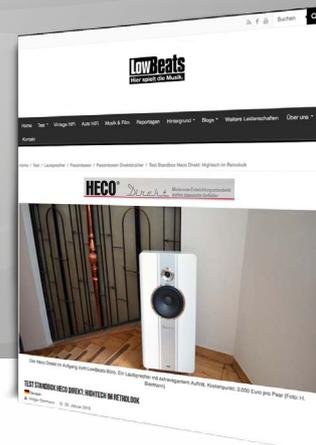


„A gift for all music lovers“

## HECO *Direkt*



- + Dynamic, thrilling sound
- + Very stable
- + Tube-friendly impedance levels
- + Extraordinary retro design





## High-tech with a retro look

**The Heco Direkt looks as if it has jumped straight from the 1950s and even sounds a bit like the earlier speakers. But that's really good. This is a report about one of the most extraordinary floorstanding speakers currently available.**

Modern technology makes it possible to conjure up an ever-increasing bass range from increasingly smaller woofers; the trend towards narrower floorstanding speakers is not only a result of the aesthetic appeal of recent years, but also the diverse and extensive analytical and simulation capabilities that the developers have been able to use to dramatically reduce the levels of distortion generated. 50 years ago things were very different: Anyone wanting to reproduce a deep bass range with as little distortion as possible had to use as large a woofer as possible. 15 inch (38 cm) drivers were snapped up enthusiastically and even shelf speakers often incorporated a 25 cm bass driver. And many of these shelf speakers featured two-way configurations with classic dome tweeters.

## A two-way configuration with a 25cm bass driver: An impossible combination?

Experts will now be furrowing their brows: Such a large woofer with a dome? The mid-range frequencies need to be catered for in this case by the comparatively heavy bass diaphragm. But does that work particularly well? Not really. And yet there was always a special charm to these constructions. Heco's developers have now resurrected this idea with their Direkt speaker - and they haven't just borrowed from the hi-fi history books... With its 44 cm wide baffle, 20 cm deep housing, elegantly rounded edges and the special lettering used for the logo, the Heco Direkt immediately evokes associations to the very early hi-fi years. Industrial designer Helmut Thiele, who co-developed the new Thorens turntable, among other innovations, has created a beautiful style here that expresses exactly what the developers wanted to achieve with the Direkt speaker in terms of its sound: An almost forgotten, yet nevertheless coherent concept, implemented with state of the art technology.

## High degree of efficiency thanks to kraft paper

As a result of the unusual approach, Heco developer Christian Gather had to develop new drivers for the Direkt speaker, namely the high efficiency tweeter with its 28 mm fabric dome (which comes into effect above 3,000 Hertz) and the likewise efficient eleven-inch (27.5 cm) woofer with its kraft paper cone. Kraft paper was THE cone material in the 1950s. The legendary Saba Greencone, for example, is a full-range speaker that is coveted by audiophiles around the world and is readily and frequently installed in an open baffle. Its cone was/is also made of kraft paper, which inspired Heco's developers in 2007 to utilize this lightweight and very rigid material for the midrange driver in their flagship Statement speakers. As I conducted the first test of the Statement speakers at the time, I have been able to track how long the developers have needed in order to unravel the secrets of kraft paper: The answer is a long time. A very long time.

Heco, however, is now able to construct even larger cones, such as the bass-midrange driver used in its Direkt speakers.

Developer Gather is full of praise for this cone – and gives the large woofer scope to run up to 3,000 Hertz. Isn't that a bit brave? No, it's quite reasonable. Just how well the modern kraft paper cone functions without any resonance is reflected by the LowBeats measurement in our listening room.

And one result of this arduous development process can be heard straight away: The Heco Direkt is at least two to three decibels louder than the majority of floorstanding speakers of its size. In other words: Even using small, less powerful amplifiers with Class-A circuits or a tube assembly becomes a real pleasure. And because sister company Magnat develops its own tube amps, such as the RV-3, the development department is familiar with the electrical demands imposed by the tubes and has therefore provided the Direkt with an impedance linearization above the bass range. While large transistor amplifiers may be able to cope with large impedance jumps, the sound experience diminishes noticeably when using small tubes with heavily fluctuating impedance levels.

## Direct to the musical nerve center: The listening test

A range of small and larger compact speakers were present in the LowBeats listening room at the time of testing the Direkt, namely the Focal Sopra No 1, B&W 805 Diamond D3, Dynaudio Excite X 18 and Teufel Definon 3. As a result, I was geared up and ready for music that is typical of compact speakers, i.e. music that is reasonable, homogeneous and subtle. But the Direkt hit me like an express train. Whoa! I yanked the volume knob on the Yamaha A-S 1100 reference amplifier (compatible for the price range) vigorously to the left. In terms of dynamics the Direkt upstages virtually all floorstanding speakers in its class; compared to living-room-friendly compact speakers, however, there is a world of difference when it comes to the high signal range. When playing Kari Bremnes' "Reise", which is a concert for cultured citizens and has been recorded accordingly, the Direkt clearly revealed what difference it makes when a speaker operates in an extremely dynamic and energetic manner – namely between hi-fi and (almost) live performance. The sounds in the eventful "Reise" not only appeared much finer, but larger, more majestic and more lively when reproduced via the Direkt.

The tweeter also played a considerable part in the sound produced and made everything seem distinctly dynamic and finely tuned, while also making Bremnes' recording appear light and airy. The singer's vocals were very crisp and clear and exhibited a distinctive and fascinating character.

In terms of spatial depth and three-dimensional representation, there are probably better speakers than the Direkt. And compared to many other, fashion-oriented hi-fi speakers in its class, it is certainly somewhat more rough-and-ready when it comes to the mid-range frequencies – which makes the sound pattern seem more angular at high volume. But that doesn't diminish its allure in the slightest. The Direkt reveals this special energy and verve in the mid-range, which is typical of speakers with such a broad baffle. Just like the clean and dry bass range that developer Gather has instilled in the Direkt. Even when positioned close to the rear wall (30 cm) the Direkt remained so contoured and crisp that it was a pure joy to behold.

My colleague, Jürgen Schröder, popped round on one day of the listening tests together with a 24/192 hi-res version of DubXanne's "Walking On The Moon" on his computer. This is the type of music that seems like it's made for the Direkt: With dubs, rich deep bass lines and phase shifts that can only be reproduced cleanly via speakers with a clean phase response. At the end we were listening at levels that might not have been very good for the ears, but were very good for the soul...

## What is Heco's speaker like with tubes?

Magnificent. My colleague, Roland Kraft, was able to get hold of the Direkt beforehand and test it for a longer period. As is Roland's nature, he connected the speaker to all manner of tube amplifier – and he was thrilled by it all. So, with my interest piqued, I also decided to test the speaker with two tube amplifiers. The first was conducted with a Unison Simply Italy, which, even though it only outputs slightly more than 10 watts per channel, I simply find enchanting. This amount of power was clearly not enough for the large LowBeats hi-fi listening room (67 square meters). But in my living room (22 square meters, with a sensitive neighbor close by) it was perfectly adequate. Kari Bremnes' "Reise" concert seemed even more colorful, more diverse and the degree of spatiality was also enhanced.

Test 2 was conducted with the obscenely well-priced AMC CVT 2100 MK2 tube preamplifier, which, like the Simply Italy, has been one of my personal insider tube tips for years. The AMC coaxes approximately 80 watts per channel from four 6550 series tubes, which is sufficient for almost all walks of life. Driven by LowBeats' reference CD player, namely the Ayon Audio CD 3SX (with integrated preamplifier), things got even better. Timbres, power in the bass range and, once again, an extraordinary level of energy in the mid-range frequencies: The Direkt makes the music travel directly – hence the name is extremely apt – from my floor-tapping feet straight to my heart. It has been such a long time since I've had so much fun when listening to music.

## Conclusion: An exceptional and extraordinary-sounding speaker

Perhaps it's because I take more pleasure from a 4.7 liter, eight-cylinder engine than I do from a small car with an engine capacity of less than a liter. Plus the fact that I get more enthusiastic about a deep bass range and wide speakers: But Heco's Direkt won me over unexpectedly. Not only is it visually one of the most extraordinary speakers on the market, but, for € 3,000 a pair, I know of very few constructions that audibly master the fine line between live performance and audiophile subtlety as skillfully as the Heco Direkt. Its fine and coarse dynamic capabilities, but mainly its high degree of efficiency and linear impedance, make it a reasonably priced insider tip for those who prefer to listen with tube amps or Class A amplifiers. However, I don't want that to be understood as a limitation. For all intents and purposes, the Heco Direkt is a gift for all music lovers who like the retro appeal. If I haven't mentioned it yet: I am one such person and think the Direkt is simply magnificent.