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SOLID TECH RACK OF SILENCE REFERENCE SYSTEM (PLAYBACK, FROM TAS 194)

by Chris Martens (/articles/?authors=34) | Aug 28, 2009

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For many years I used a simple audio rack that was reasonably sturdy and rigid but nothing to write poems about. Over time, however, so many of my audio friends and colleagues touted the performance benefits of stronger, higher-tech audio stands that I became curious and decided to try out the Solid Tech Rack of Silence Reference system from Sweden. Three things drew me to the system from the start: versatility, build-quality, and innovative design. When you first see the system it exudes an almost Bauhaus aesthetic, plus fine fit and finish that prove to be a visual and tactile delight. As you study the system, you quickly discover its elements are engineered to work together to provide an ideal combination of secure support and significant degrees of vibration isolation. Best of all, though, the Rack of Silence lives up to its name, creating deeper and more profound background silences while unlocking extra levels of sonic detail and nuance.

My test system was a pair of three-shelf Rack of Silence Reference 3 racks, though a taller four-shelf version (the Reference 4) is also available. Each rack uses four robust extruded-aluminum pillars to support slender but amazingly strong, skeletal, X-shaped component-support shelves. The shelves attach via extruded-aluminum “collars” that slip over the main support pillars. Shelf-spacing is infinitely adjustable, making it easy to accommodate oddly proportioned components.

As a means of providing basic vibration isolation, the top surfaces of each X-shaped shelf feature milled grooves that accept upward-facing ball bearings, which can be “tacked” in place with blobs of putty-like vibration-absorbing compound. Audio components, of course, rest upon the four ball bearings provided for each shelf—not on the arms of the shelf itself. To keep the bearings from skidding against or marring the undersides of audio components, Solid Tech provides small rubber O-rings that fit between components and the bearings.

Racks of Silence are offered in Regular and Reference configurations; all shelves in Regular racks are rigidly mounted, while Reference racks provide special center shelves, called “Super Shelves,” suspended by coil springs for superior vibration isolation. The weight-bearing capacity of the Super Shelves can be adjusted by adding or removing springs as necessary. To give users greater peace of mind, Solid Tech provides locking safety screws that prevent Super Shelves from falling should a spring ever break.

In addition to Super Shelves, Solid Tech also offers three specialized, add-on suspension/vibration modules for use with the Rack of Silence. The modules are called Iso-Clears, Feet of Silence, and Disks of Silence, and in a moment I’ll describe their basic design features and intended functions. But first let

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me mention that in order to use any of these add-on modules, Rack of Silence users must first buy sets of wooden adapters, called Foot Pods, which fit over the arms of the X-shaped shelves and can support any of the suspension modules mentioned above.

Iso-Clears are simple cost-effective suspension pods designed to support low-to-medium-weight components. Each pod features three to seven suspension springs, which are sandwiched between a pair of plastic plates (the deceptively simple-looking plates actually provide internal layers of viscous-elastic damping material). Just slip a set of Iso-Clear pods under your components and, *voilà*, your component instantly has a vibration-damped suspension system. By varying the number and type of suspension springs installed, Iso-Clear modules can support components weighing between 11 and 86 pounds, though I found the Iso-Clears tended to work best with lighter components.

Next, Feet of Silence are high-performance suspension/vibration-damping pods designed for use with medium-to-heavy components—preferably ones that have strong, stiff, flat-bottomed chassis. Looking much like gleaming works of industrial art, Feet of Silence modules provide polished ball-bearing contact points, an internal viscous-elastic vibration-damping layer, and a clever suspension system that uses O-rings as springs. Depending on whether light- or heavy-duty O-rings are installed, a set of four Feet of Silence can handle components weighing up to 110 pounds.

Finally, Disks of Silence are suspension pods designed for use with components whose bottom surfaces might be scuffed by the hardened-ball-bearing contact points used in other Solid Tech systems, and especially for use in applications where precision leveling capabilities are needed. Accordingly, Disks of Silence feature substantial, flat-faced, cork-padded, *height-adjustable* support hubs that are suspended from cylindrical frames by trampoline-like sets of springs. Depending on the number of springs installed a set of four Disks of Silence can support components weighing up to 200 pounds. For obvious reasons, Disks of Silence are ideal for use with turntables that have large flat plinths.

But how do all these components work in practice? The simple answer is that they work like a charm. From the moment I installed the Rack of Silence system and its associated modules I was not only treated to an across-the-board reduction in my system's noise floor—replete with noticeably deeper and "blacker" backgrounds—but also to newfound layers of low-level transient and textural details. I frankly wasn't prepared for the magnitude of improvement I heard, both on analog and digital playback.

On Sonny Rollins' classic *Way Out West* [Analogue Productions LP], for example, I could much more clearly hear the delicacy, rhythmic precision, and ultra-fine dynamic control of drummer Shelly Manne's cymbal work, even in instances where Manne chose to play at extremely low volume levels. Similarly, on "Walter Pigeon" from John Abercrombie and Eddie Gomez's *Structures* [Chesky SACD], my ear was caught by Gomez's taut yet completely unstrained *arco* bass work as the song opens, and by the sweet and ever-so-subtly modulated tone Abercrombie achieved with his guitar. Instead of a general impression of "liquidity," I could now clearly discern Abercrombie varying finger pressure to give individual notes more or less emphasis. As a general rule I found that the more musical materials had to offer in terms of rich layers of inner detail, the greater the benefit of the improvements. Sometimes the Rack of Silence made me feel like a sonic treasure hunter, allowing me to unearth precious bits of musical information that previously had been buried just beneath the surface of my system's noise floor.

Good though the Rack of Silence is, I would suggest several possible enhancements. First, I'd love to see Solid Tech simplify assembly procedures by providing three things: a photo-illustrated assembly manual; perhaps a set-up DVD to explain finer points of suspension adjustment; and especially a plastic alignment-jig to aid in proper assembly of those tricky X-shaped shelf frames. Second, and on a more performance-minded note, I would like to see Solid Tech offer (as standard) a set of height-adjustable feet for the Rack of Silence (after all, many listening room floors are far from level). While you could use shims to true up the rack, you really shouldn't have to with a product at this price point.

Minor quibbles notwithstanding, I came away thoroughly impressed with Solid Tech's Rack of Silence system. It's strong, beautiful, well made, and well thought out. But most importantly, the Rack of Silence has the proven ability to help already very good systems reach significantly higher levels of performance—levels that, once experienced, quickly become addictive.

SPECS & PRICING

Rack of Silence Reference 3

Type: Three-shelf audio rack with suspended center "Super Shelf"
Dimensions: 23.625" x 27.5" x 19.75"
Width between pillars: 20.75"
Price: $1495/each

Iso-Clear

Type: Cost-effective suspension/vibration isolation modules for use with light-to-medium-weight components
Price: $49 for four

Feet of Silence

Type: High-performance suspension/vibration-damping modules for use with light-to-heavy components
Price: $500 for four

Disks of Silence

Type: High-performance suspension modules with height-adjustment capabilities, for use with light-to-heavy components
Price: $275 for four

Foot Pods

Type: Wooden rack adapter cups for use with Iso-Clears, Feet of Silence, or Disks of Silence modules
Price:$50 for four

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Associated Equipment

Nottingham Analogue Systems Space 294/Ace-Space 294 turntable and arm, Shelter 5000 and 7000 moving coil cartridges, Musical Fidelity kW SACD player and kW500 integrated amplifier, NuForce P-9 preamplifier and Reference 9 SE V.2 monoblocks, Furutech cables and power distribution equipment, Usher Audio BE-20 loudspeakers, RPG and Auralex acoustic treatments.

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