

The 802 Diamond floorstanders are designed for serious audiophiles



**HOME  
CINEMA**  
Choice  
*Reference  
Status*

# Diamonds are forever

**Adam Rayner** runs some old classics through B&W's 800 Series Diamond speakers – and finds new levels of enjoyment

The 800 Series from Bowers & Wilkins has for a long time been the weapon of utter perfection and choice for some of the world's most demanding sound engineers – because monitoring what *exactly* you are making in a recording studio is crucial. You want utter fidelity, not a brash and boastful presentation that makes everything sound fabulous in the studio, but then leaves it all a bit damp and frayed around the edges when not heard on such flattering speakers.

This system, with its new Diamond tweeters, is pretty much without equal for sheer revelatory precision. Often the 'Peers', or possible alternative choices at the price point, in our AV/CV box (see below left) are easy to describe – but in the case of these speakers, I'm not sure if the Peers I've chosen really are equals at all.

So what is going on here, then? Well, the speakers have been out for a few months in this dramatically important new guise with their bonkers Diamond tweeters, but such was the importance of their use in stereo hi-fi applications that getting a full home cinema set, complete with centre and subwoofer, has had to wait until the beardies have all rubbed their chins and expressed delight over mere pairs of these exquisite objects.

And gratifyingly enough, *Home Cinema Choice* and yours truly got the first dibs on this 5.1 setup. So although they have been around for a short while, make no mistake, you are looking at a multichannel exclusive.

## Big day out

I do love my home, yet it is modest compared to the lifestyle these

speakers are made to fit in with. So, needs must at this level and I had to go into London to audition the array in the demo rooms at illustrious dealers, Graham's HiFi.

They had a lovely demo set up for me to walk into, white silk gloves figuratively on (for I needed to do no unpacking nor setting up myself of these big beasts) with HCC Dep. Ed. Craven-san and Tech Labs manager James in tow, just so they could get an earful at the same time.

The system comprised a fabulous DBI subwoofer (which was just doing its final 'doof-doofs' and self-tuning to the room as we arrived after final install tweaks); a pair of the bookshelf 805 Diamonds in rear channel duty; an HTM2 Diamond centre speaker (the bigger of the two available, with two bass drivers as well as the midrange and fabled Diamond tweeter) and, at the front, the all-but-biggest 802 Diamond towers.

A £15,300 combination of Classé SSP800 processor (£7,350) and CA5300 5 x 300W power amplifier (£7,950) was in control, with a JVC DLA X7 projector flinging the images with great quality. So, a simple two-box pre-power front end and a 5.1 channel speaker array. Just like in my living room...

We spun up a mixture of material on an Arcam BDP100 Blu-ray deck, although most awkwardly, I broke the weighty and solid-feeling remote for it by accidentally dropping it a foot onto carpet (not impressed and bloody embarrassed). The Graham's chap had to get another one.

The selection of demo material included my best-known reference, *Lifted* (the Pixar short from Disney's *Ratatouille Blu-ray*), then fan-

favourite *Blade Runner* in all its remastered wonderfulness. After that, there was time for the tigers-in-the-arena scene from *Gladiator* (we were in a Ridley Scott mood) before we let James sate his audiophile thirst with some two-channel music.

**From the first moment that Pixar's small angle-poise lamp called Luxo bounced into view, my chin dropped.** Incredibly, I heard layers of twanging steel spring I had only ever perceived as a mush before. As for *Lifted* itself, the sheer detail, fluency, power and scale was breathtaking. The squeaks of the boss alien's office chair, to the awesome slam when the house is flattened, to the *whoosh* of the spaceship's departure were just another experience. It was as if there was no limit to the 800 Series' prowess. That the perfectly potent power was coming from fabulous amps and the Arcam BD deck was a superb signal maker (even if the remote needs a redesign internally) was all audible.

I've specialised in subwoofers in more than one area of audio, yet I'm on record over and over raving about the importance of the tweeter in our perception of sound quality from speakers, as this smallest driver covers the bit we are using for locational cues in our hearing. The cat, owl and fox alike all use the rustle of a rodent in the undergrowth to point their pounce, after all. The highs are what give us detail, and B&W's use of vapour-deposited diamond to make the five tweeters that were pointing at us is utter 21st century genius, as this material offers a very high break-up frequency. >

## AV/CV

**Product:** 5.1 premium-grade home cinema speaker system

**Positioning:** The top products B&W make, if you exclude Nautilus

**Peers:** KEF Reference; ATC Concept 6 Active

## 42 REVIEWS



**We are family:**  
B&W's high-end  
driver technology  
is shared across  
the whole  
Diamond range

### → Specifications

#### **Bowers & Wilkins 802 Diamond**

**Drive units:** 1 x 1in vapour-deposited Diamond dome tweeter; 1 x 6in woven Kevlar midrange; 2 x 8in Rohacell cone bass drivers

**Enclosure:** Three-way downwards flow-ported, with seven piece internal matrix of MDF braces and Marlan teardrop-shaped midbass enclosure

**Frequency response:** 34Hz-28kHz +/-3dB

**Sensitivity:** 90dB (2.83V @ 1m)

**Power handling:** 50-500W

**Dimensions:** 368 (w) x 1135 (h) x 563 (d)mm

**Weight:** 72kg

#### **Bowers & Wilkins HTM2 Diamond**

**Drive units:** 1 x 1in vapour-deposited Diamond dome tweeter; 1 x 6in Kevlar midrange; 2 x 7in Rohacell cone bass drivers

**Enclosure:** Three-way sealed

**Frequency response:** 41Hz-28kHz +/-3dB

**Sensitivity:** 90dB (2.83V @ 1m)

**Power handling:** 50-300W

**Dimensions:** 841(w) x 329(h) x 387(d)mm

**Weight:** 31kg

#### **Bowers & Wilkins 805 Diamond**

**Drive units:** 1 x 1in vapour-deposited Diamond dome tweeter; 1 x 6.5in Kevlar midbass

**Enclosure:** Two-way, front ported

**Frequency Response:** 49Hz-28kHz +/-3dB

**Sensitivity:** 88dB (2.83V @ 1m)

**Power Handling:** 50-120W

**Dimensions:** 238(w) x 418(h) x 351(d)mm

**Weight:** 12kg

#### **Bowers & Wilkins DB1**

**Drive unit:** 2 x 12in Rohacell cones on long throw motors/suspensions.

**Enclosure:** Bipolar sealed

**Frequency Response:** 17Hz-145Hz +/-3dB

**On-Board Power:** 1,000W RMS

**Dimensions:** 460(w) x 490(h) x 410(d)mm

**Weight:** 44kg

**Connections:** Mono LFE line in on phono and balanced XLR as well as stereo line in on phono

An example of their potency was easy to find in the interview scene at the beginning of *Blade Runner* (after the brilliant, swelling Vangelis score) when a Tyrell Corp HR guy finds himself a replicant. The soundtrack is layered, complex and has some crazy close-miked vox. We hear the interviewer's cigarette literally crackle as it was recorded so well. On the B&W 800 Diamond array, it sounded more alight, more crackly and simply more realistic. This sort of sound, like gunfire, thunder and rustling Cellophane – even springing springs – have what's termed a very fast Rise Time that less able tweeters cannot track as well. **The superfast 800 Diamond tweeter makes the sound stage more detailed and rich, delicious and discernible.**

For instance, on any of the dozens of times I have seen this movie, I have never properly heard the announcement on the PA in the background, deep in the back of the mix, as Leon is interviewed. The 800 Series Diamonds let me hear what she is saying with utter clarity.

While still admiring how the grilles of these speakers – even the subwoofer – are all held on by tiny Neodymium magnets rather than sticky-out legs and ugly receptacles, I was also being pummelled by a section from *Gladiator*. The sound of metal on metal and clanking chains was just ridiculously good, while the tigers were full size and felt like they were in the room. And the system was so revealing that it was plain as day that Russel Crowe and Joaquin Phoenix's *tete-a-tete* was recorded in ADR...

Finally, James perched on the floor in front of the 802s for a quick play with some old rock dinosaurs, Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton. I took control of the remote again and in a thoroughly non-hi-fi way, proceeded to blow the bloody doors off the demo room, just for a minute or two. The full range nature of the 802s mean they make a superb stereo set up – those twin 8in bass drivers had no trouble tracking the bluesy basslines.

### Leading edge

The B&W 800 Diamond series loudspeakers represent the leading edge in home cinema audio and my time at Graham's has given me a new career-grade reference for utter excellence.

This £22,000 system offers brutal power, but with delicacy and control. The result is consummate, effortless audio beauty. If you're speccing a serious install, put it on your must-audition list – and if your wallet won't stretch this far, please remember there are less outrageous 800 Series Diamond models available ●

### HCC VERDICT

Bowers & Wilkins 800 Series  
Diamond 5.1  
Approx £22,500

**Highs:** Breathtaking surround and stereo performance; gorgeous design and build

**Lows:** Revealing of poor quality sources; not exactly cheap

Performance: **1 2 3 4 5**

Design: **1 2 3 4 5**

Features: **1 2 3 4 5**

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**