


Sonodyne Malhar G2 is a premium high-fidelity wireless music system with an advanced three-way acoustic design, featuring a dedicated glass-fibre woofer, dual midrange drivers and silk-dome tweeters. Pictures: Mathures Paul

TECH

# SOUND OVER SPECTACLE

## In an age of boomy bass and AI sonic slop, Sonodyne's Malhar G2 makes the case for serious sound

We are living in interesting times. Every big city in India has a few addresses that either celebrate vinyl or try to present music in ways that put audio quality first. At the same time, apartment owners are willing to spend on a corner dedicated to music. At the other end of the spectrum, the market is flooded with cheap acoustic products built around boomy bass, and with musical AI slop that doesn't deserve top-of-the-line hardware.

What can a reputed audio company do to survive? Make party speakers? Use the off-the-shelf sound solutions found in every other speaker? Sonodyne, which has had Calcutta as its playground for decades, has a simple answer: play to its strengths without diluting its philosophy of superior sound. Such is the pull of this Indian brand that audiophiles are happy to spend big on anything it makes. Take the Malhar G2, a music system housed in a curved wooden cabinet.

The Malhar G2 competes with premium one-box speakers from international brands such as Marshall and Bose. The first thing to understand is what it is not. It is not a portable Bluetooth speaker. It runs on mains power, weighs 7.5kg and measures 440mm wide, 250mm high and 220mm deep. It is a tabletop or sideboard system meant to sit in one place and fill a room, and it should be judged against hi-fi rather than party speakers.

### THREE WAYS TO DIVIDE THE WORK

Most single-box wireless speakers are two-way designs. A tweeter handles the high frequencies and a woofer handles everything else, from the bass drum to the human voice. The arrangement is cheap and compact, but it asks one driver to do two very different jobs. When the woofer works hard on a bassline, it can muddy the vocals and instruments it is reproducing at the same time. Engineers call this intermodulation distortion. Listeners describe it as congestion: the sense that a busy track turns into a wall of sound as the volume rises.

The Malhar G2 is a three-way design. It splits the audio band across two one-inch tweeters, two three-inch midrange drivers and one 6.5-inch woofer. The midrange drivers handle the band where most of music's information sits: voices, guitars, piano, strings and the body of a snare drum. Freed from bass duty, they can concentrate on it. It is an unusual configuration at this price and in this format, though not a surprising one given Sonodyne's long history in professional monitors.

The tweeters are one-inch silk domes with neodymium magnets. Soft domes such as silk tend towards a smooth, forgiving treble rather than a sharp, etched one. Metal domes in aluminium or titanium can sound more detailed, but also harsher, particularly on bright or heavily compressed recordings. That makes silk a sensible choice for a speaker that will spend most of its life playing modern pop and rock. The trade-off is a little less air at the very top, where cymbal shimmer lives, though the treble control can compensate.

The midrange drivers use glass-fibre cones, which are stiff and light. Stiffness means the cone moves as a single piston rather than flexing at higher frequencies. Lightness means it can start and stop quickly. The result is cleaner sound in the band the ear is most sensitive to. This is where the Malhar G2 separates itself from most rivals. A carefully recorded vocal, whether Adele at a piano or a folk singer with an acoustic guitar, depends almost entirely on the midrange.

Bass comes from a single 6.5-inch woofer, also with a glass-fibre cone, in a bass-reflex cabinet with two rear ports. Sonodyne rates the frequency response at 45Hz to 20kHz. The 45Hz figure means the speaker reproduces the full range of a bass guitar and the fundamental thump of a kick drum.

Ported designs typically deliver punchy, fast bass, but placement matters. Push the Malhar G2 flat against a wall or into a corner and the rear ports will make the bass boom. Leaving 15cm to 30cm of space behind the cabinet is the usual remedy.

The Malhar G2 uses 200W of Class D amplification, which is efficient and runs cool. The more useful figures are the sound pressure levels. Sonodyne rates the maximum SPL at 101dB at one metre, with peaks of 107dB. That is well beyond comfortable listening in a typical Indian living room. The headroom is important even at moderate volumes, because an amplifier that isn't working near its limit stays cleaner on sudden peaks such as a drum hit or an orchestral swell.

### BUILT FROM WOOD

The cabinet is a proprietary curved wooden enclosure in a natural wood finish. Every driver pushes sound backwards as well as forwards, and the rear wave strikes the cabinet walls. If those walls are thin, they vibrate and add a boxy, hollow colouring of their own. A good cabinet is inert, so the listener hears the drivers and not the box.

Wood is dense and naturally damped. It absorbs vibration rather than ringing, which is why hi-fi has relied on it for decades. The curve matters as much as the material. Parallel walls let sound bounce back and forth, building up standing waves that colour the bass and lower mids. Curved sides break up those reflections.

The Malhar G2 is a "3 Way Stereo" system. The left and right channels are reproduced separately inside the one cabinet, each with its own tweeter and midrange driver. That gives a genuine stereo image. With the drivers spread across a 44cm cabinet, the two channels sit far closer together than a pair of speakers placed two metres apart would.

Instruments panned hard left and right will sound nearer to each other than the mix intends. Sonodyne's answer is Duet Mode, which pairs two units wirelessly over Bluetooth for a wider image. That, of course, doubles the cost.

### CONNECTIONS AND CONTROLS

Let's talk about connectivity. Bluetooth 5.4 improves range, stability and power efficiency, but not sound quality. Sound quality depends on the codec used to compress audio between phone and speaker. On a speaker of this resolution, you don't have to worry about overall sound quality. But what would have taken this to the next level is the support for AirPlay.

The wired options partly make up for this. The optical input takes a digital signal from a television, streamer or CD transport, and is the most dependable lossless route in. With HDMI ARC, the TV's own remote controls the volume, making the Malhar G2 a capable stereo TV speaker. The 'Movie' mode enhances soundstage and dynamics. The AUX input means an external network streamer can be added to fill the Wi-Fi gap.

There are independent bass and treble controls and a full-function IR remote. Physical tone controls have become rare on wireless speakers, and they are useful: a little bass helps thin older recordings, and a little treble restores air. There is no app, multi-band equaliser or room correction, but few owners would miss an app.

### WHAT TO PLAY

The Malhar G2's strengths suit a range of genres. For the midrange, try Adele's *Someone Like You*, which is essentially voice and piano. Tracy Chapman's *Fast Car*, with its warm vocal and fingerpicked guitar, and Norah Jones's intimate *Don't Know Why* work well too. The Eagles's live *Hotel California* from *Hell Freezes Over*, with its long acoustic introduction, has been a hi-fi showroom staple for three decades.

To hear the three-way design keep dense mixes apart at volume, play Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* or Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean*. *Billie Jean* has a tight kick drum, a busy bassline and a vocal that a good speaker keeps in separate spaces. The clocks at the start of Pink Floyd's *Time* and the hard-panned 1966 stereo mix of The Beatles's *Taxman* will show the limits of a single cabinet, and the case for Duet Mode.

The Malhar G2 is a serious piece of acoustic engineering in a lifestyle format. Its three-way driver arrangement, glass-fibre cones, curved wooden cabinet and generous headroom put it well ahead of the plastic Bluetooth speakers. The tone controls are a welcome rarity. For a listener who wants one well-built speaker for a room, the Malhar G2 is easy to recommend. Its sound and simplicity can make it hang with the premium Bluetooth speaker brands. It's a bold move.

*— Mathures Paul*

### AT A GLANCE

**Device:** Sonodyne Malhar G2

**Price:** ₹55,000 (MRP) and there is an offer on Amazon, ₹42,999

Malhar G2 comes with independent bass and treble controls

### HIGH NOTES

- Three-way driver design
- Curved wooden cabinet
- 45Hz–20kHz frequency response
- Independent bass and treble controls
- Duet Mode for stereo pairing

### MUFFLED NOTES

- No AirPlay
- No app



It has a sleek IR remote control