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TITLE:

LOUDSPEAKERS COMPRISING PANEL-FORM ACOUSTIC RADIATING ELEMENTS

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DESCRIPTION

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates to loudspeakers and more particularly to loudspeakers comprising panel-form acoustic radiating elements.

BACKGROUND ART

20 It is known from GB-A-2262861 to suggest a panel-form loudspeaker comprising:-

a resonant multi-mode radiator element being a unitary sandwich panel formed of two skins of material with a spacing core of transverse cellular construction, wherein
25 the panel is such as to have ratio of bending stiffness (B), in all orientations, to the cube power of panel mass per unit surface area (μ) of at least 10;

a mounting means which supports the panel or attaches

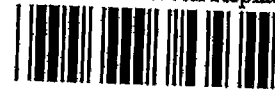
to it a supporting body, in a free undamped manner;

and an electro-mechanical drive means coupled to the panel which serves to excite a multi-modal resonance in the radiator panel in response to an electrical input within a
5 working frequency band for the loudspeaker.

There is a wide application for sound distribution using speakers in standard module form, interchangeable with commercial ceiling tiles, generally on a 600 x 600mm format, the objective being the even distribution of
10 articulate speech and music over a large area. Some conventional moving coil drivers and panel derivatives are presently made for this application.

Existing technology uses cone type moving coil speakers fitted into frames and acoustic baffles. While
15 commonly used due to moderate cost and ready availability, these suffer from serious hot spot (excessive sound intensity) and directional effects and consequently poorer intelligibility off axis. Many units are required to give a uniform coverage over larger area.

20 Another known development uses a cone type speaker where the 'cone' is a polystyrene structure with a flat front surface, which may be painted. Here a combination of additional moving coil drivers fitted to their diaphragm, the latter structured to shrink acoustically with
25 increasing frequency, may give a wider radiation pattern than a conventional cone speaker. These polystyrene foam speaker units require chassis and acoustic baffles for mounting them in position.



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DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

Embodiments of the present invention use members of nature, structure and configuration achievable generally and/or specifically by implementing teachings of our co-

5 pending PCT application No. (our case P.5711) of even date herewith. Such members thus have capability to sustain and propagate input vibrational energy by bending waves in operative area(s) extending transversely of thickness often but not necessarily to edges of the member(s); are

10 configured with or without anisotropy of bending stiffness to have resonant mode vibration components distributed over said area(s) beneficially for acoustic coupling with ambient air; and have predetermined preferential locations or sites within said area for transducer means,

15 particularly operationally active or moving part(s) thereof effective in relation to acoustic vibrational activity in said area(s) and signals, usually electrical, corresponding to acoustic content of such vibrational activity. Uses are envisaged in co-pending International application No. (our

20 file P.5711) for such members as or in "passive" acoustic devices without transducer means, such as for reverberation or for acoustic filtering or for acoustically "voicing" a space or room; and as or in "active" acoustic devices with transducer means, such as in a remarkably wide range of

25 sources of sound or loudspeakers when supplied with input signals to be converted to said sound, or in such as microphones when exposed to sound to be converted into other signals.



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This invention is particularly concerned with active acoustic devices in the form of loudspeakers the purpose of use in a suspended ceiling tile.

Members as above are herein called distributed mode
5 radiators and are intended to be characterised as in the said PCT application and/or otherwise as specifically provided herein.

The invention is a ceiling tile for a suspended ceiling and incorporating a loudspeaker, characterised in
10 that the tile is in the form of a distributed mode acoustic radiator, and by a transducer mounted wholly and exclusively on the radiator to vibrate the radiator to cause it to resonate. A resilient suspension may be disposed at the periphery of the radiator and by which the
15 radiator is supported in the suspended ceiling.

The radiator may be a stiff lightweight panel comprising a cellular core sandwiched by high modulus skins.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

20 The invention is diagrammatically illustrated, by way of example, in the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a diagram showing a distributed-mode loudspeaker as described and claimed in our co-pending International application No... (our case P.5711);

25 Figure 2a is a partial section on the line A-A of Figure 1;

Figure 2b is an enlarged cross-section through a distributed mode radiator of the kind shown in Figure 2a

and showing two alternative constructions;

Figure 3a is a perspective diagram of a room incorporating a suspended ceiling, and

5 Figure 3b is a cross-sectioned side view of an embodiment of distributed-mode loudspeaker according to the present invention in the form of a ceiling tile.

BEST MODES FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Referring to Figure 1 of the drawings, there is shown a panel-form loudspeaker (81) of the kind described and claimed in our co-pending International application No. (our case P.5711) of even date herewith comprising a

5 rectangular frame (1) carrying a resilient suspension (3) round its inner periphery which supports a distributed mode sound radiating panel (2). A transducer (9) e.g. as described in detail with reference to our co-pending International applications Nos. (our cases P.5683/4/5) of

10 even date herewith, is mounted wholly and exclusively on or in the panel (2) at a predetermined location defined by dimensions x and y , the position of which location is calculated as described in our co-pending International application No. (our case P.5711) of even date herewith,

15 to launch bending waves into the panel to cause the panel to resonate to radiate an acoustic output.

The transducer (9) is driven by a signal amplifier (10), e.g. an audio amplifier, connected to the transducer by conductors (28). Amplifier loading and power

20 requirements can be entirely normal, similar to

conventional cone type speakers, sensitivity being of the order of 86 - 88dB/watt under room loaded conditions. Amplifier load impedance is largely resistive at 6 ohms, power handling 20-80 watts. Where the panel core and/or
5 skins are of metal, they may be made to act as a heat sink for the transducer to remove heat from the motor coil of the transducer and thus improve power handling.

Figures 2a and 2b are partial typical cross-sections through the loudspeaker (81) of Figure 1. Figure 2a shows
10 that the frame (1), surround (3) and panel (2) are connected together by respective adhesive-bonded joints (20). Suitable materials for the frame include lightweight framing, e.g. picture framing of extruded metal e.g. aluminium alloy or plastics. Suitable surround materials
15 include resilient materials such as foam rubber and foam plastics. Suitable adhesives for the joints (20) include epoxy, acrylic and cyano-acrylate etc. adhesives.

Figure 2b illustrates, to an enlarged scale, that the panel (2) is a rigid lightweight panel having a core (22)
20 e.g. of a rigid plastics foam (97) e.g. cross linked polyvinylchloride or a cellular matrix (98) i.e. a honeycomb matrix of metal foil, plastics or the like, with the cells extending transversely to the plane of the panel, and enclosed by opposed skins (21) e.g. of paper, card,
25 plastics or metal foil or sheet. Where the skins are of plastics, they may be reinforced with fibres e.g. of carbon, glass, Kevlar (RTM) or the like in a manner known per se to increase their modulus.

Envisaged skin layer materials and reinforcements thus include carbon, glass, Kevlar (RTM), Nomex (RTM) i.e. aramid etc. fibres in various lays and weaves, as well as paper, bonded paper laminates, melamine, and various
5 synthetic plastics films of high modulus, such as Mylar (RTM), Kaptan (RTM), polycarbonate, phenolic, polyester or related plastics, and fibre reinforced plastics, etc. and metal sheet or foil. Investigation of the Vectra grade of liquid crystal polymer thermoplastics shows that they may
10 be useful for the injection moulding of ultra thin skins or shells of smaller size, say up to around 30cm diameter. This material self forms an orientated crystal structure in the direction of injection, a preferred orientation for the good propagation of treble energy from the driving point to
15 the panel perimeter.

Additional such moulding for this and other thermoplastics allows for the mould tooling to carry location and registration features such as grooves or rings for the accurate location of transducer parts e.g. the
20 motor coil, and the magnet suspension. Additional with some weaker core materials it is calculated that it would be advantageous to increase the skin thickness locally e.g. in an area or annulus up to 150% of the transducer diameter, to reinforce that area and beneficially couple
25 vibration energy into the panel. High frequency response will be improved with the softer foam materials by this means.

Envisaged core layer materials include fabricated

honeycombs or corrugations of aluminium alloy sheet or foil, or Kevlar (RTM), Nomex (RTM), plain or bonded papers, and various synthetic plastics films, as well as expanded or foamed plastics or pulp materials, even aerogel metals
5 if of suitably low density. Some suitable core layer materials effectively exhibit usable self-skinning in their manufacture and/or otherwise have enough inherent stiffness for use without lamination between skin layers. A high performance cellular core material is known under the trade
10 name 'Rohacell' which may be suitable as a radiator panel and which is without skins. In practical terms, the aim is for an overall lightness and stiffness suited to a particular purpose, specifically including optimising contributions from core and skin layers and transitions
15 between them.

Several of the preferred formulations for the panel employ metal and metal alloy skins, or alternatively a carbon fibre reinforcement. Both of these, and also designs with an alloy Aerogel or metal honeycomb core, will
20 have substantial radio frequency screening properties which should be important in several EMC applications. Conventional panel or cone type speakers have no inherent EMC screening capability.

In addition the preferred form of piezo and electro
25 dynamic transducers have negligible electromagnetic radiation or stray magnet fields. Conventional speakers have a large magnetic field, up to 1 metre distant unless specific compensation counter measures are taken.

Where it is important to maintain the screening in an application, electrical connection can be made to the conductive parts of an appropriate DML panel or an electrically conductive foam or similar interface may be
5 used for the edge mounting.

The suspension (3) may damp the edges of the panel (2) to prevent excessive edge movement of the panel. Additionally or alternatively, further damping may be applied, e.g. as patches, bonded to the panel in selected
10 positions to damp excessive movement to distribute resonance equally over the panel. The patches may be of bitumen-based material, as commonly used in conventional loudspeaker enclosures or may be of a resilient or rigid polymeric sheet material. Some materials, notably paper
15 and card, and some cores may be self-damping. Where desired, the damping may be increased in the construction of the panels by employing resiliently setting, rather than rigid setting adhesives.

Effective said selective damping includes specific
20 application to the panel including its sheet material of means permanently associated therewith. Edges and corners can be particularly significant for dominant and less dispersed low frequency vibration modes of panels hereof. Edge-wise fixing of damping means can usefully lead to a
25 panel with its said sheet material fully framed, though their corners can often be relatively free, say for desired extension to lower frequency operation. Attachment can be by adhesive or self-adhesive materials. Other forms of

useful damping, particularly in terms of more subtle effects and/or mid- and higher frequencies can be by way of suitable mass or masses affixed to the sheet material at predetermined effective medial localised positions of said
5 area.

An acoustic panel as described above is bi-directional. The sound energy from the back is not strongly phase related to that from the front. Consequently there is the benefit of overall summation of
10 acoustic power in the room, sound energy of uniform frequency distribution, reduced reflective and standing wave effects and with the advantage of superior reproduction of the natural space and ambience in the reproduced sound recordings.

15 While the radiation from the acoustic panel is largely non-directional, the percentage of phase related information increases off axis. For improved focus for the phantom stereo image, placement of the speakers, like pictures, at the usual standing person height, confers the
20 benefit of a moderate off-axis placement for the normally seated listener optimising the stereo effect. Likewise the triangular left/right geometry with respect to the listener provides a further angular component. Good stereo is thus obtainable.

25 There is a further advantage for a group of listeners compared with conventional speaker reproduction. The intrinsically dispersed nature of acoustic panel sound radiation gives it a sound volume which does not obey the

inverse square law for distance for an equivalent point source. Because the intensity fall-off with distance is much less than predicted by inverse square law then consequently for off-centre and poorly placed listeners the intensity field for the panel speaker promotes a superior stereo effect compared to conventional speakers. This is because the off-centre placed listener does not suffer the doubled problem due to proximity to the nearer speaker; firstly the excessive increase in loudness from the nearer speaker, and then the corresponding decrease in loudness from the further loudspeaker.

There is also the advantage of a flat, lightweight panel-form speaker, visually attractive, of good sound quality and requiring only one transducer and no crossover for a full range sound from each panel diaphragm.

Figure 3 illustrates a ceiling tile (36) of the kind adapted to be supported in a grid-like suspended frame (99) to form a suspended ceiling, and which is formed as a loudspeaker (81) of the kind shown in Figures 1 and 2, that is to say comprising a stiff, lightweight multi-mode resonating panel (2) having a core (22) enclosed by skins (21) on both sides. The panel (2) is mounted at its periphery on a resilient suspension (3) of foam rubber which is supported on the frame (99). The suspension (3) may be attached to either the panel (2) or to the frame (99) by means of an adhesive, but the connection may be by gravity alone. The panel (2) carries a transducer (9), e.g. of the kind shown in Figures 7 to 12, to launch



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bending waves into the panel to cause it to resonate to produce an acoustic output. The transducer (9) may be positioned on the panel as described in our co-pending International No. (our file P.5711).

5 In a preferred example of good quality the acoustic panel is made as an expanded polystyrene foam core of typically 100g/m³ density, 8mm thick, skinned with hardened aluminium alloy skins of 0.1mm. A soft foam or felt strip, some 3mm thick is fixed to the perimeter to provide a
10 partially compliant mounting when placed in the ceiling frames and also helps to suppress any possible vibration in the ceiling framing sections.

A preferred form of excitations is a unitary moving coil inertial transducer with a 25mm or 38mm voice coil, 6
15 ohms impedance, 40 watt power handling, with the coil bonded directly to the panel surface. A compact cup type magnet system enclosed and self sealing may also be bonded directly to the panel via a resilient decoupling ring chosen for its vibro-mechanical properties and dimensional
20 stability.

Depending on application, a low cost form ceiling tile can be made with a plastics foam cored paper faced board material, which may have a light alloy foil layer for fire retardancy, driven by low cost piezo vibration exciters.
25 Reduced maximum sound levels are obtained, still more than sufficient for personnel announcements, voice overs and background music distribution. The wide area coverage is maintained.

When metallic or carbon conductive skins or cores are employed the speaker may be earth bonded or grounded to maintain EMC screening of an installed structure.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

5 A ceiling tile loudspeaker according to the present invention does not require a frame, chassis, or acoustic baffle. The entire speaker panel is unitary and may be placed in position just like a passive decorative ceiling tile. The acoustic panel is relatively lightweight,
10 reducing ceiling loadings and aiding installation. It may readily be made fire resistant. It can be decorated, painted or papered to render it invisible in a ceiling installation without significant acoustic impairment.

Minor damage does not impair the performance as
15 compared with the diaphragms of cone type speakers which are very fragile. Also important is the great advantage in sound distribution given by the acoustic panel speaker. Its combination of high intelligibility and wide angle coverage means that in a typical large area installation
20 superior acoustic performance may be achieved with around half the number of conventional installed loudspeakers, with a great saving in installed cost.



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CLAIMS

1. A suspended ceiling tile incorporating a loudspeaker, characterised in that the tile comprises a distributed mode acoustic radiator, and by a transducer mounted wholly and
5 exclusively on the radiator to vibrate the radiator to cause it to resonate.
2. A suspended ceiling tile according to claim 1, characterised by a resilient suspension disposed at the periphery of the radiator to support the radiator in a
10 suspended ceiling.
3. A suspended ceiling tile according to claim 1 or claim 2, characterised in that the radiator is a stiff lightweight panel comprising a cellular core sandwiched by high modulus skins.
- 15 4. A suspended ceiling tile according to claim 3, characterised in that the cellular core is of foamed plastics.
5. A suspended ceiling tile according to any preceding claim, characterised in that the transducer is an inertial
20 vibration transducer.

