

## Genelec 6020A Speaker System

By Mark Fleischmann • December, 2006

*Amplification has its rewards.*

I'm always willing to stand up for the little guy. Small speakers are my favorite kind, whether they're compact sub/sat sets or slightly chunkier bookshelf speakers. The Genelec 6020A leans more toward the sub/sat side in terms of size, but it has a significant distinction—the 5.1-channel configuration with this little speaker and the 5050A subwoofer is stuffed with 11 channels of amplification.

Each satellite has an internal Class A/B amplifier that delivers 20 watts to the woofer and another 20 to the tweeter. And, of course, the 5050A has its own 70-watt amp. (Driver-protection circuitry kicks in above that point.) While these numbers may seem unusually small at first blush, Genelec's disdain for conventional specsmanship is as striking as the system's lively dynamics.

Onboard amps completely redraw a surround system's architecture, eliminating the space-heater-like surround receiver or multichannel amp in favor of a pre/pro for surround decoding, switching, and volume control. I used a Rotel RSX-1065 A/V receiver as a pre/pro. This sufficed; although, if I were to adopt the Genelecs permanently, I'd strongly consider a Lexicon or other dedicated pre/pro.



### **The Best Center Approach**

One of the smartest things about this system is what it does not come with: a horizontal center speaker. I felt like cheering when I read the following on Genelec's Website: "All the international standards for 5.1 systems agree that the center loudspeaker should, where possible, match the left and right loudspeakers. The best way to ensure a match with the left and right loudspeakers is to use exactly the same loudspeaker model. In the case of Genelec's two-way loudspeakers, the cabinets are compact enough that the standard model can be used in most situations. Dedicated center-channel versions of two-way systems are more costly to produce, physically larger, and have acoustic features that seriously compromise the sound quality." Genelec offers horizontal centers only in their larger three-way systems.

The 6020A speaker is the smallest member of the Genelec family. It's designed for the smaller home theater, and it prospered in my 19-by-14-by-9-foot room. I suspect that it could beat the pants off of nearly any HTIB satellite.

This diminutive speaker houses a 4-inch paper cone woofer and a 0.75-inch aluminum dome tweeter in an aluminum enclosure designed for minimum diffraction. In other words, the speaker cabinet reflects sound waves off of itself as smoothly as possible. The tweeter is recessed in a waveguide to control dispersion and thereby further control room interaction. There is a faintly beamy quality, but it's so minimal that you have to walk well to one side to hear any variation in tone. An 8-inch front-firing driver and two side-mounted passive radiators animate the 5050A sub.

Building amplification into a speaker brings one complication—each speaker needs both a line-level input and a power connection. Several advantages present themselves, however. The amps can be equalized to provide ideal mates for the drivers, passive crossover components don't dissipate any of their power, and new adjustment options become possible. DIP switches on the back of the 6020A provide response controls. One knocks down the treble by 2 decibels. Three more knock down the bass by 2, 4, or 6 dB.

Genelec recommends that you mount these speakers on the wall—with a 2-inch gap to allow the rear port to breathe. They further recommend a minimum 2-dB bass reduction to compensate for the bass emphasis that can result from on-wall placement. These recommendations defy conventional audiophile wisdom, which emphatically states that speakers sound best a few feet out from the wall. Stubborn audiofool that I am, I stuck with my usual 2-foot distance with no equalization, but it certainly doesn't hurt to have options. If my room wasn't so diffused with clutter—if I lived instead in a modernist space full of hard surfaces—I might have been equalizing like crazy.

The sub has seven DIP switches. Three provide bass trim of 2, 4, or 6 dB. There are also two phase settings and two control modes. You can feed the sub with a conventional LFE output from the pre/pro. It also offers inputs and outputs that let you send line-level signals from the pre/pro to the sub and then on to the three front channels, taking advantage of the internal high-pass filter. If your pre/pro doesn't provide bass management, using these high-pass filters may be a great idea.

Tiny dials turn each speaker's amplifiers on and off and provide individual volume controls. Most folks would leave them turned all the way up and use the pre/pro to control the volume. Genelec says that the idle mode's power consumption is very low, about 5 watts, and recommends leaving the speakers powered up all the time.

### **San Francisco in the Mist**

What was it about this system that made me spend hours and hours listening to the Grateful Dead before moving on to other material? It may have been the way the sub made Bill Kreutzmann's and Mickey Hart's bass drums pop, while Phil Lesh's peculiar bass lines dribbled out. Or maybe it was the rain that went on for days. It seemed to fill the room with humidity and clouds of vapor that I couldn't see but could feel. I was covered with sweat and just couldn't move.

It was the perfect moment for America's greatest improvising rock band to noodle around. I went through *Dick's Picks 15* (Englishtown, New Jersey; 1977), *One from the Vault* (San Francisco; 1975), and *Europe '72*. The latter is reference-quality Dead, recorded in some of the world's most plummy-sounding concert halls. Temporarily stripped down to one drummer, the band became a nimble speed demon, in contrast to later years, when an opiated Jerry Garcia would lead a depressed, lumbering monster through stadiums.

Popping in the DVD for the movie *16 Blocks* was a complete change of pace—to a minor masterpiece of the urban-chase genre with a demo-quality soundtrack. Bruce Willis is a cop trying to bring a hunted grand-jury witness to the courthouse on Centre Street in a richly textured and claustrophobia-inducing Lower Manhattan. The Dolby Digital soundtrack pulsed more than it pounded, but, when it pounded, the modestly powered sub was superbly controlled, especially in the scene with a basement shootout among cinder-block walls and metal doors.

The midrange was full of interesting bullet trajectories, street and subway noise, Chinatown street percussion, and a memorable scene with a city bus pounding down an alley and crushing everything in its path. That may seem like a perfect recipe for excruciating noise, but the Genelecs are so gently voiced that I never even considered engaging the Rotel's Cinema EQ mode.

Next, I watched *School of Rock*. The Ramones, Led Zeppelin, and Jonathan Richman sounded great with surround ambience (however inauthentic), and Jack Black and the kids were great. I have nothing else profound to say here except that I had a good time, and it didn't hurt my ears.

Although they're not as bright as most speakers I review, the Genelecs treated details in well-recorded vocals as would a true audiophile product. For instance, Bill Morrissey's "Time to Go Home" (from the *Night Train* CD) opens with these lines: "She looks so small / She looks so frail." The s in small emerged without sibilance or spittiness; the f in frail was a realistic outrush of breath between pursed lips. Solo cello, muted trumpet, and all sorts of other instruments on my standard test tracks thrived under the Genelec regime, emerging smooth and natural yet often vivid. And Keith Moon's drum kit on "Tattoo" from The Who's *Live at Leeds* was pretty physical for a bunch of 4-inch paper woofers and a 70-watt sub. It wasn't as big as the real thing, but it was more than big enough for my room.

The Genelec 6020A reinvents the compact speaker as an intelligently powered, high-performance machine. It will provide top-drawer home theater and even two-channel performance in a small room; and, although the manufacturer doesn't say so, it will do well in many medium-sized rooms (as it did in mine). The 5050A sub is capable of both subtlety and musicality. Together, these two products set a new standard in their size category.

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