

AS SEEN IN

THE HOME Theater

July 2001

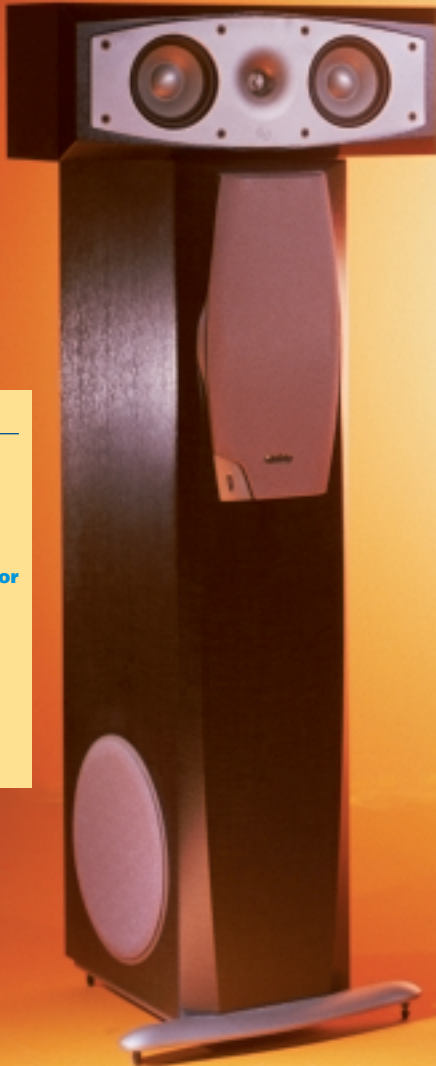
Infinity's Interlude speaker system offers top-shelf technology at a nice price.

by Chris Lewis

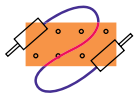
When Technology Comes Tricklin' Down

Inside Gear Guide:

- **Infinity Interlude Speaker System**
- **Sony KP-57XBR10W 57-Inch Rear-Projection HD Monitor**
- **RCA DWD490RE UltimateTV DBS Receiver**
- **Vienna Acoustics Mozart Speaker System**



Here we go again. You may remember my lamentations last month in the opening of the DTV Face Off about the cliché phrase “bridge technology,” a worn-out phrase that I shudder to use, given its widespread misuse and questionable origins. Of course, I then proceed to use it anyway. Well, it’s déjà vu all over again, as it seems to me that the proper theme for an introduction to Infinity’s entry-level Interlude speaker line must be “trickle-down technology,” another hackneyed phrase that proves to be quite accurate in the



right context. And these particular Infinity speakers fit the bill, given that one of their most notable features is their use of some of the same top-shelf technologies that I went on about in my review of the flagship Prelude MTS line back in November 2000.

Now, I know some of you out there have a mental block against products from big companies, and Harman International—the company that owns Infinity (as well as Revel, Madrigal, Proceed, Mark Levinson, Lexicon, and some other first-rate names)—is a big one. Still, it's hard to deny the advantages that being a part of a large company provides in terms of research, resources, and so on. Truth be told, Infinity remains

very independent within the Harman fold—you could think of them as a small company within a large company. The trickle-down comes from the top of the Infinity line, not elsewhere. Outside the listening room, I root for the little guy as much as anybody. Inside the listening room, when I sit down to evaluate a speaker, I couldn't care less where it comes from, who makes it, what color it is, or just about anything else. The only thing I care about is what it sounds like.

These trickle-down technologies can be summed up with, well, several letters—C.M.M.D. and R.A.B.O.S. Since you all read my work religiously (ha!), I won't go into quite the detail on each that I did in the Prelude review, but the highlights bear retelling.

but they lack the inherent damping and stiffness of ceramics. Ceramics provide the damping and extra stiffness, but they're brittle and can't stand up to much abuse on their own. Put the two together, and you've got a full driver package that sounds as good as it measures. You may remember that the Preludes were remarkable in both respects, and these Interludes are impressive, as well. Needless to say, these aren't cheap drivers to produce.

Drivers, in general, are the most expensive part of any speaker: The more advanced they are, the more they cost. While we might expect this type of quality in the more-expensive Preludes, it's a major bonus for products in the Interludes' price range, many of which still use polymers and other cheaper driver materials.

The R.A.B.O.S. (Room Adaptive Bass Optimization System) consists of a parametric equalizer for the subwoofer section that allows you to make level, frequency, and bandwidth adjustments to optimize low-frequency output for your listening environment. As we all know, your room is the biggest determining factor of a speaker's performance, and its effect on the lower frequencies is the most profound. Three dials on the back plate of each speaker (corresponding to the three adjustments I mentioned) allow you to make corrections in a couple of different ways. One option is to make primary changes by adjusting level and frequency by ear (you'd need a keen ear to make bandwidth adjustments in this manner). You can also get the R.A.B.O.S. kit (an extra \$60 with the Interludes),

A. The IL10 is a direct-radiating bookshelf speaker that performs very well with music and solidly with movies.

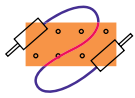
B. The IL25c center channel managed to avoid many of the problems associated with a horizontal alignment and two active drivers.

C. Thanks to the R.A.B.O.S. system, you can tailor the IL50's bass output to match your particular tastes.

C.M.M.D. (Ceramic Metal Matrix Diaphragm) drivers are the heart of all Infinity speakers, regardless of their cost.

As the name suggests, this is a hybrid driver construction that uses an aluminum core encased in an outer layer of the ceramic material alumina, utilizing the beneficial properties of each while also accounting for each material's shortcomings. Metals are dense and strong,





which includes a test CD, an SPL meter calibrated for low frequencies, a measurement template, and a frequency-curve tool Infinity calls the “Q finder”—all of which are used to plot your room’s frequency response and make the necessary adjustments. You can either do the calculations yourself or input your data on the R.A.B.O.S. Online page of Infinity’s Website, where they will do the computations for you.

As I said in the Prelude review, R.A.B.O.S.’s slick factor is superseded only by its effectiveness. Once again, this kind of technology in an entry-level line is a serious perk.

There are multiple models of each speaker type (front, center, surround) in the Interlude line. For this review, I went for the least expensive of each: the IL50 powered towers (\$1,800/pair), the IL25c center channel (\$300), and the IL10 surrounds (\$400/pair), each of which uses C.M.M.D. drivers from top to bottom. The IL50 is a powered tower that has a 1-inch tweeter, a 6.5-inch midbass, a 10-inch sub, a 250-watt internal sub amp, and the aforementioned

R.A.B.O.S. with controls at the rear. The back panel also sports a line-level sub input and output, speaker-level inputs, and a fixed low-pass-filter switch. A main

level control for the sub is found on the front of the speaker.

The horizontally aligned IL25c has dual 5.25-inch midbass drivers and a 1-inch tweeter in a D’Appolito array, while the direct-radiating IL10 has a single 6.5-inch midbass driver and a 1-inch tweeter.

The IL50 measures 42 inches high by 8.75 wide by 14.5 deep and weighs 60 pounds; the IL25c is 7.5 high by 20.5 wide by 7.5 deep and weighs 20 pounds; and the IL10 is 15.625 high by 8.5 wide by 11.5 deep and weighs 18 pounds. Each model’s beveled front baffles are constructed of 1.5-inch MDF and are available with a natural maple, natural cherry, or onyx anigre vinyl finish. All of the drivers are magnetically shielded, and the grilles are available in a variety of colors.

First, I tested the Interludes with two-channel material, and I found that the IL50s performed much as I expected they would with music—quick and tight in the midrange, accurate throughout, and forgiving of harsher material on the top end without sounding soft or laid-back. Good drivers can do good things,

no matter what the speaker costs. Out of the box, the bass was big and boomy—far too boomy for my taste—but there’s plenty here for those who like their walls to rattle. I quickly adjusted the main level control on the front baffle and then had a colleague adjust the equalizer’s level and frequency controls while I sat in the listening position. The effect was considerable. The subs tightened right up without sacrificing much in the way of punch or impact. The transition from sub to midrange was also relatively smooth, something that’s never a given with any full-range speaker, especially a powered tower. Obviously, I can’t tell you that the IL50s were as spectacular from top to bottom as the Preludes,

but I can tell you that these are easily among the best speakers I’ve heard in this price range.

The IL10s and IL25c joined the IL50s for the multichannel-music demo, which began with the Sony SCD-CE775 SACD player that I had recently acquired (see the review in this issue). Granted, SACD is an outstanding medium; however, formats, sources, et al, can’t make bad speakers sound

good—they simply unveil what a system is capable of. The SACD demo spoke volumes about what these speakers can do. The fact that I could hear the differences in

the SACD material clearly proved that this system is significantly detailed, revealing, and (as I mentioned before) highly accurate. My ears told me initially—and the measurements later confirmed—that you’ll be hard-pressed to find more-accurate speakers at this price. The IL10 is a musical little bugger in its own right, so those of you who may write this speaker off as a surround because it’s not bi-/dipolar shouldn’t. What little compromise the IL10s make with soundtracks, they make up for tenfold with music (where direct-radiators hold a significant advantage), and they’d make a great little stereo pair for the bedroom, kitchen, etc. You don’t run across drivers this good very often in a bookshelf model.

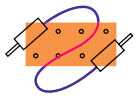
The Interludes were not quite as impressive with soundtracks as they were with music, but I’d still



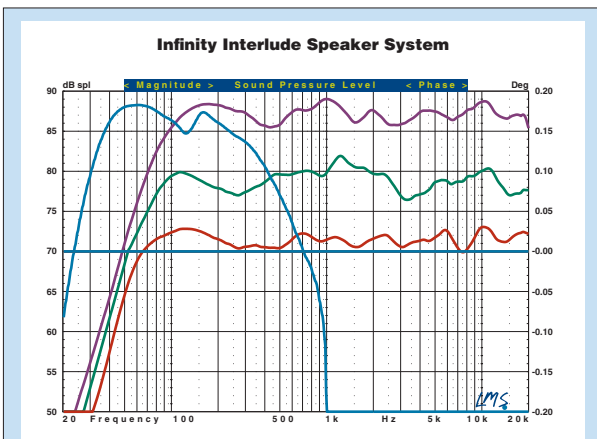
D. The IL50’s back panel offers the standard array of subwoofer controls, as well as the level, frequency, and bandwidth adjustments that make up the R.A.B.O.S. system.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Top-quality C.M.M.D. drivers
- Highly effective room-correction system
- Excellent performance for the price



put them at the top of their class in this department (which tells you just how good they sound with music). The IL25c is a nice little center and is certainly par for the course in terms of performance, but there's only so much a speaker of this size can do when so much emphasis is being placed on it. Voicing was dynamic and intelligible; however, like virtually every model its size, the IL25c displayed some boxiness and hollowness on



HT Labs Measures: Infinity Interlude Speaker System

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the IL50 L/R (purple trace) and its built-in subwoofer (blue trace), the IL25c center channel (green trace), and the IL10 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.

On-axis response of the IL50 measures +1.50/-2.03 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 92 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 76 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 5.40 ohms at 15.79 kHz and a phase angle of -66.24 degrees at 4.74 kHz. Sensitivity averages 87.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

On-axis response of the IL25c measures +1.92/-3.56 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and (+/-15 degree) horizontal responses measures +1.44/-4.02 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 79 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 66 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 5.33 ohms at 17.87 kHz and a phase angle of -53.56 degrees at 5.65 kHz. Sensitivity averages 89.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

On-axis response of the IL10 measures +1.49/-1.61 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 59 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 52 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 5.60 ohms at 188 Hz and a phase angle of -65.50 degrees at 5.65 kHz. Sensitivity averages 86.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

Close-miked response of the IL50's built-in sub, normalized to the average level from 40 to 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 37 Hz and the -6dB point is at 33 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 227 Hz with the low-pass filter set to zero.—AJ

occasion. The IL25c does avoid many of the problems associated with a horizontal alignment and two active drivers (cancellations, etc.), and its off-axis response was better than many at this stature.

The IL10s handled rear effects far more competently than most inexpensive bookshelf models. What they lacked in diffusion, they made up for in accuracy and quick attack. With properly mixed soundtracks, I don't think you'll find yourself pining away for dipoles. The soundfield was consistent all around, with very few holes. If you're concerned about it, those of you with seven-channel setups could add a pair of dipoles on the side, move the IL10s to the rear (for soundtracks), and have the best of both worlds in terms of direct and diffuse radiation.

With soundtracks, the IL50s continued to impress. The midrange and tweeter left little to be desired, and R.A.B.O.S. successfully handled the few aspects of the bass that I didn't like initially. I still had the kit from the Prelude review, so I went ahead and put the towers through their paces. Naturally, I found that the frequency-response results were very similar to those of the Preludes. Our room's noticeable spike at 49 hertz was the main concern, and I was able to tame this for the most part. Remember that this is an attenuation-only filter, which essentially means that it goes after spikes, not dips. Equalizers are usually unsuccessful with dips anyway, and this is the type of fill-in trickery that has given equalizers a bad name. As they did with music, the IL50s' subs showed a wide range of output options for soundtracks. You can have it big and boomy, tight and

quick, or anywhere in between. I'll reiterate that the tight-and-quick option with these subs doesn't take that much away from the physical impact that people like so much with soundtracks. If you ask me, physical impact has more to do with accuracy than it does with raw power. Sure, big, mushy bass may rattle the walls more. Without definition, though, where's the real physical engagement and believability? The bottom line is, the IL50s should have you covered, no matter what your taste may be.

Here's another bottom line: If you're looking for speakers in this price range, you're cheating yourself if you don't at least give the Interludes a listen. Even the least expensive Interlude system, which is what I reviewed here, is easily at the top of its class. Frankly, I've heard plenty of speakers that cost a lot more and don't offer this type of driver and design quality, this degree of control, and (most importantly) this level of sonic performance. I never

IL50 Tower Speaker	\$1,300/pair
IL25c Center-Channel Speaker	\$300
IL10 Bookshelf Speaker	\$400/pair

Infinity Systems
(800) 553-3332
www.infinitysystems.com
Dealer Locator Code IFY

endorse a particular speaker or system for all circumstances, but I'll tell you this—at this price, you simply can't go wrong with these speakers. 🎧

