

hardware review



Not long ago I tested some [stands](#) for my Harbeth [P3ESR](#) loudspeakers, just to see which would work best. A wood, stone and steel stand, open frame metal or a massive sand filled design. I found enough differences between the stands to pick a favourite but they were all satisfactory. Until that is I had the opportunity to put the P3ESR on a pair of handmade stands that are dedicated to Harbeth P3 speakers. TonTräger audio was with Harbeth in Munich for the High End show, but as I was unable to compare or listen to the speakers in the booth at the time I waited patiently until they crossed the Dutch border.

The environmentally friendly box and packing weighs more on its own than the pair of stands that came in it. At 2.5kg per stand they are surprisingly light compared to most stands used with the P3ESR. The TonTräger stands are made out of wooden battens, mortise and tenon jointed and glued, and finished with black-pigmented oil. TonTräger owner Eva-Maria Weichmann is concerned about the environment and only uses FSC certified beech from German forests. maple, cherry, walnut and ash are available on request. Only solvent-free glues, water-based stains, natural oils and waxes are used to produce the stands.



On a TonTräger stand you won't find any metal or plastic parts. The stand rests on four tenons, while the loudspeaker is carried on extended tenons formed from the pillars. The top tenons are partly hollow with a rectangular form instead of a drilled hole. These "tone beds" reduce the surface area for more secure support. There's no top plate at all, the stand is open frame in most aspects. To stabilize the stand there are extra battens around the base and the stands should be placed on 30mm thick slate or marble plinths for best results. The stands are 70cm high, 24.5cm wide and 25.5cm deep. Because no adjustments are possible small pieces of paper between the stand and the floor, or the stand and the speaker, have to compensate for variations in floor level. The loudspeakers are in no way fixed to the stand (no Blu-Tack!), neither are they fixed to the floor by spikes.

Since the TonTräger stands are especially made for Harbeth loudspeakers I only used them with the P3ESR. And as I do not have any slate or marble plinths I first put the stands on a lino floor, and later on concrete paving slabs.



The surprise

After my previous research into loudspeaker stands I was in for a surprise. If someone had blindfolded me and only switched the stands, I would have accused them of swapping loudspeakers to something far more expensive. The P3ESR is well known for its detailed midrange, the ability to correctly reproduce the human voice and the natural sound of acoustic instruments. The TonTräger stand does not change this, it will only give you more detail, more insight into what goes on in the recording process and the mix. A lot more detail that is, even the tiniest sounds, and often those usually hidden in the soundstage. This adds to listening pleasure and involves the listener more and more. The coloration that all other stands seem to add is impossible to detect with the TonTräger. The way the cabinet should behave according to Harbeth is fully met, the little woofer and tweeter have never been better integrated. I had the feeling that I was finally in a position to fully understand the extended capabilities of this speaker. I tried streaming and vinyl, jazz, pop, rock and singer/songwriter, male and female voices and instrumental. And classical music too, ranging from baroque to full symphony orchestras. Going back to my earlier stand was a disappointment every time.

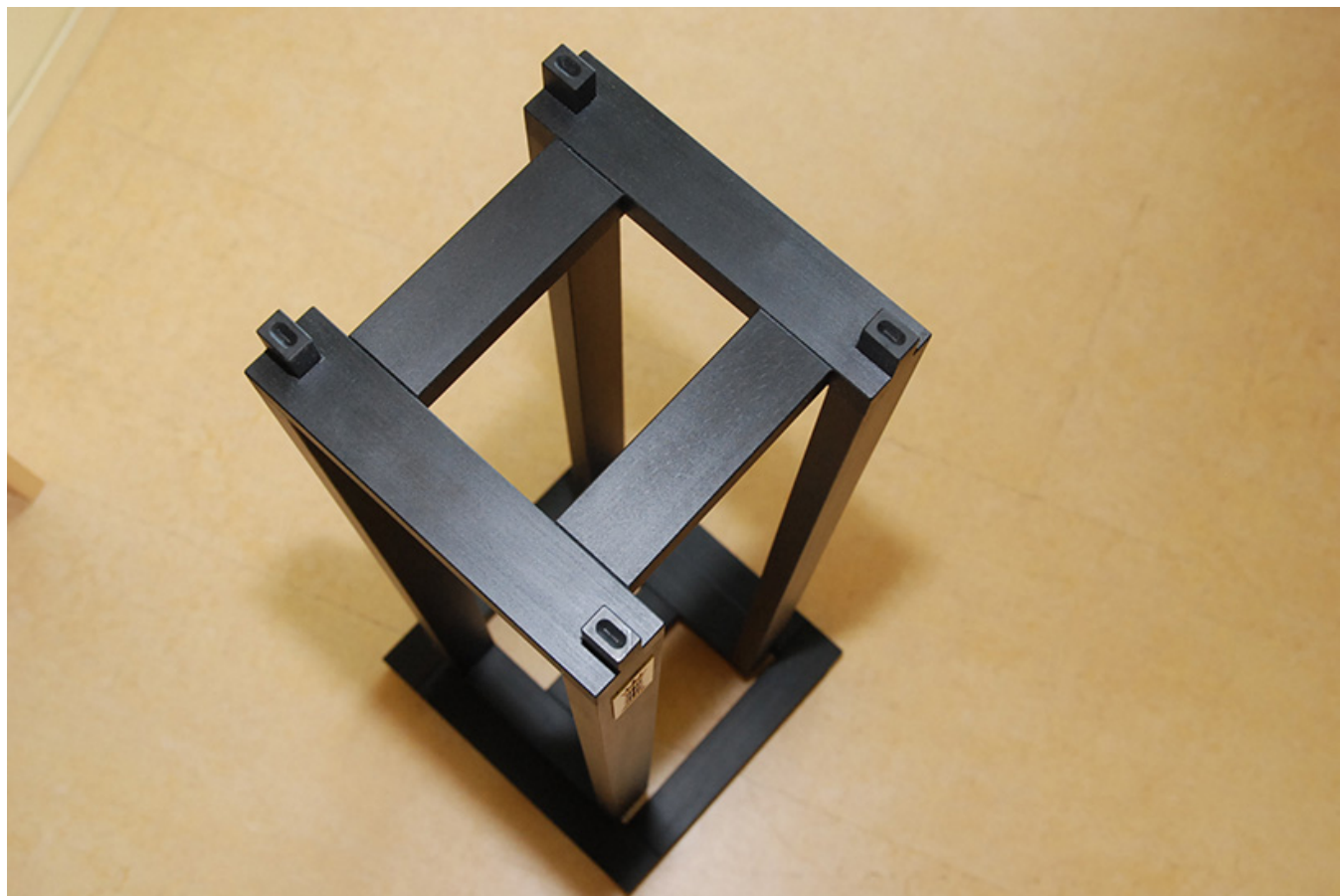


Had the benefit been only in the details the TonTräger would still seem very expensive. But listen to how it transforms the bass, with its sealed cabinet this speaker is too small to produce deep bass. A high mass stand is supposed to help the bass and lightweight frame designs will not help. This stand does not add bass, which means it does not colour the sound. Do not expect sudden powerful bass from a recording with soft bass notes. Change to a rock recording with bass drum, bass guitar and maybe electronic noise and the P3ESR grows into a floor standing speaker. Or put on The Ray Brown Trio on vinyl, turn up the volume and be amazed. There's never too much energy, only fast, tight, overwhelming bass notes that you never expect. Pumping 100 Watts of peak power into the P3ESR they become detailed and punchy in a way I never believed possible from a small passive loudspeaker. Just because of the stands? Oh yes! But how has TonTräger achieved this result? When touching the stand during playback you 'feel' the music in the battens. So they do add to the overall output but presumably in a more harmonious way than metal. The principle of acoustically dead material for stands never reached the city of Füssen it seems. Every stand alters the sound of the loudspeaker in some way, to me it sounds like the TonTräger stand alters it least of all.

Width limit

The only aspect in which my regular stands outperform the TonTräger is in stage width, not in depth or height though. Somehow the sound stage does not reach wall to wall or virtually beyond the walls. But inside this smaller stage the dynamic energy is

enormous and faster than fast.



The Audia Flight 50 and the T+A PA 2500R amplifiers I was using both sound better than Exposure Audio monoblocks, but they are a third of the price of the other two. What's telling is that the gap between the different amplifiers is bigger than it has ever been. The P3ESR plays in a league of its own, showing exactly what is thrown at its terminals. After visiting a stone merchant I was able to give the stands a try on marble plinths to see if things could improve beyond excellent. And some small improvements were made. It was already hard to point at the loudspeakers as the sound source with eyes closed, but now it was impossible. The sound is a little snappier, more to the point but never over the top. A little faster I would say. Hardware stability is improved too, these heavy stones form a better base than a lino floor with MDF beneath. What doesn't change is the basic way that the stand behaves under the loudspeakers. So if you do not want heavy bases or you have already a stone floor, just leave them out.



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I am fully convinced that this small German company is making the best, or at least one of the very best stands for Harbeth loudspeakers. The improvement in performance of my P3ESR on the TonTräger stand is stunning, it makes the asking price seem like money well spent. €1,000 is a high price to pay for what seems so lightweight, even though the stand is handmade (20 hours per pair), environmentally friendly and manufactured to a very high standard with extremely close tolerances. But when you start listening and your lower jaw drops in surprise you realize that this product is capable of getting more out of the speakers than anything else. A highly recommended stand if you own a pair of Harbeths and want to hear all of their capabilities. What makes the TonTräger different? It is not a stand specially made for bass, detail, midrange, speed, dynamics, high notes or whatever, it is a stand to support all the virtues of Harbeth speakers without adding any character of its own, you can't ask more of a stand.