← SOUND STORIES

What We Mean by Brilliant Sound

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At Sonos, brilliant sound includes the technical smarts needed to easily listen to what you want, where you want, how you want. But it's our commitment to how our speakers sound that truly defines our work. Over the next few weeks, we'll share what "brilliant sound" means to us. To kick things off, today we're unveiling Inventing Brilliant Sound, a short film introducing you to sound at Sonos.

Smooth. Light. Comforting. Neutral. Cozy. Honest. True. Brilliant sound may be hard to define, but it's easy to recognize. Studies have shown that casual, everyday listeners prefer the same speakers as those who have been professionally trained, despite the latter group's experience analyzing audio for the specific attributes that make it great. When you set up your first Sonos speaker, you probably noticed that the sound was richer or more detailed than you were used to—even if you weren't able to explain why. Here's a three-step process to help you understand why your Sonos speakers sound brilliant.

How to recognize brilliant sound

1: Prepare your environment (and yourself)

To truly evaluate sound, you'll need to create the right conditions. Make sure the space in which you're listening is as free of ambient sounds and distractions as possible. Position yourself at the center of your speaker (or speakers). Then take a moment to center yourself, allowing your ears to adjust to the silence before starting the song.

2: Focus in

Art is designed to engage us intellectually, emotionally, or absolutely. You'll need to detach yourself from the song at first in order to draw your focus to the sound quality alone. Try concentrating on one element of the track—the lead guitar, backing vocals, or the bass line. Notice where it sits in the overall mix and if that changes over the course of the song. How does it sound in relation to the rest of the song's disparate elements? Then try turning up the volume to observe the clarity of the detail you're focused on.

3: Pull back

As Emily Lazar, President and Chief Mastering Engineer at The Lodge and Sonos Sound Board member explains in *Inventing Brilliant Sound*, great sound "fills the room with an emotion." While there are many aspects to evaluating great sound that fall on the scientific end of the spectrum, don't discount the artistic part of the process. Allow the entire song to wash over you. How does the sound make you feel? What emotions or feelings does it evoke? Where do you feel it in your body? If that feels esoteric, remember that sound is ultimately just vibrations in the air. As Greg McAllister, Sound Experience Manager at Sonos notes, "Sound is just slightly less tangible than other senses."

Try it: "Lovesong"

Adele's "Lovesong" was produced and mixed in a way that allows an aspiring sound expert to clearly identify distinct elements of the track. Make sure you've tuned your speaker with Trueplay, pull up "Lovesong" on your favorite streaming service, and follow along for a brilliant sound journey.

Intro (0:00-0:25)

Clean guitars during the song's intro are ideal for hearing more subtle details, like the sound of the musicians' fingers on the strings.

If you have two speakers stereo paired or a home theater speaker like Beam, Playbase, or Playbar, you'll notice that the first acoustic guitar comes distinctly from the left for the first four bars of the song, while the second acoustic guitar is situated far to the right.

First Verse (0:26-0:57)

When Adele's vocals join in, they are positioned squarely in the center of the two guitars. One way expert listeners assess sound is by evaluating the spatial arrangement of a song. You can think of it like a giant movie screen, with a character in the center and supporting cast members at the edges. With "Lovesong," the spatial arrangement of the guitars and vocals is clearly defined.

The song should sound natural—as if you were in the same room as the musicians playing live. Without audio effects like reverb or distortion altering the guitars and vocals, you can more easily appreciate their tone and character.

Second Verse (0:58-1:47)

When additional instruments join at the end of the first verse, you have an opportunity to appreciate how your Sonos speakers handle a range of frequencies in a song. The bass's long, sustained notes are at a lower frequency, while the crisp hi-hat cymbals are at a higher frequency. All of the frequencies should sound well balanced, not like they're competing with one another.

Chorus (1:48-2:18)

The strings should sound full and lush. While they were playing a counter melody to the main vocal melody during the verses, they swell during the chorus, evoking an emotional response.

Rest of song (2:19-4:09)

Finally, take a step back to evaluate the song more holistically. The track's instrumentation changes throughout the song. How does that impact your experience of listening? Try playing the song a few more times, choosing different elements to focus on and paying attention to how your assessment evolves with each listen.

Ready to go deeper? Now that you know what it's like to experience brilliant sound, check back next month to find out how we ensure each and every Sonos speaker delivers on that promise.

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