

Editors' Choice Awards 2003!

stereophile

GUIDE to HOME THEATER

www.guidetohometheater.com

January 2003

DVD-Audio & SACD Explained!

Which format is right for you?

Best Gear of 2002

Editors' Choice Awards



Plus:

- Sony DVD player
- Epson projector
- Musical Fidelity amp
- Rotel processor
- Cambridge SoundWorks speakers

A PRIMEDIA Publication

\$5.99 US, \$6.99 CAN

0 70992 34969 2 01 >



often be spec'd into homes without the owners auditioning it beforehand. That's not something we encourage anyone to do when shopping for speakers, particularly very expensive ones, but no buyer is likely to be disappointed with the Snells.

The XA 2900 front speakers are derived from Snell's top-of-the-line, \$30,000/pair XA Reference towers—a pretty fair pedigree to start from. And it shows. The main difference is that the smaller XA 2900 responds down to only 40Hz; you'll need one or more great subwoofers (not included in the price of the package recommended here) to complete the system. So equipped, and properly set up in a good room (four room- and position-compensating switches help accomplish this), the Snells really sing.

The system's only significant sonic signatures are a bit of midrange forwardness not visible in the speakers' excellent measured response, and a slight lack of air at the top that is barely perceptible in the measurements. Otherwise, the XA 2900s are chameleonlike in telling it like it is on both music and soundtracks. The system's maximum output capabilities were well above anything TJN could test in his 3200-cubic-foot home theater room. In his five months with the Snell XA 2900 system, he found it to be a consistently superb and excellently engineered performer.

JBL Performance

(\$6394; reviewed by J. Gordon Holt, June 2002)

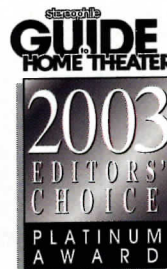


"Realism is one of the Performance's strongest suits," spake JGH in his review of this JBL winner. It excelled at reproducing the size of sources—both musical instruments and film effects. Its output capabilities were impressive. The system's subwoofer responded strongly down to 30Hz, pumping out over 106dB at 35Hz in his room before overloading. "The JBL Performance won't be everyone's snifter of cognac," observed JGH (a comment that can be applied to any speaker), "but it's certainly one of mine. People who know real music, as well as film buffs, will almost certainly love it."

Subwoofer

Earthquake SuperNova MKIV-15

(\$2900; reviewed by Steven Stone, September 2002)



Steven Stone got all shook up over the Earthquake SuperNova MKIV-15 subwoofer. Scoring high in all the critical requirements for a subwoofer (loud, deep, clean, and fast), it produced bass down to

below 20Hz, and did so with panache and style. Whether the program material was music or film, the SuperNova performed with aplomb, improving on the low bass in his room even over his resident L/R front speakers, Dunlavy SC-VIs, each of which has two 15-inch drivers in a box large enough to have required piano movers when he bought a new home just up the street from his old one. Of course, a good powered subwoofer has the advantage of positioning flexibility, and its dedicated amp can be tailored to provide the best system performance. In this case, that performance was so good that SS concluded, "There might be better subwoofers on the planet, but I haven't heard them."

Hsu VTF-3

(\$849; reviewed by Robert Deutsch, December 2002)



Hsu knows Hsub—that's all they make. Sold directly from their

California factory, the company's products have always been great buys and great performers, and the long-awaited VTF-3 is no exception. Yes, it comes in a plain box finished in that ubiquitous black textured material. Yes, if your decorator sees it, you'll have to call the paramedics. But hide it behind the philodendrons and watch the leaves wave. Bob Deutsch found the VTF-3 to be a prodigious performer, pumping out low bass in a way reminiscent of subwoofers that sell for much more. Got a big room? Buy two and follow Russ Herschelmann's recommendations for setting up multiple subs to smooth out a room's bass response. Either way, you'll find it hard to believe that you got bass this good for so little cash.