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**The B&W 685s are one of the larger loudspeakers in our group, measuring 340mm high, 198mm wide and 335mm deep; they barely fit a standard 12in shelf and are best seen as stand mounters. Box volume connotes to deeper bass, so what is a drawback physically isn't sonically. At 7kgs they are not too heavy.**

The 685 is a two-way design with shiny aluminium dome tweeter and eye catching yellow woven Kevlar 165mm woofer. B&W talk of "first order crossover slopes" and special components for sonic zest. Supporting this, the 685s are very efficient; they are louder than all rivals at any particular volume setting except the new KEF iQ30s. So in a showroom demo, the 685s will usually be loudest and seemingly have most impact. It isn't artifice though; these loudspeakers are truly efficient, and efficient loudspeakers do have a get up and go demeanour. All the same, B&W enhance their liveliness by raising tweeter output to ensure treble cuts through. Well built and finished, the 685s feel good and look good. Bi-wire terminals are fitted and foam bungs for the ports supplied to damp down bass, useful when wall or shelf mounting.

## **SOUND QUALITY**

The 685 scores immediately with a lovely open sound seemingly unconstrained by the boxes. The sound stage was projected well forward of the loudspeakers, placing vocalists close, and it extended well beyond the loudspeakers, a product I suspect of good drive units and slow crossover slopes, as there was a curious almost phasey quality that cut earthly anchors to make for an ethereal sound. Bass was nicely balanced, reasonably tuneful and convincing, if with a soft air to it. Synthesised hand claps in Goldfrapp's *Lovely To See You* were sharply defined in the time domain and hovered in space. Alison Goldfrapp's voice was clear and uncoloured, but there was a lightness of timbre. Unfortunately, the tweeter was always obvious and could make mediocre recordings like *Within Temptation Live* sound messy and a little harsh; others did better here. All in all though, the 685s sound generously open and clear, image outside usual limits and thoroughly impress with their expansive and a projective sound. Their treble lift didn't suit our Sugden A21a and they really need a warm amplifier like a Naim Nait or NAD C315BEE to rein back treble and knit it back into the musical whole.

# VERDICT

For more info, go to [http://www.audioholics.com/forums/showthread.php?p=100000](#) and clear, if lacking image focus and some bass grip.

