology. The Mythos ST-L isn't just another pretty powered tower—it's a magical, *emotive* speaker, one that's able to bypass the rational, thinking part of your brain and unleash deep and powerfully moving emotions

# Test Bench

## Definitive Technology Mythos ST-L Loudspeaker



**Mythos ST-L (purple)** +4.45/-1.49 dB, 200 Hz to 10 kHz; -3 dB @ 26 Hz, -6 dB @ 24 Hz; impedance minimum 4.40 ohms @ 284 Hz, phase angle -38.96° @ 158 Hz; sensitivity 91 dB, 500 Hz to 2 kHz.—*MJP*

## SPECS

**Mythos ST-L** 6x10 in glass/fiber cone woofer, 6x10 in passive radiator (2), 5.25 in polymer cone midrange (2), 1 in magnesium/aluminum alloy dome tweeter; 6.75 x 53 x 9.5 in (WxHxD); 73 lb

trapped within. While I'm not one to casually throw money around, I have to say that, even though they're

made of aluminum, for \$5,000/pair, the Mythos ST-Ls are an absolute steal...er, steal. ♦