

HOME Theater



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Mirage UNI-Theater™ Speaker System

It's three omnidirectional speakers in one

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BY STEVE GUTTENBERG

Here's a tip for home theater

newbies: Don't shop for speakers using just your eyes. That advice holds true for any speaker, regardless of size or price; when it comes to what we euphemistically refer to as "lifestyle" speakers, though, please try to listen before you make a purchase, or you'll deserve what you get. Lifestyle-inflicted design compromises too often exact a toll on performance—skinny towers can sound undernourished, wall-mounted speakers can produce pancake-flat imaging, and pint-size satel-

lites can come up short.

I remember one wee satellite speaker that successfully dodged those pitfalls, Mirage's original Omnisat (see the November 2002 review). I must have nailed that one just right, because the Omnisat went on to become Mirage's best-selling speaker of all time. The range now includes the Omnisat's baby brother, the Omnisat Micro, and the Nanosat, Mirage's teensiest model yet. Mirage's design engineer, Andrew Welker, has refined the shape and orientation of the dispersion modules positioned just above the tweeter and midrange drivers. These saucer-shaped discs create the

speakers' 360-degree, "omni" radiation pattern. Welker thinks that the newer models deliver a more-neutral midrange and smoother high-frequency response. I get the feeling that he's most proud of the new Uni-Theater, an integrated left/center/right, all-in-one speaker.

It's obviously the most radical Omni yet, and it's his most lifestyle-friendly design. Don't worry, though; it sounds great.

Uni-Theater to the Front and the Rear

The Uni-Theater is an incredibly

flexible speaker. It can act as an integrated L/C/R speaker, hugging the wall over or under a flat-screen TV. Most Uni-Theaters are deployed with two or three Nanosats, Omnisat Micros, or Omnisat satellites providing surround support—or not. Some Uni-Theater owners will opt for the simplicity of a second Uni-Theater instead of separate surround satellites—a two-box, six-channel system. For the ultimate in stealth surrounds, wall-mount the rear Uni-Theater upside-down, near the ceiling. Heck, you can do the same for the front Uni as well, and the Mirages' omnidirectional radiation will direct the sound down and out. Then again, if you don't want to run speaker wire to the back end of your room, or you want to save bucks, try the single-speaker, three-channel option: a solo Uni-Theater. Just go into your A/V receiver's set-up menu, turn off the surround channels, and their information will be "folded" into the front Uni-Theater's left and right speakers. No, it won't sound like a 5.1 or 6.1 setup, but once I removed the Uni-Theater's form-fitting grille, the speaker created a mildly enveloping surround effect. All of these Uni-Theater scenarios require the services of a subwoofer, and I went with Mirage's superb Omni Series S10 sub.

The Uni-Theater features independent left, center, and right speakers housed within a single cabinet. Each "channel" sports an

active Omni midrange/tweeter set and two passive drivers. Passive isn't a description of their personality—it's just that passive drivers don't have voice coils or magnets. The active Omni midranges acoustically drive the passive drivers and augment their bass output. The Uni-Theater's extruded aluminum cabinet is a step up from the Micro's ABS plastic body.

If wall-mounting isn't in the cards, do what I did and use the supplied plate-glass-and-metal table stand. It's really gorgeous—the clever design “floats” the Uni-Theater just above the glass base. My one gripe with the speaker's ergonomics is the placement of its connectors. They're so steeply angled that some banana jacks are a tight squeeze, and futzing around with the stripped-bare wire ends and the spring-loaded connectors is an exercise in frustration. Granted, you'll probably only have to do it once, so I don't mean to make a big deal about it, but I'd like to see Mirage come up with a better arrangement.

The Uni-Theater's backside also houses a two-position switch for the boundary-compensation circuit. Select Stand if your Uni-Theater is positioned away from the wall, and the compensation will be out of circuit; the Wall setting provides a gentle bass roll-off to compensate for the bass boost that the speaker's close proximity to the wall produces. The design's tonal balance will therefore remain more consistent, regardless of its position in the room. That said, the Uni-Theater, just like any other speaker, will sound more open and produce a greater sense of image depth when you mount it some distance from the wall. I performed the bulk of my listening tests with the Uni-Theater on a stand positioned 2 feet in front of my TV.

When I briefly experimented with placing the stand-mounted Uni-Theater up against the wall, the soundstage was distinctly flat-

ter. That said, the Uni-Theater produced a more-open sound than I've heard from wall-mounted conventional speakers.

AT A GLANCE MIRAGE UNI-THEATER SPEAKER SYSTEM



These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs; the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

SUBWOOFER: OMNI S10

Connections:	Stereo speaker and mono line-level inputs
Enclosure Type:	Vented
Woofer (size in inches, type):	10, titanium deposit-polypropylene cone
Power Rating (watts):	200 (RMS)
Crossover Bypass:	Yes
Available Finishes:	Platinum, Cherry, Black
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	16.9 x 14.7 x 18.5
Weight (pounds):	41
Price:	\$500

SPEAKER

Type:	
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	0.75, Titanium Hybrid Dome (3)
Woofer (size in inches, type):	3, Titanium Deposit Hybrid woofer (3), 3, Titanium Deposit Hybrid passive radiators (6)
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	8
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	10-100
Available Finishes:	Platinum, Black
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	5.25 x 36.5 x 4.2
Weight (pounds):	19
Price:	\$999

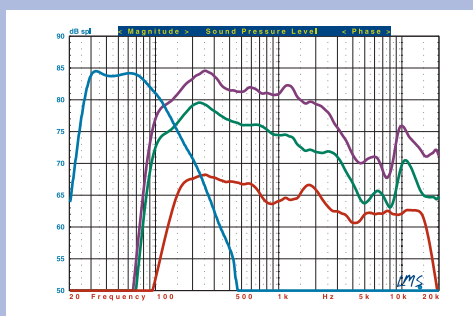
UNI-THEATER

Type:	Two-way, integrated L/C/R
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	0.75, Titanium Hybrid Dome (3)
Woofer (size in inches, type):	3, Titanium Deposit Hybrid woofer (3), 3, Titanium Deposit Hybrid passive radiators (6)
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	8
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	10-100
Available Finishes:	Platinum, Black
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	5.25 x 36.5 x 4.2
Weight (pounds):	19
Price:	\$999

OMNISAT MICRO

Type:	Two-way, omnidirectional satellite
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	1, Titanium Hybrid Dome
Woofer (size in inches, type):	3, Titanium Deposit Hybrid
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	8
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	10-100
Available Finishes:	Platinum, Black, White and Platinum/Black
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	6.5 x 5.1 x 6.5
Weight (pounds):	3.4
Price:	\$180

HT Labs Measures: Mirage Uni-Theater Speaker System



- Uni-Theater Left Sensitivity: **81.0 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**
- Uni-Theater Center Sensitivity: **81.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**
- Omnisat Micro Surround Sensitivity: **81.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Uni-Theater left (purple trace), S10 subwoofer (blue trace), Uni-Theater center channel (green trace), and Omnisat Micro 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. Please note that any loudspeaker with such

an extremely broad dispersion pattern would be expected to produce a somewhat top-tilted-down response curve using our standard tests.

The Uni-Theater left's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +3.63/-13.23 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 100 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 93 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.52 ohms at 347 Hz and a phase angle of -39.33 degrees at 213 Hz.

The Uni-Theater center's listening-window response measures +5.04/-11.43 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +4.89/-12.32 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 97 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 90 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.34 ohms at 351 Hz and a phase angle of -40.59 degrees at 213 Hz.

The Omnisat Micro's listening-window response measures +2.71/-4.88 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 136 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 123 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.41 ohms at 403 Hz and a phase angle of -64.18 degrees at 213 Hz.

The S10's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 27 Hz and the -6dB point is at 25 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 110 Hz with the Filter switch set to off. —MJP

I found the speakers to be easy to set up and blissfully unfussy about placement details. I used my Pioneer DV-45A player, Sunfire Theater Grand III pre/pro, and Ayre V-6x power amp for all of my Uni-Theater listening sessions. Omnisat Micros handled the surround duties, and the Omni S10 subwoofer supplied stellar low-end support for the entire ensemble. It's worth noting that you can even mount the Omnisat Micros on your ceiling. Omnidirectional dispersion pays big dividends in this application; even if your couch is right up against the wall, a Uni-Theater or Omnisat Micro mounted directly overhead will produce spacious surround sound effects in a 6.1 system.

Unique Sounds

As I listened to Blue Man Group's *The Complex Rock Tour Live DVD-Video*, the front-to-back continuousness of the soundstage filling my large home theater was truly remarkable. I could pick out individual audience members' claps and cheers between the front Uni-Theater and the Micros, which were positioned way out to the

sides of my home theater. The scale of the experience, the sense of being in a large arena, was surprisingly realistic. It's all the more amazing when you stop and realize that this holographic sound was coming from just three speaker cabinets. Mind you, the Uni-Theater was no slouch on its own; the sense of spatial depth and height created a completely three-dimensional stage for the blue guys' percussion-heavy music. The speaker's imaging stability was exceptional; when I moved side to side, or even in close, the Uni-Theater's sound was consistent.

Reality Check

Critical listeners may be aware that the Mirages' imaging focus isn't as sharply defined as the better direct-radiating box speakers, but I consider the trade-offs worthwhile in light of the gains in spaciousness and overall sound quality. Most poseur systems squash dynamics, but the Mirages didn't seem to mind being cranked-up. They certainly never flinched from their duties during the most treacherous battle scenes populating

HIGHLIGHTS

- Huge, room-filling sound
- High spouse-acceptance factor
- Seriously potent subwoofer for the price

the *Alamo* DVD. Visceral impact, which the S10 subwoofer dished out in abundance, was excellent.

CDs weren't as satisfying in stereo—the Uni-Theater's 3-foot-wide image was a little cramped for comfort—so I listened to CDs in Dolby Pro Logic II and never went back. The Mirages can rock-out with gusto; Marvin Gaye's tunes of spiritual elation and sexual healing got my mojo workin'.

I'm happy to report that Mirage has figured out how to let us have it both ways: We can have great-looking, totally lifestyle-friendly speakers that don't sound like lifestyle speakers. Who knows: With any luck, Mirage will have another runaway success on their hands. 📻



MIRAGE UNI-THEATER SPEAKER SYSTEM					OVERALL RATING
Build Quality	Value	Features	Performance	Ergonomics	91
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The Uni's extruded aluminum cabinet looks and feels high-end → A gorgeous glass table stand is included → Hunky subwoofer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → This under-\$2K system's looks and sounds wowed Steve → Innovative engineering usually costs a lot more → One of the best \$500 subs I've heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Pioneering omnidirectional design → Room-tuning boundary-compensation circuit → FTCrated 200-watt subwoofer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Omnidirectional designs belt out a huge sound! → Uninhibited dynamics → The Omnisat Micro doesn't sound micro 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Wall- or table-mount the Uni-Theater → Ceiling mounting is an option → Ergonomically challenging speaker wire hook-up 	
90	90	92	93	85	

General information

Uni-Theater Speaker, \$999 → Omnisat Micro, \$180 → Omni S10 Subwoofer, \$500 → Mirage, (416) 321-1800, www.miragespeakers.com → Dealer Locator Code MRG

Mirage's evolving omnipolar series continues to astound, and its unheralded placement versatility may be the deal clincher for some buyers.