



## Genelec Play 6020 Home Theater Speaker System

By Ken C. Pohlmann • December 2007



Having worked in and around recording studios for 30 years, I cut my teeth on professional gear before broadening my horizons to the vast consumer audio/video world. In studios, you quickly learn that trustworthy monitors are essential. Every tracking and mixing decision hinges on what your monitors tell you; if they mislead you with any inaccuracy, your recording will suffer.

The monitors I learned to trust most are those from Genelec, a Finnish company famed for its powered professional loudspeakers. Of course, pro Genelecs would sound great in a home. But would a Genelec "consumer" package sound as good? This system based on the company's Model 6020A compact satellite gave me the chance to find out.

### Setup

As with other Genelecs, the 6020A satellite is an active speaker. It contains amplification, an electronic crossover, and protection circuitry. It's the smallest Genelec, measuring a scant 9.5 inches tall. Each satellite uses a beefy die-cast-aluminum cabinet (rounded to reduce edge diffraction) housing a 3/4-inch aluminum dome tweeter and a 4-inch paper cone woofer. Both drivers are behind punched-metal grilles. The speaker is biamplified, with each driver receiving 20 watts.

The front of the cabinet has a power LED and an integrated on/off switch and volume control. Around the back are RCA and pro-style XLR inputs and a power-cord socket. Four DIP switches allow simple EQ adjustment of  $-2$  dB treble tilt and  $-2$ ,  $-4$ , and  $-6$  dB bass tilt, and they also engage an autostart mode.

The cabinet is supported by rugged rubber feet mounted on rails. The rails are easily removed, and the included bracket and bolts allow wall mounting. In fact, Genelec recommends wall mounting, leaving clearance for the cabinet's rear port.

Five identical 6020As are employed in this 5.1-channel system; there is no horizontal center speaker. As Genelec unapologetically notes, ideally the center-channel speaker should match the front left/right speakers exactly. Fortunately, the company's two-way speakers are small enough to make such an approach practical.

I placed the compact but hefty satellites on speaker stands, with the center-channel speaker underneath my display, vertically, where it fit quite nicely. With conventional speaker cables suddenly rendered useless, I rummaged through my closet — um, audio-research archive facility — for the longest RCA cables I could find, as well as extra extension cords (since each speaker needs a power socket). I connected each satellite to my receiver's preamp outputs.

The Model 5050A is Genelec's tiniest subwoofer, but it packs a 70-watt amplifier, an 8-inch front-firing driver, and two 8-inch side-firing passive radiators. The driver is covered by a heavy metal grille that could conceivably be removed and used to barbecue chicken, and the radiators can be covered by removable grille cloths. This all comes in a cabinet that's not much bigger than a cubic foot. The sub accepts both XLR and RCA inputs, and it also has RCA jacks for left in/out, center in/out, and right in/out for passing signals through an internal high-pass filter. A volume control varies level. DIP switches select four different phase settings and a bass rolloff of  $-2$ ,  $-4$ , or  $-6$  dB. A link-out jack lets you daisy-chain additional subs.

## Specifications and Conclusions

I auditioned a few music test tracks, moving the satellites relative to the walls and using their EQ to tilt bass and treble. I soon settled on a permutation that sounded just right in my room: satellites away from the walls, and a  $-2$  dB treble rolloff. The subwoofer sounded good out of the box in my usual front-wall location and didn't require any repositioning or EQ.

## Music Performance

After the system's mandatory break-in time, I started my music audition using only the front stereo pair and the subwoofer. [KT Tunstall's \*Drastic Fantastic\*](#) is an enthusiastic follow-up to her sensational *Eye to the Telescope*. Borrowing the same energy as that album's "Black Horse and the Cherry Tree," the new track "Hold On" is driven by a raunchy [Buena Vista Social Club](#) kind of beat that's as infectious as the flu in day care. The raw clarity of Tunstall's dusky vocals was exemplary on these monitors. In the second chorus, after the bridge, I could clearly discern at least four tracks of Tunstall's voice. I could also cleanly hear the subtle EQ shifts of the guitar track as it transitions from the verses to the bridge.

The Genelecs maintained a warm clarity with this somewhat muddy mix (perhaps not mixed on studio speakers as good as Genelecs!). On some other woofers, the heavy floor toms and thick bass might meld together unhandsomely. However, the subtle balance was nicely distinguished and well reproduced by these speakers. The system could really rock, too, and it didn't particularly tighten up at loud levels. I was impressed that a 2.1 system running 150 watts could sound so lively and dynamic.

Turning my attention to surround music, I auditioned the DVD-Audio release of [Brian Wilson's \*Live at the Roxy Theatre\*](#). Given the matched front trio of speakers, I wasn't surprised to hear a unified panorama across the soundstage, with each instrument occupying its own distinct acoustic space. Moreover, the surrounds extended the envelope, mainly carrying delayed and reverberated copies of the front stereo mix and crowd noise. While dipole surrounds would have been an interesting option for this concert recording, I was completely satisfied with these direct radiators; the ambient sound field wasn't localized to the speakers but was instead very natural and open.

The subwoofer was extremely musical as well, providing a solid foundation for the satellites. Given the satellites' small size, I was impressed by their low-frequency extension and by how well they blended

The Short Form
Price \$3,999 (as tested) / <a href="http://genelecusa.com">genelecusa.com</a> / 508-652-0900
Snapshot
These powered monitors borrow from Genelec's fabled studio products to bring professional-quality gear to small home theaters.
Plus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Near-professional sound quality</li> <li>•Onboard EQ to tailor sound</li> <li>•Bulletproof build quality</li> </ul>
Minus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Vertically configured center speaker may pose problems in some setups</li> <li>•Rewiring required</li> <li>•Not ideally suited for conventional powered receivers</li> </ul>
Key Features
<p><b>6020A (\$545 each)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•4-in woofer, 3/4-in aluminum dome tweeter; 2 x 20-watt RMS amplifier; 9.5 in high (w/stand), 8.2 lb; black, white, or silver finish</li> </ul> <p><b>5050A (\$1,595)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•8-in driver, (2) 8-inch passive radiators; 70-watt RMS amplifier; 13.2 x 12.75 x 13 in, 33 lb; black finish</li> </ul>
Test Bench
In all positions, the 6020A measured essentially flat and displayed excellent directionality, meaning that the sound is the same from all seats. A treble peak just above 20 kHz imparts a top-octave rise; otherwise, response fits inside a $\pm 2.5$ -dB window below 13 kHz. The 5050A subwoofer had modest dynamic capability but well-distributed output; though average SPL from 25 to 62 Hz was 93 dB, it still delivered 90 dB SPL at 25 Hz. — <i>Tom Noursaine</i>

with the sub. I could accurately hear bass-guitar notes with virtually seamless continuity across the lower musical spectrum.

## Movie Performance

*Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* is a goofy but lovable look at the [NASCAR](#) scene. Ricky ([Will Ferrell](#)) lives in a world where women's breasts and babies' foreheads are prime real estate for drivers' autographs. And in a movie like this, if the dialogue isn't intelligible, then the jokes aren't funny. On the Genelecs, articulation was excellent, with every drop of Southern drawl coming through loud and clear, even off-axis. Thanks to the matched front trio, the soundstage was completely integrated. The screaming cars panning across the front were rock-solid, while the matching surrounds dovetailed with the fronts in race scenes, picking up crowd noise, Doppler-shifted engine whine, and a drum kit to create an immersive environment. The sub kicked in with kick drum, bass guitar, and the thunder of 800-horsepower engines.

I was pleasantly surprised by the sonic horsepower of the system's internal amps. They sounded much louder than their rated specs would suggest, pushing my listening room to relatively high sound-pressure levels. No, they couldn't do cinema reference levels, and they'd be mildly underwhelming in very large or very absorptive rooms. But for lower levels, especially in smaller and more live-sounding rooms, these Genelecs would be quite adequate.

## Bottom Line

With respect to the fine consumer speakers in your home theater, there's essentially a 0% chance that the music and movies you listen to were mixed on them. On the other hand, there's a good chance that those recordings were mixed on Genelecs. In that respect, listening at home to this system takes you a step closer to hearing how the sound was meant to be heard. True, these models are targeted for home listening (though I've seen them in both home and professional studios), but there's no mistaking the Genelec sonic signature. Their timbral clarity, accurate response, and controlled dynamics are what professional mixers (and you) look for in a monitor. After decades of success in the studio, Genelec has a bright future in home theater.