

HOME Theater

Dynaudio Audience 72 Speaker System

Roger Maycock, May, 2005

Attention to detail makes all the difference.

Although they're best known as a loudspeaker manufacturer for the audio enthusiast, Dynaudio also has a commanding presence in professional audio. Their Dynaudio Acoustics subsidiary is highly regarded by many people in leading recording studios. It is in these circles where I first came to know and gain an appreciation for the brand.



When I got the assignment to evaluate Dynaudio's Audience Series in a home theater context, I looked forward to discovering how this line performed in contrast to the company's studio-reference systems—because these two environments aren't as similar as you might expect. Studio monitors must be able to handle extreme transient peaks without obvious distortion so that the listener can make critical decisions about the mix. By contrast, most people listen to music that has already been mastered, and this process generally levels out the transient peaks and massages everything into a more manageable state. Armed with high expectations and several favorite CDs and DVDs, I was ready.

First Impressions

My system consisted of a pair of Audience 72 loudspeakers for the left and right channels, the Audience 122C center-channel unit, and a pair of Audience 52s for the surround channels. The subwoofer was the company's new SUB 500. As is the case with all current Dynaudio subwoofers, it is not specific to the product line.

While audio purists may frown at the notion that appearance counts, it does. After all, if you're about to spend \$5,900 for a loudspeaker system, chances are good that your taste in home furnishings is a cut above that dormitory room you called home as a student. Rest assured, the Audience system has a refined, though conservative, look.

It's All in the Details

A closer inspection revealed solid fit and finish, with natural-maple-veneered enclosures. The baffles, made from heavy-duty medium-density fiberboard (MDF), provide support for the drivers and minimize resonance. For those of you who prefer to remove the grille, there are mounting provisions on the back of the Audience 72's enclosure for keeping the grille safe from harm. This is a nice touch. These systems are also available in black ash, cherry, and rosewood at identical pricing.

The Audience 72, Audience 122C, and Audience 52 all utilize a bass-reflex, ported cabinet and are equipped with a single set of gold-plated binding posts. They ship with foam plugs for the ports. If, due to limited space, you need to place the speakers close to a wall or in a corner, these plugs will reduce the bass output accentuated by proximity to room boundaries.

The 250-watt SUB 500 provides RCA and XLR-type connectors for both input and output. The grille is affixed with strong magnets to ensure a tight, stable fit. Noteworthy features include auto-on/standby signal sensing, whereby the sub shuts itself down after 20 minutes of inactivity and powers up upon sensing a signal. This feature greatly simplifies operation. The SUB 500 also ships with a credit-card-sized remote control for defining volume, roll-off frequency, phase, and low-frequency extension. With the ability to create four presets, this is the couch potato's dream come true for boosting low end during action movies and easily returning to a more natural balance for music listening.

Audible Impressions

My source-playback equipment included an Onkyo DV-SP800 SACD/DVD player, Parasound's Halo C2 controller, and Sunfire's Cinema 7 amplifier. The front loudspeakers employed Kimber Kables of equal lengths, while the surrounds and sub used Monster cables. Loudspeaker test levels for all enclosures measured 75 decibels.

I began with a stereo recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 "Eroica" performed by the Berlin Philharmonic. The Audience 72s provided balanced, natural reproduction throughout the entire frequency range. The Audience 72s maintained the stereo field's integ-

riety better than many other systems I've heard. They are a 2.5-way system employing Dynaudio's D260 ESOTEC tweeter working alongside twin 6.7-inch woofers with 2.9-inch voice coils and one-piece molded-cone diaphragms. These speakers delivered a warm, pleasing performance with exceptional dynamic contrast and excellent stereo imaging. I was able to move in absurdly close before the soundfield collapsed into separate left and right sources. Similarly, off-axis listening remained convincing.

I listened to CBS Masterworks' recording *Portrait of John Williams*. Nothing beats classical guitar for auditioning a loudspeaker's ability to reproduce overtones, and the Audience 72s did not disappoint. The light, airy texture of the overtones cascading above the plucked string's fundamental was delightful. Further, every little scrape of the strings as Williams' hands raced across the fretboard was there—without causing distraction, as can be the case with loudspeakers that have an accentuated high end.

Changing pace, I switched to Sting's *Brand New Day*, in both CD and DVD versions. Now the SUB 500 made its presence known. Without deviating from the 75-dB level, the low end sprung to life—with plenty of definition, particularly in the midbass region. Bass-guitar slaps jumped right out. Every note had personality. Low-frequency drones and other effects were rich and full. The SUB 500 does exactly what a good sub should—enhance the performance without overpowering it.

Again, the Audience 72s performed impressively. While percussive effects danced throughout the soundfield, Sting's vocals were so positively centered that, on more than one occasion, I found myself checking to ensure that I was still operating in stereo.

When I switched to DVD and 5.1 surround, Sting's music assumed a new dynamic, with effects now prancing about the entire soundfield. I heard the Audience 52s for the first time. These two-way, monopole enclosures with 6.7-inch woofers and 1.1-inch soft-dome tweeters would make an admirable stereo setup on their own. While I wasn't impressed with some of the mixing

decisions, the congas, backing vocals, and even the piano solo were all reproduced with convincing detail.

Show Time

I auditioned the system with 20th Century Fox's original *Die Hard*, listening primarily for sound effects, ambient treatments, and center-channel performance. The Audience 52s and the SUB 500 combined to create spectacular-sounding action scenes, and I upped the volume accordingly. One scene features a jet landing at Los Angeles International Airport, and, sonically, this was particularly impressive. I was examining the sub's remote when, all of a sudden, this roar of engines swept from rear to front. Forgetting where I was, I ducked for cover. The SUB 500 is capable of prodigious output. During the multitude of explosions and general mayhem, the entire system pooled its resources and shook the room. I experienced pure, mindless bliss.

I also experimented with the SUB 500's various configurations and level settings. This is an impressive unit, although I was disappointed by its lack of visual feedback during parameter settings. There are two status LEDs and an indicator that flashes when the sub receives remote commands, but that's it.

The Audience 122C's performance on the 5.1-channel versions of both Sting's DVD and *Die Hard* was on par with the system's other components. The Audience 122C's two midbass drivers and its single soft-dome tweeter performed admirably. Dialogue was clear and articulate, and ambient effects were handled with aplomb. If you intend to place this enclosure in a cabinet, you'll appreciate its ported design and the inclusion of the foam plug, as this will enable you to better control the bass response.

Summation

It's difficult to find fault with Dynaudio's Audience 72 speaker system. The articulate, smooth performance throughout the entire frequency range, combined with great imaging and solid off-axis capability makes this a compelling system. Similarly, the SUB 500's performance and features make it a great complementary piece.

The system has a conservative design, which leads me to the following thought: There's a saying, "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM." The same goes with Dynaudio's Audience system. While its looks may not garner a "Wow" from your houseguests, its performance certainly will.

Highlights

- Great imaging and off-axis consistency enhance the multiple-listener experience
- The SUB 500 is a versatile performer for those who love to tweak settings

At A Glance: Dynaudio Audience 72 Speaker System

Subwoofer: SUB 500

Connections: Single-ended/RCA, Balanced/XLR

Enclosure Type: sealed cabinet

Woofer (size in inches, type): 12, long-throw

Power Rating (watts): 250

Crossover Bypass: Yes

Available Finishes: Black Ash, Cherry, Maple, Rosewood

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 14.9 x 14.2 x 22.4

Weight (pounds): 67.5

Price: \$2,000

These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs,



the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

Speaker: Audience 72

Type: 2.5-way, tower

Tweeter (size in inches, type): 1.1, soft-dome

Midrange (size in inches, type): 6.7, poly-cone

Woofers (size in inches, type): 6.7, poly-cone

Nominal Impedance (ohms): 4

Recommended Amp Power (watts): 25–125

Available Finishes: Black Ash, Cherry, Maple, Rosewood

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 37.8 x 8 x 10.1

Weight (pounds): 37.4

Price: \$1,900/pair

Speaker: Audience 122C

Type: Two-way, center

Tweeter (size in inches, type): 1.1, soft-dome

Midrange (size in inches, type): 5.9, poly-cone

Woofers (size in inches, type): 5.9, poly-cone

Nominal Impedance (ohms): 4

Recommended Amp Power (watts): 25–125

Available Finishes: Black Ash, Cherry, Maple, Rosewood

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 6.5 x 22.4 x 12.6

Weight (pounds): 25.1

Price: \$900

Speaker: Audience 52

Type: Two-way, monitor

Tweeter (size in inches, type): 1.1, soft-dome

Midrange (size in inches, type): 6.7 poly-cone

Woofers (size in inches, type): 6.7, poly-cone

Nominal Impedance (ohms): 4

Recommended Amp Power (watts): 25–125

Available Finishes: Black Ash, Cherry, Rosewood

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 13 x 8 x 10

Weight (pounds): 15.2

Price: \$1,100/pair

Ratings: Dynaudio Audience 72 Speaker System

Build Quality: 90

Real-wood-veneer cabinetry with matte-gray-painted baffles and silver grille cloth Versatile binding posts, good fit and finish, and smooth enclosure edges

Value: 92

Dynaudio is well known for their driver technology, which is key to their reputation for solid performance.

Dollar for dollar, the Audience system is a smart buy

Features: 93

Bass-reflex ports include foam plugs for bass attenuation when used close to boundary surfaces.

SUB 500 provides automatic on/standby signal sensing, XLR and RCA connectors

Performance: 95

SUB 500 subwoofer provides plenty of well-defined bass.

Solid off-axis performance ensures a good sonic experience for multiple listeners

Ergonomics: 89

Audience 72 provides mounts at rear of enclosure for grille storage; spikes included.

Extremely limited visual feedback when adjusting SUB 500 parameters

Overall Rating: 93

The Audience 72, Audience 122C, and Audience 52 are second-generation designs that benefit from redesigned crossovers. The accompanying SUB 500 provides a wealth of parameters—all via wireless control. With an impressive list of features and inspiring sound quality, it's easy to overlook the system's conservative appearance.

General Information

Audience 72 Floorstanding Loudspeaker, \$1,900/pair

Audience 122C Center-Channel Speaker, \$900

Audience 52 Monitor Speaker, \$1,100/pair

SUB 500 Subwoofer, \$2,000

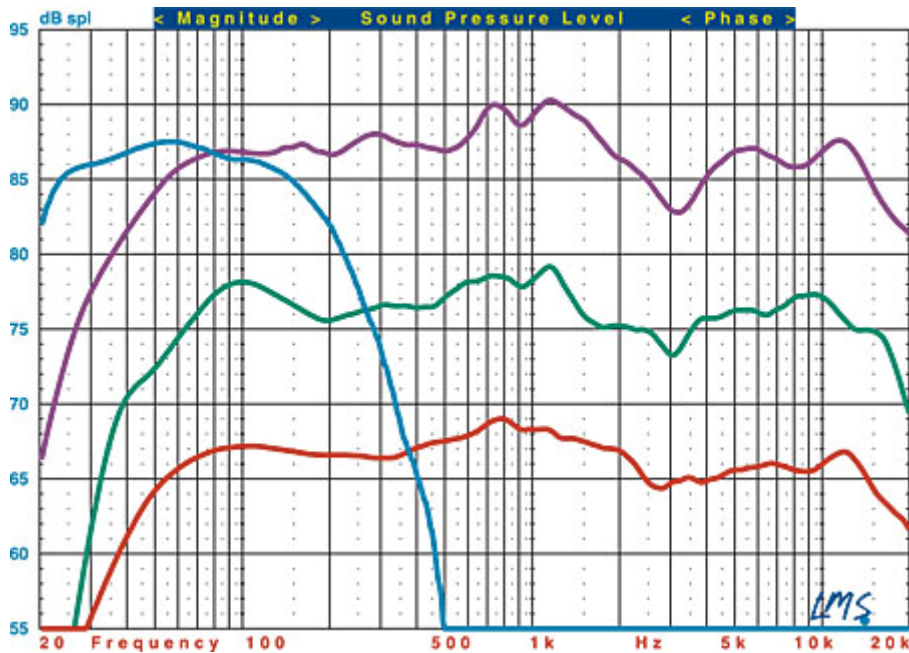
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Dealer Locator Code DYN

HT Labs Measures: Dynaudio Audience 72 Speaker System



L/R Sensitivity: 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

Center Sensitivity: 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

Surround Sensitivity: 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Audience 72 L/R (purple trace), SUB 500 subwoofer (blue trace), Audience 122C center channel (green trace), and Audience 52 surround (red trace). All passive loudspeakers were measured at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

The Audience 72's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +2.27/-5.22 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 55 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 42 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.36 ohms at 114 Hz and a phase angle of +35.60 degrees at 51 Hz.

The Audience 122C's listening-window response measures +1.27/-4.64 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +0.60/-5.72 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 63 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 47 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.78 ohms at 210 Hz and a phase angle of -32.26 degrees at 106 Hz.

The Audience 52's listening-window response measures +1.02/-3.62 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 55 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 42 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.52 ohms at 200 Hz and a phase angle of -31.85 degrees at 100 Hz.

The SUB 500's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 22 Hz and the -6dB point is at 20 Hz with the bass-extension control set to on. The upper -3dB point is at 170 Hz with the crossover-frequency control set to flan

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