

# DIABLO UTOPIA 1/2

Review by **René Van Es**, for the web-magazine **Hifi.nl** - October 15<sup>th</sup> 2008

## **Focal Utopia Diablo** **A devilish listening pleasure**

The first few days with the Diablo, I don't do anything, apart from getting LP after LP, CD after CD from the cabinet. Fascinated by what I hear. Tied up, drawn into the music. Until I finally free up from emotion, to listen in a way so I can share my experiences with you.

I begin with a favourite of mine in baroque music, my beloved Vivaldi's "Four Seasons", played by Dutch Janine Jansen.

How to describe beauty? How can I tell you that right from the start the music carries me away, almost unable to concentrate on technical listening? The solo violin of Jansen dances in the air. An organ carries the music. Each time the entire ensemble plays, pure power flows in the room. Details are there for the taking. The intimate sounds are perfectly audible. The sniff of Janine is part of her play and concentration. At moments, the music is very soft and small, creeping silent as a beast in its hunt for prey.

The next moment, I sit upright when the weather changes in a way only the summer is able to. Storms, rain, thunderstorms, the corn and all animals are wept away. Wild as a bolt of lightning, the violin sounds shoot through my listening room. The music thunders, it is the torn of God humans and animals are falling into. It is the "Diablo" at length. I snap for air to be able to turn to another CD.

This time it is Pablo Sarasate, played by Giovanni Angeleri. Angeleri plays a piece that is much more subtle than what Jansen brought me. His violin is many times smaller in the air of the chapel where he played this piece. In the background a soft tambourine, much further away clearly a triangle. Each instrument has his natural place. It is very difficult to point out why the sound is so immensely correct. It is a combination of space, instruments, musicians, the music itself and the recreation that the Diablo Utopia turn into the sum of the parts. Quite naturally, free and relaxed. Dynamic with a capital "D". Wide as the stage is supposed to be. Angeleri pinches only the tiniest note from the strings. It is lively, it makes me happy, jumps and moves. These speakers do not put down a static performance, they live with the music. They disappear from the room to become an invisible source.

The Diablo is begging for a voice, so I continue to hang on to the classic selection and play a first work performed by Maria Cecilia Bartoli. It was the devil who seduced Eve with the apple in the Garden. It is the Diablo that seduces me to taste Bartoli's songs. Her voice has exactly the right size. Not an overstretched head, a human being stands in front of me. The voice has a lot of strength, where every nuance comes from under a magnifying glass. Very clean and pure. But technique is not the goal. Soon, people link details with hi-fi sound. In this case, that must be absolutely avoided. The details and sophistication are part of music, an indispensable part, but it remains only music. Not a hi-fi sound.

Do you sense the way I do not mention high tones, midrange, bass end and so on. The simple reason is that I have nothing to whine about. Well, the bass could be a bit tighter and have a little more definition (remember I use valve amps). Or may run deeper (physically impossible). I expect these last points of criticism soon will be solved by use of a super tight Pass Labs transistor amplifier. There is nothing to moan, it's very difficult to describe the points Diablo scores or drops.



  
**FOCAL**  
the Spirit of Sound

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Because it continuously sucks me into the music. With classics such as Ella Fitzgerald, Juliette Greco, Oscar Peterson. With modern pop songs of Katie Melua. I challenge you: try to get "Pictures" out of the player when you play it through Diablo Utopia. It took me a lot of energy to lift my behind from the chair. The devil kept me in my seat. After track two, I wanted to stop and listen to something else. I eventually stopped after track number eight. Six tracks later than intended.

## Conclusion

The Grande Utopia EM of Focal is a masterpiece. Will everything below that level suffer in comparison to an inferiority complex? That is partly true. The woofer of the Diablo compares to the Grande Utopia mid unit. The Diablo misses a 27cm and a 40 inch woofer with EM technology.

In the end, you'll never reach the ultimate. But once we start talking about integration, treble, voice playback, dynamic range, speed and purity, the Grande Utopia left its DNA on this devil.

The Diablo is a full-fledged Utopia, it deserves to live in many homes, behind a beautiful audio set up, to wear its years. This speaker left a deep impression behind. More so than former types of Utopia did, sometimes physically a lot larger. This is mainly due to the operation of the tweeter, a real masterpiece.

The sound is unprecedented free of harshness or aggression. Without loss of impact, transparency or speed. These are properties directly granted to the Diablo.

I will not deny that I'm a Focal fan. From the Kevlar dome to the third generation with Focal Beryllium, I have used all.

In the 15 years that I listen to Focal in private, I was always happy with the ones I bought for myself.

Not every Focal is just as beautiful, not every system works best in my listening room, other brands have their strengths I can highly appreciate. And every year, I listen to many systems, home and elsewhere.

But I still use Focal, that does tell something about the brand, about my personal preference, the price/performance ratio, the pleasure I daily experience playing music through loudspeakers. It is therefore almost perfectly plain that at any moment my own beloved Electra 937Be make room for the Diablo Utopia. This review was a diabolical pleasure. I sell my soul to the highest bidder for a couple of these guys.

**Excerpts translated in English by René Van Es, to read the complete original review in Dutch, copy this link:**

**[http://www.hifi.nl/recensies/3581/Focal\\_Diablo\\_Utopia.html](http://www.hifi.nl/recensies/3581/Focal_Diablo_Utopia.html)**

