



MURATA SUPER TWEETERS

Does frequency response matter, even if we're talking about response above and beyond where your ears leave off? That question has been discussed a lot. It was back in the 50's that a study was done with subjects unable to hear above 18 kHz, seeming to show that they could sense if frequencies above 20 kHz were filtered out. Of course, we know filters are never inaudible, so...

But interestingly enough, CD players do filter out everything beyond 20 kHz. Of course, SACD and DVD-A players don't (and neither do turntables for that matter). Is there something up there to reproduce?

The muRata company thinks the answer is yes. These gorgeous ES103 piezoelectric ceramic super tweeters, which look as though they've just been unbolted from the wing of a jumbo jet, are meant to *start* where many an ear leaves off, namely at 15 kHz. No cross-over network needed, just plug them across the regular speakers, and go.

We had some serious doubts about this. For one thing, how can you build such a tweeter without knowing the efficiency of the main speakers? Aren't add-on tweeters bound to add noise or distortion? Well, it wouldn't hurt to give them a few minutes, would it? We put them atop our Suprema speakers in

our Omega system and dug out some SACDs.

What we heard left us with our mouths agape!

We began with a selection we had used several times in the current tests, *Needed Time* from Eric Bibb's *Spirit and the Blues* (Opus 3 CD19411). At first all three of us wondered whether we were letting our imaginations run away with us...had we *really* heard more things with the muRatas connected? We listened again, without and with. No, there really was a change, and it was neither noise nor distortion.

So what was it? "A little something extra," was all Gerard could come up with. Reine and Albert pointed to extra little guitar notes and percussive effects that were all but hidden until we connected the tweeters. We're not talking major transformation, but perhaps a pleasant addition to an already outstanding system.

We continued with another piece we had heard several times lately, *Comes Love* from Opus 3's *Showcase* SACD (CD21000). All three of us noted — still

Speakers that take up where your ears leave off.

with some surprise — the enhancement of several instruments. The clarinet, already beautifully reproduced had superior articulation. The piano, notably, no longer sounded quite the same, and detached itself more clearly from the foundation laid down by the sax, the banjo and the sousaphone.

Yes, the effect was subtle, not the sort of thing you would notice in a noisy setting such as an audio show (where we had heard the muRatas more than once). What's more, we hadn't yet spotted any down side to using these tweeters.

"But I want to hear them with a female voice," said Albert. "If it adds any screechiness or unnatural sibilance, that's where we'll hear it." Well, we did have a sealed copy on hand of FIM's SACD version of *Cantate Domino* (PRSACD7762). We selected the *Christmas Song* (aka *O Holy Night*), with its wonderful solo by soprano Marianne Mellnäs. By the way, we had actually never heard the CD, contenting ourselves with the LP. The SACD transfer compared well.

No, the tweeters added no harshness or noise. Indeed, Albert and Reine thought they added little to this recording. Gerard disagreed. He thought Mellnäs' voice had more of a sheen to it, though by no means an unpleasant one, and a superior articulation of the smaller (and higher) pipes of the organ.

Our conclusion is that we were wrong to be so offhanded about this product, relegating it to a brief and final listening session. But we had no more time before we put the magazine to bed, and no more space for a longer report if we had chosen to prepare one.

Which means the muRata super tweeters will return in our next issue, this time with a full-fledged report. We will try them with a wider variety of SACDs, and in both of our reference systems. We will try them with analog as well, since our high performance moving coil pickups can easily extend to 65 kHz or more. And we will make some measurements. We will need to revert to analog instruments, since our digital instrument suite stops dead at 20 kHz.

For most systems, this add-on makes no sense at all. But if your system already works outstanding well, what then?

More to come...

