"... superb performance ...

...AWE-INSPIRING...

a precisely pitched and focused treat."

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Home Theater

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"... truly satisfying ... effortless vocal intelligibility ... easily brought out the vocal timbre and small dynamic shifts ... power of high quality and more than sufficient quantity ... sub bass potency – WOW!"

by Mark Fleischmann

TWO PRODUCTS, ONE LOOK

It wasn't until I uncrated both the Paradigm Cinema 330 speakers and the Harman/ Kardon AVR 340 receiver that I realized I'd found something rare in the home theater realm—a visual match between speakers and receiver. Did some invisible hand simultaneously guide Paradigm's whizzes in Toronto and Harman/Kardon's design squad in Northridge, California? These two large companies have no connection that I know of. Yet, this month's Spotlight System is a genuine fusion of Canadian and Californian design sensibilities.

That I am obsessing over the appearance of audio components indicates how far we've come. Any manufacturer who wants to ship units had better consider how their products will look in the home. In Paradigm's case, that means dispensing with the rectangular fiberboard enclosures that contribute to the superb performance of their more conventional products in favor of shapely molded plastic. The gray plastic is a close match for the suave gunmetal chassis of Harman/Kardon's receiver. Accents of black—in the speaker grilles and the receiver's top-front panel—complete the resemblance. You'd almost swear that Dr. Sidney Harman and Scott Bagby sat down for a secret lunch and worked the whole thing out just to amaze the reviewer from *Home Theater*.

THREE TALL COOL ONES

Three Paradigm Cinema 330 LCR speakers, a pair of Cinema ADP surrounds, and an UltraCube 10 subwoofer formed the speaker system. These models hail from the Monitor Series, which also includes several highly rated box-shaped speakers. The Cinema 330 is anything but boxy. It's more that 2 feet tall but not very wide or deep. The fluid-cooled PTD (pure titanium dome) tweeter gets pride of place in the center of the baffle, surrounded by a pair of ICP (injection-molded-copolymer polypropylene cone) midranges and a pair of polypropylene woofers. Visually, the speakers are spare, even austere, an impression the stand's skinny triangular column and glass base underscore.

Cinema™ 330

Unless you wall-mount them, the speakers need their stands, as they don't have a flat edge to rest upon. The mounting screws thread directly into the plastic enclosures,

and their heads fit into cross-shaped holes on the stands. Access limitations may confront users of premium cable: Although the speakers have conventional plastic-nut binding posts, the stands block their banana-plug holes. You'll also need fairly slender cable to enter the column through a small hole and snake down to the base. That eliminated my bulky Monster 1.2 reference cable. Even my thinner Monster THX ribbon cable was too thick. Instead, I installed 12-gauge zip cord before I attached the speakers to the stands, grumbling about the unwelcome variable.

"… Cinema ADP's dipole design created a null in the listening area, keeping effects diffuse and attention in the front where it belongs."

The Cinema 330's took up their positions below my Stewart FireHawk projection screen with a sleek patrician grace. Removing the grilles let me better appreciate the stylish radial grooves surrounding the tweeter, but leaving the grilles on imparted visual calm and subtlety. Company logos attach magnetically, and you can easily reposition them for vertical or horizontal placement.

The Cinema ADP dipole surrounds are the smallest I've seen outside of a compact sub/sat set. It's sensible kind of reductionism, given the rarity of surround bass effects. Sonically, the Cinema ADPs are a fine match for the Cinema 330s. Wall-mount them, and you'll barely know they're there.

Tap either side of the UltraCube 10 subwoofer, and you'll feel a steel plate beneath each of the two 9-inch passive radiators. (The 10-inch high-excursion woofer is on the bottom.) This adds mass, which, in turn, lowers the drivers' resonant frequency. It is slightly awe-inspiring to imagine the air pressures found within this small enclosure. The Class D amplifier is conservatively rated at 650 watts, a lot for a little sub. It sounds like a larger one.

VASTY DEEP

The first order of business was to fine-tune the bass. Normally, I use personal default settings that work with my reference gear, as well as with much other equipment, and save the tweaking for later. Not this time. I couldn't set up the UltraCube 10 in a quick-and-dirty way and ignore it for a while. Even with the receiver's low-frequency-effects level set at the absolute minimum, the sub was still too strong. Hairline adjustments of the sub volume control—which really needs more degrees of adjustment at its bottom end—eventually got the proportions right. The good news here is that this sub has far greater volume capability than I expected. Once you get it dialed in, you'll be awestruck.

"… had a way of strongly outlining sonic objects … easily brought out the vocal timbre and small dynamic shifts."

That's good, since bass is not Cinema 330's strong suit. Played full-range, it leans to the light side, more like a compact satellite than something 2 feet tall. I increased my usual 80-hertz crossover to 100 Hz and later to 120 Hz. This made the UltraCube 10 an even bigger player in the scheme of things. And it stepped right up to bat, smacking tuneful grooves out of the ballpark and sensitively sculpting orchestral bass sections and timpani.

The Cinema 330s are voiced to sit on or near walls. In my usual 2-feet-out position, they were bright but improved a little when I moved them closer to the wall. They had a way of strongly outlining sonic objects. For instance, in Donald Fagen's *Morph the Cat*, the speakers gave brass arrangements a stinging edge and downplayed the crushed-velvet inner texture of the lead vocal.

"It is slightly awe-inspiring to imagine the air pressure found within this small enclosure … conservatively rated at 650 watts, a lot for a little sub … sounds like a larger one … a downright bargain at the price."

Musically, they were more at home with June Tabor's *At the Wood's Heart*, which is less like a cartoon and more like an exquisite woodcut. Like most of the English-traditional singer's long discography, this new release suspends the precise enunciation of her distinctively husky contralto in vast pools of quiet space only slightly filled in by her usual collaborators on piano, viola, guitar, and other instruments. Here, the outlining acquired delicacy. And, with so many open spaces in the mix, the Paradigms more easily brought out the vocal timbre and small dynamic shifts.

Deadwing by Porcupine Tree entered my system through the front door—with a great DVD-Audio mix, complemented by a DTS alternate soundtrack, and supplemented with three DTS-only bonus tracks. The main use of the surround channels on this disc is to add enough ambience to bring most elements of the front soundstage a foot or two in front of the speakers and slightly farther forward at the sides. A few details found their way into the surrounds, but I never felt that the surrounds were being overused, partly because the Cinema ADP's dipole design created a null in the listening area, keeping effects diffuse and keeping attention in the front where it belongs. The UltraCube 10 made the rhythm section a precisely pitched and focused treat.

"… this sub has far greater volume capability than I expected … you'll be awestruck… stepped right up to the bat, smacking tuneful grooves out of the ballpark … sensitively sculpting orchestral bass sections and timpani."

KONG, CASANOVA, AND THE GARDENER

The first movie I watched was King Kong. Unfortunately, this was before I dialed in the bass, and the overall effect was the sonic equivalent of dodgeball. Remote in hand, I kept dodging, knocking down the master volume. But no matter how low it went, dialogue was perfectly intelligible. By the time I got to the *Venetian Carnavale of Casanova*, with fireworks exploding, the sub was right in the pocket. The detonations were extremely lifelike—distant yet palpably solid—and Heath Ledger's seductive drawl was as colorful as the fireworks. The dominant element of this soundtrack, however, is the score, in which bits of Vivaldi and other baroque composers are cleverly blended with newly

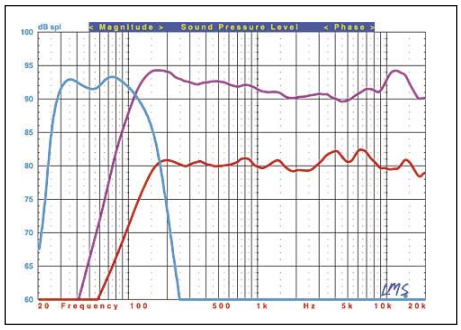
written pastiche, all of it recorded with a roomy ambience reminiscent of a Venetian palazzo.

"The sub brought home the moments of low-frequency menace while the Cinema 330 that was serving as the center speaker helpfully picked out whispered and low-voiced dialogue."

An early airport scene in *The Constant Gardener* had me wondering where the airplane noise was coming from. I do live along the Hudson River flight path. I reverse-scanned a small amount and replayed the scene. The sound came from the speakers and sub. This latter day John Le Carré thriller came with a relatively nonstereotypical soundtrack, a melange of varied world-beat-ish music and realistic (as opposed to overdone) effects. The sub brought home the moments of low-frequency menace, while the Cinema 330 that was serving as the center speaker helpfully picked out whispered and low-voiced dialogue. The overall experience was more moving than average demo material.

"… I kept dodging, knocking down the master volume. But no matter how low it went, dialogue was perfectly intelligible … the sub was right in the pocket … extremely lifelike … palpably solid …"

Here's a short list of this system's strengths: Truly satisfying bass in a small package, effortless vocal intelligibility, power of high quality and more than sufficient quantity, and a blessedly unified décor friendliness. In bits and pieces, these are not exactly rare jewels, but it was a pleasure to have them all together in the same place at the same time.



HT LABS MEASURES:
Satellite Sensitivity:
91.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz
Surround Sensitivity:
85.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Cinema 330 LCR speaker (purple trace), UltraCube 10 subwoofer (blue trace), and Cinema ADP surround, (red trace). All passive loud-speakers were measured with grilles at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

Cinema 330's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/- 15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +2.52/-1.93 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. When orientated horizontally, an average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +2.47/-2.32 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3-dB point is at 103 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 91 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.67 ohms at 98 Hz and a phase angle of -41.06 degrees at 179 Hz.

The ADP's three-face averaged response measures +1.93/-1.30 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3-dB point is at 137 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 117 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.85 ohms at 429 Hz and a phase angle of -25.64 degrees at 302 Hz.

The UltraCube 10's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3-dB point is at 28 Hz and the -6-dB point is at 26 Hz. The upper -3-dB point is at 117 Hz with the cutoff frequency control set to maximum. – MJP

HIGHLIGHTS
Paradigm Cinema 330 Speaker System:
- Small yet unusually potent sub
- Speakers look great on stands
- Small and unobtrusive surrounds

BUILD QUALITY
- Sub's passive radiators reinforced with steel plates
- The speakers have molded plastic enclosures
- Titanium Tweeters

VALUE
- LCR's 5-driver design comes in at a nice price
- Sub is a downright bargain at the price

FEATURES
- Stand or wall-mount for both front and rear
- Glass-bottomed stands are a neat touch

PERFORMANCE
- Sub's bass potency — WOW!
- Strongly outlined midrange
- Coherent front-focused soundfield

ERGONOMICS
- Speakers look beautiful on stands
- Forget thick cable or banana plugs

UltraCube™ 10