

The Sound of Style

Three surround speaker packages bound to please both eyes and ears

BY AL GRIFFIN

Unlike oxygen, food, or water, surround sound isn't necessary for survival. But if you recently upgraded to a slim, big-screen HDTV, you're probably feeling a need to update the audio part of your system with something equally tasty. Home theater used to mean huge tower speakers or chunky satellites paired with subwoofers that took up as many cubic feet as an SUV's gas tank. But a new trend in speaker design has yielded a flock of systems that match the trim new video displays.

We pulled together a group of three sleek, stylish packages priced between \$2,000 and \$2,500: the Infinity Total Solutions TSS-4000 (\$2,394), Mirage's Omnisat V2 series (\$2,400), and Polk Audio's RM30 (\$2,080). In addition to stylin' looks, these systems can be installed in a number of configurations. And each comes with hardware for wall-mounting the satellite speakers or placing them on bookshelves or stands. So let's fire up the plasma and get down to business. ▶

*For the lab report on these three systems, go to the **S&V** Web site.*

PHOTOS BY TONY CORDOZA

TSS-4000

One technique speaker makers are using to slim down their offerings is to switch to rigid aluminum cabinets that can be shaped into trim profiles. With its gleaming all-metal satellites and subwoofer, Infinity's Total Solutions TSS-4000 rig would fit right into a futuristic, robot-assisted home theater. The system I tested consists of three matched TSS-SAT4000 satellites for the front left/right and center channels, a pair of smaller TSS-SAT1100 sats for the surrounds, and the TSS-SUB750 subwoofer. Each satellite comes with a base for shelf or stand mounting plus a sturdy metal wall bracket that swivels the speaker up to 30° off-center. Infinity also offers sturdy aluminum stands that make a sweet match for both the 4000s and the 1100s (\$279 each and \$179 a pair, respectively).



SETUP

I placed the left/right TSS-4000s alongside my plasma TV stand about 3 feet out from the front wall and the center speaker on a shelf directly beneath the TV. The sub went into the front corner of my room. I particularly appreciated the TSS-1100's tall stands, which positioned the speakers a foot or two above my seated ear level — a good elevation for surround speakers. Slim speakers tend to have limited bass, so I set my processor for a fairly high, 120-Hz low-pass setting to filter the low frequencies out of the main channels and pass them to the subwoofer.

MUSIC PERFORMANCE

Turning first to trusted CDs to get a grip on the Infinity system's stereo performance, I spun the jazzy "Outlaws" from *Bill Frisell*, *Dave Holland*, and *Elvin Jones*. I was quickly impressed by the SUB750's performance. Dave Holland's walking acoustic-bass lines came across as full and authoritative, hitting all the low notes without sounding boomy. The upper bass notes were slightly thin, but I got a good sense overall of the instrument's heft and body. Listening next to The Shins' "Pink Bullets," I found the vocals clear and sibilants neither harsh nor overemphasized. And when the harmonica solo kicked in, it had a balanced tone, at once brassy and sweet.

I hadn't heard much music from Rammstein — a German band that can best be described as Metallica meets the Third Reich in the Matrix — but when a friend told me that the singer sets himself on fire during concerts, I had to check out their new DVD, *Live aus Berlin*. Playing the Dolby Digital 5.1 mix of the anthemic "Rammstein," the Infinity rig delivered an excellent sense of arena-crowd ambience. I felt as if I was right there in Berlin and could follow the path of the fans' whistles and howls behind me. The singer's guttural growling sounded full and clear through the center speaker. And the system didn't flinch at loud volumes.

Cranked up, the dynamic

impact of the drums was nothing short of thunderous, with snare hits sounding slamming and crisp, and the kick drum low and tight. Oh, yeah — the guy did sing with his jacket on fire.

MOVIE PERFORMANCE

Turning to a scene in *I, Robot* where Detective Del Spooner (Will Smith) is chased through an underground tunnel by a fleet of nasty robots, I had another opportunity to hear the Infinity system shine in surround. As the escaping detective ran his vehicle up against

fast facts

- **TSS-SAT4000/CENTER4000 front speakers** ¾-in tweeter, two 3½-in midranges, four 3½-in woofers; SAT4000, 23 in high, CENTER4000, 23 in wide
- **TSS-SAT1100 surround** ¾-in tweeter, two 3½-in midranges; 9¼ in high
- **TSS-SUB750 subwoofer** 10-in driver; 150-watt amp; crossover bypass; 10¾ x 16¾ x 15¾ in, 33 lbs
- Aluminum cabinets and finish
- \$2,394
- infinitysystems.com, 516-674-4463

the sides of the tunnel, spattering glass and robot parts along the way, the sats conveyed a vivid sonic image of ricocheting debris. It was actually one of the most impressive surround sound performances I've heard in my room. And when the bass kicked in, I felt it in my bones. Dialogue coming from the center speaker, meanwhile, was consistently clear and natural, even at off-center seats on my couch.

BOTTOM LINE

With its clean, all-metal looks, slim profile, and slamming performance, Infinity's TSS-4000 system is an excellent option for any home theater. But its versatile wall-mounting options make it an especially ideal solution for rooms where floor space is at a premium. Even after I took them down, the Infinity speakers' great looks and sound left a lasting impression.