

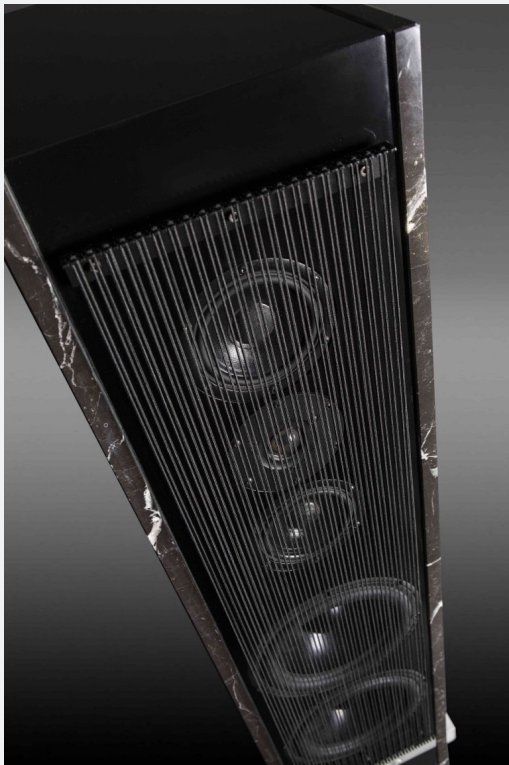
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## Perreaux Audiant SR58 Loudspeaker PREVIEW

MARCH 14, 2016 1:45 PM GARY STEEL 0 COMMENTS

### 5 Stars

**Our man of Steel gets a first taste of a pair of speakers that knock his socks off, and could probably break a window or two, as well.**



WHEN I MENTIONED to a friend that I had driven for over an hour to the wilds of South Auckland to get to hear Perreaux's new loudspeaker, the SR58, his enthusiasm was muffled, to say the least. The inference was that while the Mosgiel-based company are rightly feted for their amplification, making speakers was an entirely different skill set. What my friend didn't know was that for Perreaux, manufacturing its own range of speakers was simply taking them full circle: when the fledgling firm was first making waves in the mid-'70s, loudspeakers were an important part of its business, and in fact, they came up with the first locally made PA system, which travelled around with a brilliant progressive rock band called Ragnarok. I'll be showing my age when I admit that I saw Ragnarok in concert, and even remember how sparkling clean the sound was in an era when "muddy" and "distorted" were the operative words for gigs.

Eventually, Perreaux's resilient MOSFET amplifiers really took off internationally, and it's not surprising that they became the focus of

their endeavours, and that as the company expanded exponentially, they left the job of loudspeakers up to those with the resources to do so.

But in 2014, Perreaux once again entered the loudspeaker fray with its small SR35 floorstanders, which I raved about [here](#). While I loved many things about the SR35s, they weren't the kind of noise boxes that I could quite take to my heart. Their sound was sophisticated and on the right music, magical, but they're speakers I would recommend primarily to listeners of acoustic music. It's not that they don't sound great with electronic dance or rock, just that they don't have quite the ballsy quality that those genres demand.

And that's where the SR58s come in. As I was to discover, these large, premium, custom-made loudspeakers are that rarity in the lofty world of hi-fidelity: they're a one-size-fits-all solution capable of the kind of subtlety required to make acoustic music compelling, but also the sonic authority to make the best of what popular music has to

offer.

As Perreaux owner Marty van Rooyen pointed out during our session (and I concur most enthusiastically) he's over that rarefied thing of hi-fi freaks who will only listen to "mature jazz" or whatever makes their set-up sound great: he likes the idea that a speaker can handle a whole range of music and deal with everything with equanimity.



So here I was, driving across town to Papatoetoe, and the home of Mike and Lee-Anne, who played gracious hosts to a select bunch of stereo nerds keen to check out these formidable

looking sound emitters. It turns out that Mike was a recent convert to hi-fi, but is the type of personality that when he gets into something, he goes all the way. Hence, his purchase of the very first pair of SR58s, which were manufactured to order, and finished in a most impressive 20mm of solid stone siding using Nero Marquina marble. [Marty says that a client can order any side cladding – stone, solid timber, whatever – and that the inner cabinets can also be produced to suit exact requirements.]

As I've found out by asking around, the look of the SR58s can be polarising. Personally, I love their incredible semi-industrial visage, as I'm a bit over the beautiful woodgrain look and prefer something a little more dark and threatening! Having said that, as I noted above, the speakers are custom-made and presumably the look will change depending on what the customer wants used on the sides and inners.

They certainly looked great (and somewhat imposing) set up in Mike and Lee-Anne's living room, becoming the focal point of the space (and rightly so), and we soon settled down to some listening. I have to mention at this point that my experience of the SR58's was fairly brief, and that I made the mistake of not bringing any vinyl with me. My selection was entirely CDs, but Mike is a vinyl-oriented listener, so his CD player was bog standard. For those reasons, I've made this a PREVIEW rather than a fully blown REVIEW.

The system was almost entirely Perreaux-enabled: powered with 2 x Prisma Series 750W mono block amps, an Audiant DP32 USB DAC preamp, Silhouette SXV2 phono preamplifier, and Perreaux interconnect and loudspeaker cables.

The thing that grabbed me straight away was the effortlessness of the sound, and that's something I've experienced over and over again when auditioning speakers powered by large amps. There's no beating it, and as much as small power amps might do the job perfectly well (in the same way that my Suzuki Swift can drive me all the way to Papatoetoe) there's no getting away from the effortless cruising power and ability to steer the music no matter what the demands when using a large amp.

The SR58s are designed so that you can really see those cones throbbing, and that intensifies the enjoyment, giving the listener a sense that air is being moved here, and that the vibrations your ear are picking up aren't just some sonic sorcery, but the real thing.

I played bits of some of the usual suspects: dubby electronica via the beautifully engineered International Observer album, *Seen*; a rare example of well-produced '80s pop in Talk Talk's *Colours Of Spring*, some bass-heavy blues from Little Axe, a bit of toe-curlingly sexy singer-songwriter breathiness from Emiliana Torrini. Etc. I could tell that the very average CD player was doing it no favours, but the sound was still blindingly great.



But when Mike started thumbing through is vinyl box, that's when the slight disconnection was erased, and the speakers really came alive. By and large, what spilled off those platters wasn't really my cup of char (Michael Jackson, Dire Straits) but one of the selections, Hugh

Masekela's "Stimela", I remembered from when Kramer had played it on a pair of Jason Parmenter's Fat Boy speakers. Now, those Fat Boys are fabulous, but they're on another level of hi-fi investment to the SR58s, so I was astonished that the amazing characteristics of this track were still there: as Ashley said in his review of the Fat Boys, "The sound had everything I'd imagined the high-end should have – presence, detail, scale and enough power and dynamics to make the music seem almost real." Mike likes his volume even louder than me, so at this point he had his SR58s turned up LOUD, and the impact was riveting. Despite the wide dynamic range of this recording, there was no sign at all of the speakers shying away from the challenge. I was floored.

What it really comes down to is this: where most \$20K-plus high-end speakers put all their effort into mid-range and tops, Perreux has decided to respect those who as well, like a bit of kick with their music. The SR58, as Marty notes on the Perreux website, packs the kind of punch you get from a kick drum in a live situation – a dynamic that too many high-end manufacturers ignore in favour of those who prefer a meek, family friendly loudspeaker. They're a no-compromise tower with a height of 1210mm and a weight of (wait for it) 104kg, and a frequency range of 27Hz to 20 KHz at 6db. You can read Marty's detailed notes [here](#), but what it boils down to, for me, is a no-bullshit high end speaker, no smoke and mirrors, just what you see is what you get: incredibly rigid housing and heavy cabinetry to circumvent nasty vibrations, bigger drivers for extended low frequencies, and no passive radiators to confuse the issue.

In his notes, Marty talks of listening to real instruments in a room, then comparing them to playback: "As sophisticated as the loudspeaker undoubtedly is, it's only through a lengthy process of careful design in combination with critical listening and fine tuning, that we've been able to close in on our goal of creating a product of such defining quality. If you were to play exactly the same note on both a piano and guitar at the same volume, the timbre of the sound would represent the psychoacoustic difference you perceive between the two notes played. The timbre of the SR58 is therefore the subjective impression felt by the listener of the quality and accuracy of individual instruments, voices and indeed the overall sound produced."

What this tells me is that the technicians at Perreux have used their ears and not just their engineering skills and ability to interpret graphs to get to the endpoint of the SR58s. Increasingly, people are returning to the idea that what sounds best is best, and that's not necessarily what a computer reading tells us is perfect.

I'm hoping that I'll get a chance to have a more structured, extended audition of the SR58s some time, either with a really good SACD player or some hi-res files. Being a Martin Logan owner I'm used to hearing that specific sound electrostatic speakers produce, and it's always a bit of a shock to hear "conventional" loudspeakers, but instead of the typical feeling of loss, with the SR58s I thought straight away: "I could live with these, alright!"



My recommendation? Anyone with around \$20K to spend (presuming you already have a fairly powerful amp and good source components) would be hard-pressed to find something as good as Perreux's SR58, which is clearly the product of graft

and passion rather than something geared towards huge profits and international markets (they're too heavy to send overseas, for one). And you could do worse than supporting local, don't you think? **GARY STEEL**

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