

# Angstrom Suono Sonata 200 On-Wall Speaker System

Speak of the devil.



BY MARK FLEISCHMANN

**In the Faustian struggle for** the soul of the audio industry, Mephistopheles mans the sales floor, giving the public what it wants, namely on-wall speakers. The beckoning demon's proposition is irresistible. If you're hanging a flat-panel display, why not hang speakers there, too? All other things being equal, on-walls are at a sonic disadvantage when it comes

to soundstage depth. But, as any competent demon knows, all things are rarely equal. So, let's restate the proposition: If on-walls are what you want, why not buy the best-sounding ones you can find? If they sound good in the space and look good on the wall, you might find yourself handing the demon your credit card.

Enter Angstrom, trailing a flowing red cape, baby demons scampering in its wake. Knowing that anything is more seductive if

spoken in Italian, the company has given their on-wall speaker family the name of Suono. That's from the verb *suonare*, meaning "to make music." The speakers themselves wear fabrics of three less flamboyant colors—beige, black, or silver, the latter being the color of my review samples—to harmonize with your plasma or liquid-crystal display. Behind the Suono Sonata 200's cloth covering are 5-inch woofers, in pairs for greater power handling, and a 1-inch tweeter, with ports on the speaker's narrow side. The speakers are not shielded; although, if you're using them with a flat-panel display, that shouldn't matter anyway.

I don't spend much time with demons, so my frame of reference isn't big enough to tell if there's anything unusual about the Sonata 200's design, but the pair I pulled out of a tall, flat box hardly intimidated me. On the back is a plate that affixes to another plate for easy wall-mounting. I pulled a painted end cap off the bottom and found the gold-plated speaker terminals. Since I had only a pair of the Sonatas to start with, they ended up in my increasingly celebrated desktop system, leaning against the wall. They spent several weeks there, linked with 12-gauge zip cord to a 50-watt stereo inte-

grated amp fed by CDs and MP3s.

### Shadings of the Wraith

Sometimes a guest in my desktop system will sucker-punch me and knock me flat. Others bring a mild surprise. Others still behave exactly as they would in my surround system, for better or worse. The Sonatas were in the second category. Once in a while, some instrumental texture would jump out of them, and I'd think, "Wow, where did that come from?" But, most of the time, I forgot they were there; they simply became the acceptable standard that serenaded me by day as I worked and by night as I read.

The Sonatas are voiced perfectly for on-wall use. You don't have to strain to hear lyrics or dialogue, and you don't have to flinch when a screaming heavy-metal guitar solo grabs hold of the midrange (unless the recording is spectacularly bad). The downside is that the musical spirit that flies out of the speakers is slightly translucent rather than opaque, texturally vivid but spatially ghostlike. It has all the shadings of real life, but you feel like you could stick out your hand and reach through them.

While the Sonatas sat on my desk, my CD library absorbed lots of new acquisitions, including a couple of fat boxed sets. The speakers were at their best with the Amadeus Quartet's seven-disc set of Haydn string

quartets on Deutsche Grammophon. Seven slender cardboard wallets made the box itself only 0.66 inches thick—this is my favorite format for multidisc CD packaging, because it makes the most of my shelf space. The 1970s recordings

were late analog (good), as opposed to early digital (bad), and are full of color and texture. This is something you can't always take for granted in string-quartet recordings—or with on-wall speakers, for that matter. The Suono Sonatas lived up to their

## AT A GLANCE **ANGSTROM SUONO SONATA 200 ON-WALL SPEAKER SYSTEM**



### ••• SUBWOOFER: SW500

Connections:	Speaker- and line-level inputs
Enclosure Type:	Sealed
Woofer (size in inches, type):	10, paper cone
Power Rating (watts):	150
Crossover Bypass:	Yes
Available Finishes:	Beige, Silver, Black
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	17 x 14 x 14
Weight (pounds):	33
Price:	\$599

These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs; the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

### SPEAKER:

Type:	
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	
Woofer (size in inches, type):	
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	
Available Finishes:	
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	
Weight (pounds):	
Price:	

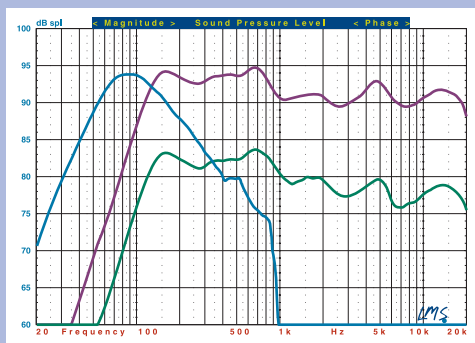
### SONATA 200

Two-way, three-driver on-wall
1, soft dome
5, poly cone (2)
6
10-70
Beige, Silver, Black
24 x 10 x 3
9
\$499/pair

### SONATA 200C

Two-way, three-driver on-wall
1, soft dome
5, poly cone (2)
6
10-70
White, Silver, Black
24 x 10 x 3
9
\$249

## HT Labs Measures: Angstrom Suono Sonata 200 On-Wall Speaker System



••• L/R Sensitivity:  
91.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

••• Center Sensitivity:  
91 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Sonata 200 L/R (purple trace), SW500 subwoofer (blue trace), and Sonata 200C center channel (green trace).

All passive loudspeakers were measured with grilles at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and were scaled for display purposes.

The Sonata 200's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +3.25/-2.08 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3-dB point is at 107 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 94 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.81 ohms at 5.2 kHz and a phase angle of -24.50 degrees at 158 Hz.

The Sonata 200c's listening-window response measures +2.59/-5.24 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +2.77/-8.96 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3-dB point is at 110 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 97 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 5.32 ohms at 277 Hz and a phase angle of -21.71 degrees at 158 Hz.

The SW500's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3-dB point is at 57 Hz and the -6-dB point is at 47 Hz. The upper -3-dB point is at 152 Hz with the LFE switch set to enabled. —MJP





name. They picked up the material and sang. The voices of the instruments blended and separated as intended. It was all there, undulating and glowing, like neon gas hanging in the air.

The Suonos' sound was muted with *The Life and Music of Richard Thompson* on Free Reed, which adds up to six discs if you count the early-bird bonuses. The recordings include many archival rarities, and their quality varies wildly. When the on-walls tried to grab a recording that originated as a shaky demo cassette,

it slipped away from them, without enough shadings to hold onto. The more well-rounded recordings fared better. They sounded lifelike and substantial. I think there was more going on here than the customary "garbage in, garbage out." Bad recordings can still have a crude vitality, but, without the focus that only good speaker placement can provide, only the crudeness survives, and the vitality disappears.

### Up Against the Wall

To avoid obstructions near the

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Flat form factor and varied color options to match your flat-panel video display
- More sonic subtlety than you'd expect in an on-wall

wall, my surround setup required the left and right speakers to sit farther apart than I'd normally have them. They ended up flanking the projection screen instead of sitting in the usual position under the screen's left and right boundaries, as stand-mounted speakers normally would do. That didn't violate Angstrom's setup instructions, which recommend that left/right and speaker/listener be equidistant. The manufacturer also suggests "angling the speakers in a lot, so that their axes cross in front of you." This definitely made the ghost less ghostly. If I'd been hanging the Sonatas permanently rather than propping them up temporarily, I'd shop around for an angled bracket to attach to the mounting plate.

Departing from my usual speaker placement didn't prevent the violin and cello from leaping out of the speakers on Piazzola's *Fuga 9*, performed by Mr. McFall's Chamber from *Like the Milk*. I don't mention it much, but it's track 1 on my most heavily used test CD-R. On other tracks, there was a soft-focusing of familiar vocals, and some electric guitars had less sting than usual. But, if the tonal balance seemed on the soft side of average, that may be because so many other speakers that come through here are bright.

The opening scene of *Dances*



with *Wolves* is my favorite DTS soundtrack for its mix of mumbled vocals, rifle shots, and orchestral score. Vocal clarity was about average. The rifle shots made me jump, and I began to like the sub. Setting

it up was mildly confusing. It didn't seem to respond much to my receiver's sub test tone, and I pegged it as reserved. The 150-watt power rating seemed to confirm that judgment. But, when it actually started subwoofing, I realized the sub was prioritizing low bass over midbass (not a bad thing in my room). It's not the meatiest or the most focused bass I've ever heard, but it gave the rap-club scenes in Eminem's *8 Mile* a suitable plumpness.

### Cohabiting

After living with Angstrom's Suono Sonata 200s for an unusu-

ally long demo period—which coincided with the holidays and other work interruptions—I had grown to depend on them. So, snob though I am, I managed to live with on-walls for months and survive. During that time, they mutated attractively, becoming sweetly musical and positively voluptuous toward the end. For people turned off by bulky conventional speakers, high-performing on-walls like the Sonatas are now among the possibilities. 🗨

\*Audio editor Mark Fleischmann is also the author of the annually updated book *Practical Home Theater* ([www.quietriverpress.com](http://www.quietriverpress.com)).

ANGSTROM SUONO SONATA 200 ON-WALL SPEAKER SYSTEM					OVERALL RATING
Build Quality	Value	Features	Performance	Ergonomics	91
→ Two-plate mounting bracket a step up from the usual keyhole mount → Full fabric covering	→ A cut above the genre's usual take-the-money-and-run designs → Good sound for price	→ Dual woofers for greater power handling → Vertical or horizontal placement options	→ Surprisingly communicative for an on-wall speaker design → The audio shadings are all there	→ Quiet, tasteful, nothing shiny to pick up room light → Three color options make for a close match with most monitors	
88	93	91	89	94	

**General information**  
 Suono Sonata 200 Speaker, \$499/pair; Suono Sonata 200C Center-Channel Speaker, \$249; SW500 Subwoofer, \$599  
 Angstrom Loudspeakers, (714) 648-0983, [www.angstromloudspeakers.com](http://www.angstromloudspeakers.com) → Dealer Locator Code ANG

Angstrom's approaches to décor-friendly speakers include both on-walls and small satellites. The Suono Sonata 200 is a flat speaker that will harmonize with any flat-panel TV while calling as little attention to itself as possible. By on-wall standards, it's a sweet-sounding speaker.

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