

www.stereophile.com

stereophile

REPRINTED FROM MARCH 2001

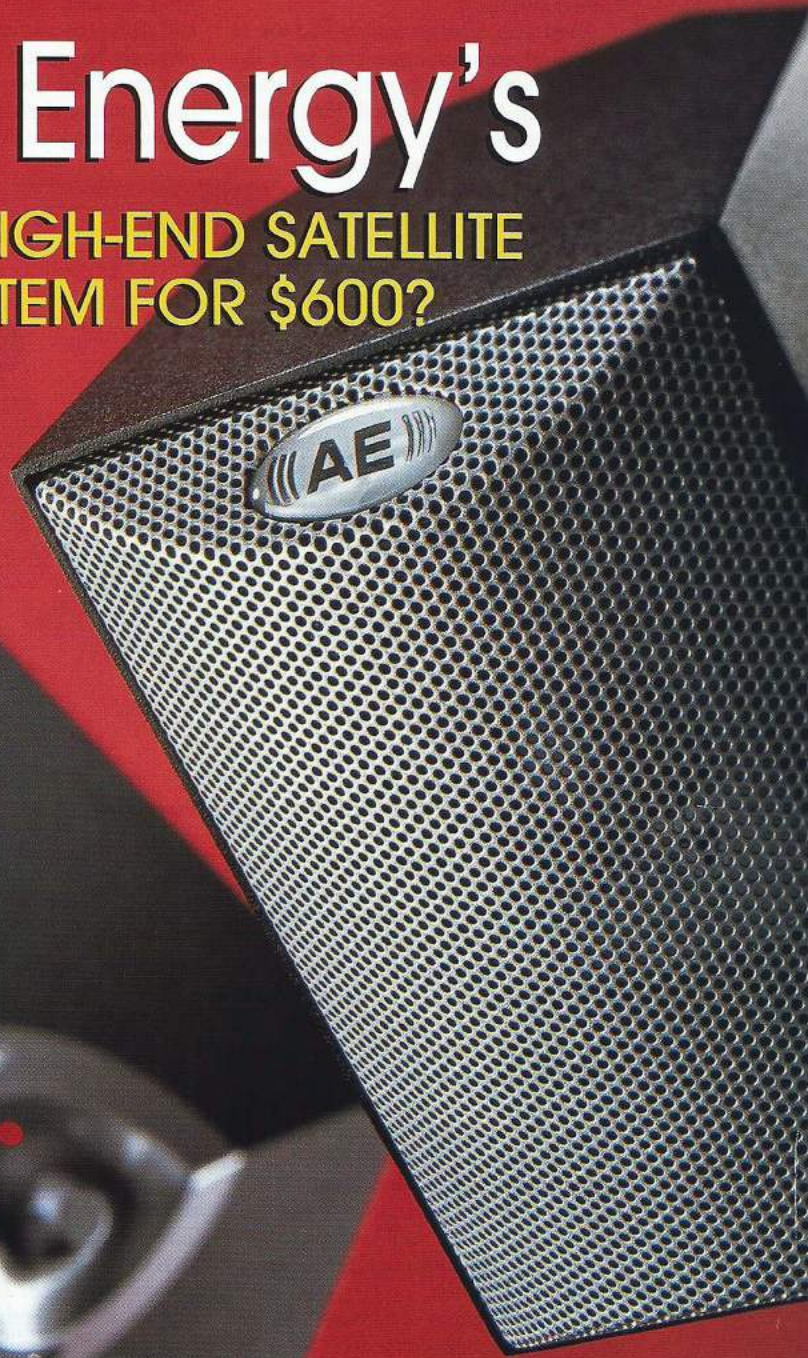
Acoustic Energy's **AEG02** A HIGH-END SATELLITE SYSTEM FOR \$600?

LEXICON MC-1 SURROUND CONTROLLER

Audiophiles & **THEIR MUSIC**

New column!
JOHN MARKS
The Fifth Element

AMPLIFIERS:
Quicksilver, Creek,
McIntosh, Bel Canto, Herron





Gear Shift to the AEGO2

Every so often a product shows up that surprises the hell out me, and while what follows is not the usual "Analog Corner" fare, I just can't contain my enthusiasm for it.

Wired magazine recently asked me to pick three computer speakers for a department they have in which one product in a category is awarded "First Class," one "Business Class," and one "Coach." The editor assigned to the piece had already done some legwork for me and suggested I check out Acoustic Energy's AEGO2 satellite-subwoofer system, which is aimed at the computer crowd. The three-piece package sells for \$599 and is imported by Audiophile Systems, which also distributes Arcam and dCS in the US.

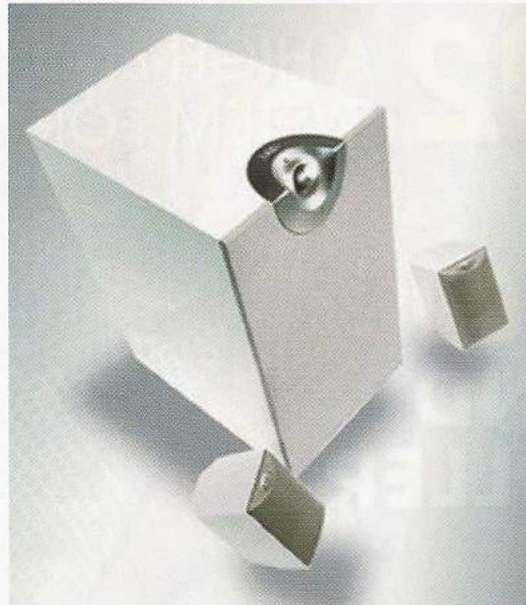
I ended up going through a whole stack of three-piece systems before I got to the AE, and for the most part, if you've heard one of these plastic-boxed assemblages, you've heard 'em all. Some, like the ones from Cambridge SoundWorks, can sound surprisingly good... for plastic boxes. A \$79 JBL system impressed me, as did a \$99 trio from Altec-Lansing that included a downfiring midrange hidden in the base of each satellite. Still, the only really credible, music-making "personal system" I heard before I got to the AE was Eminent Technology's planar magnetic LFT-11 (\$499, \$599 with amplifier; www.eminent-tech.com), which I use flanking my computer monitor.

When I unboxed AE's AEGO2, I was disappointed: a pair of *tiny* metal (zinc alloy) satellites not quite 4" tall and 3" wide, and a 13" by 10" by 7" subwoofer box that also contains the system's amplification. There are three channels of amplification built in, and provisions for a center channel (computer home theater, anyone?), as well as convenient front- and rear-mounted stereo mini-plugs.

I've heard dozens of systems like this, and was quite prepared for the usual vague, wimpy sound, but at a higher price. But what poured forth was what I would have to call high-end audio. It wasn't perfect, but it was *way* superior to any other small sat-sub system I'd heard

—particularly in terms of low coloration, but in every other sonic department as well. This little setup rivaled much bigger systems.

The AEGO2 had an absolutely stunning, detailed, and believable midband, and delivered a soundstage that was surprisingly large, and freed from the constraints of the tiny boxes. The system had genuine dynamics and could play impressively loud with no hint of strain



Acoustic Energy's AEGO2 satellite-subwoofer system

**The AEGO2
had an absolutely
stunning, detailed, and
believable midband.**

or compression. Images were three-dimensional and nuanced in ways I've never heard from puny systems like this. There was a crystalline clarity without etch or brightness that wowed every visitor to my office. The AEGO2 offered superb detail, depth, ambience—name your audiophile calling card.

This system has the potential to turn a generation of computer geeks into audiophiles. It was so much better than anything the average computer guy or gal has ever heard that they'll probably

be bowled over—as might you, despite your having been exposed to the real high-end deal. Think of the AEGO2 as a goodwill ambassador to our world.

It wasn't perfect, of course. The biggest disappointment is a three-position bass-level switch instead of one that's continuously adjustable. In my room, no matter where I placed the subwoofer, there was simply too much bass, even with the switch in the minimum position. (My new Mac G4 doesn't have tone controls.) Even so, the system astounded me. You'll know you're listening to something special when you hear it, and that *includes* the bass, which is tuneful instead of "one-note."

What's going on here? According to the www.aegoproject.org website, the designer is a "slightly eccentric" former Bose engineer, Shuji Yamamoto, who has come up with a unique driver shaped like a piece of Wonder Bread instead of the standard cone. The design is said to reduce standing waves, which perhaps accounts in part for the system's low coloration. The driver is built in Malaysia by FPI (Formosa Prosonic Industries), one of the world's largest OEM speaker manufacturers.

The satellite's patented drive-unit features a special long-throw suspension and a computer-designed anti-resonant diaphragm. To ensure high power-handling capacity, the system has a unique heat-transfer design that pumps air through the coil and magnet assembly. That's why you can crank it. Other tricks are employed to get this kind of performance from such a tiny system, including extensive active equalization to correct for driver-response deviations. The satellites can be positioned to fire directly at the listener for nearfield listening, or angled up to create more spread and diffusion. The subwoofer driver is mounted entirely within the box, which features an oval, front-mounted passive radiator and a tuned port in the rear.

Using the AEGO2, you might actually enjoy listening to music through your computer. But forget the computer—with its built-in, front-mounted volume control, the AEGO2 can function as a credible music system when connected to a CD player—or a turntable and phono section, for that matter. ☐