

Usher Audio Dancer CP-8571 II Loudspeaker

Chris Martens

A high-end speaker from Taiwan? Our reviewer says it's the real deal.



Usher's three-way Dancer CP-8571 II is a dead-serious high-end speaker that offers innovative design, Rolex-like construction, exceptionally high-performance drivers, and—most importantly—sound so good that it easily competes with American and European speakers selling for thousands more.

Founded in 1972, Usher Audio Technology has become well-known throughout Asia for its speakers and high-quality OEM driver units. Usher drivers feature a proprietary technology called Symme-Motion, which is said to give the company's speakers highly symmetrical long-throw excursion capabilities and the ability to play with low distortion at both high- and low-output levels. Usher's president, Lien-Shui Tsai, hired Dr. Joseph D'Appolito as product design and development collaborator. Tsai defines the overall speaker configuration, chooses drive units, and oversees enclosure design, while D'Appolito takes responsibility for crossover design and speaker voicing. This melding of the minds yields products with a magical sound.

The Dancer is highly focused, thanks largely to its Beryllium tweeter that supplies gobs of high-frequency and upper-midrange detail without a trace of edge or

glare. Similarly, the speaker's 7" mid/woofer can resolve extremely fine textures and nuances, yet offers enough power to capture explosive transients and enough reach to handle upper-bass frequencies with authority. I wouldn't have thought a 7" driver could sound so agile and versatile, but this one tracks complex waveforms more faithfully than most. Finally, the Dancer's low-resonance/low-diffraction baffle plates contribute to the sense of focus by allowing listeners to hear exactly what the drive units have to say.

On recordings such as Philip Hii's acoustic-guitar transcription of the Chopin *Nocturnes* [GSP] that capture natural hall ambience, air, and fine details, the Usher presents delicate overtones, subtle instrumental resonances, and small finger and string sounds so realistically that you would swear the performer was standing directly across the room. On closely miked recordings like Patricia Barber's recent Blue Note CDs, the Usher has a deliciously intimate, personal quality; musical details just *appear* as a natural and balanced part of the performance. But the Ushers also have sufficient resolving power to handle large-scale orchestral works, remaining composed even when orchestration becomes dense and complicated (on Mahler symphonies, for example). Together, these characteris-

The Dancer, Inside and Out

Built like a bank vault, the CP-8571 II is a large floorstander with a curved-wall enclosure and gorgeous satin walnut finish. According to Tsai, the enclosure is "built on a cast-iron base for maximum stability" and has heavily braced 1"-thick cabinet walls with "a layer of high-mass damping material applied to most internal surfaces." The front baffle is made from a rigid MDF laminate several inches thick, and the enclosure has three chambers: at the bottom, a mass-loading chamber with front-facing access hatch; in the middle, a large, partially lead-lined ported woofer chamber; and at the top, a separately ported tweeter-mid/woofer enclosure. The Dancer is bolted to a plinth. Large brass floor spikes couple the speaker to the floor.

CM

Robert Harley Comments

I had the opportunity to hear the Dancer at Chris Martens' house one evening, and though Chris expressed to me his overall enthusiasm for the Dancer, I had not read his review as of this writing.

I was taken aback by the Dancer's size, shape, and build quality—I wasn't expecting this much from a \$6900 loudspeaker, which would be appropriate in a much more expensive product.

I was similarly impressed by the Dancer's specific sonic attributes as well as its overall musicality. For me, the Dancer's most impressive characteristic was its sense of transparency through the midband. There was the distinct impression of a lack of veiling between the musicians and me, which fostered a remarkable sense of tangibility without sounding forward or forced. Images had a wonderful presence and palpability that made it easy to forget the playback system. This transparency contributed to the sense of depth and "see-through" quality that allowed low-level sounds at the back of the soundstage to sound clear and distinct.

I also enjoyed the Dancer's portrayal of space; images were tight and focused, and surrounded by space and air that was detached from the image. Some speakers tend to fuse the surrounding acoustic with the image, diminishing the impression of an instrument or voice in a hall. I noticed the Dancer's terrific soundstaging, particularly on the solo voice passage in Rutter's *Requiem* [Reference Recordings], a recording I've heard on dozens of loudspeakers.

Tonally, the Dancer had a neutral overall balance and deep bass extension, coupled with a treble that was clean and free from hash. Although the Dancer had good dynamic impact, I thought that the speaker wasn't as dynamically coherent across the frequency range as I'm accustomed to hearing. That is, the bass didn't have quite the same sense of quickness and snap as the rest of the spectrum.

Overall, the Dancer delivered an amazing level of performance for the price. In fact, it's a stone-cold bargain.

tics allow you to savor fine details in recordings much like the way a magnifying glass lets you appreciate small textures you can't ordinarily see in everyday objects. The only downside is, once you grow accustomed to the Dancer, most other speakers sound either out-of-focus or etched and exaggerated.

The Usher is among the most holographic speakers you could hope to hear, producing images that float free from its surfaces. On a first-rate disc like the Richter/Munch/Boston reading of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 [JVC XRCD], it precisely delineates the onstage positions of the orchestra sections as well as interactions between the orchestra and the venue's acoustics. On smaller-scale recordings, the Dancer also presents spatial and textural cues that suggest the sizes and shapes of instruments. The only drawback is that the Dancer is not terribly tolerant of poorly mixed recordings. So if an engineer pans certain instruments into one channel, the three-dimensionality of the soundstage may collapse, leaving instruments "trapped" inside their assigned speaker. Yet under normal circumstances, the Dancer sounds highly three-dimensional—you may want to place the speakers


far apart in order to enjoy the huge, deep, realistic soundstage they can produce.

The Dancer is so free of dynamic constriction that when you first hear it, you may think that the audio signal has been run through an expander. But the longer you listen, the more the big, full-bodied dynamics seem expressive and to scale. What's more, the powerful dynamics carry right on down into the bass region, which extends to the upper-20Hz range. As a visiting colleague put it, "It's hard to believe the bass Usher gets from a single 8" woofer. If you told me it was using dual 10" woofers, I'd believe you." Granted, when you push the Dancer *very* hard, you might hear faint strain—a subtle "shouting" quality—from the 7" mid/woofer. But on the whole, the Usher's dynamic qualities are exemplary.

There are only a few nits to pick. While driver integration is very good, there remains an ever-so-slight qualitative difference between the sound of the Beryllium tweeter and 7" mid/bass driver. To be fair, this difference is much less noticeable than, say, the disparity between the ribbon tweeter and non-ribbon midrange driver in Magnepans. There is also a slightly strained "shouting" quality when you push the 7"

midrange driver to very high levels (a problem I also hear, and to about the same degree, in Wilson's costlier Watt/Puppy speaker system).

While I do not find the Dancer's mid and low bass to be underdamped, some listeners might, although damping materials can be added to the mass-loading chamber to further tighten the bass. Finally, low-frequency aficionados might wish for a dab of bass reinforcement to add weight to the half-octave between 20-30Hz.

Usher's Dancer CP-8571 II is a wonderfully capable speaker that gives you nearly top-tier performance at a not-too-outlandish price. If you've dreamed of owning speakers like Wilson Audio's \$22,400 Watt/Puppies or \$11,700 Sophias, but can't fit them into the budget, the great news is that the Dancer puts you in that performance range for a much more manageable \$7735—a price/performance "math" that works for me. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Driver complement: 1" tweeter, 7" mid/bass, 8" woofer

Frequency response: 30Hz–30 kHz, +/-3dB

Sensitivity: 87dB

Impedance: Eight ohms nominal

Recommended amplifier power: 100 watts

Dimensions: 12.6" x 47.5" x 29.5"

Weight: 114 lbs.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Linn Sondek LP12 turntable/Ittok LVII arm; Shelter 501 MkII cartridge; Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD/CD player and kW500 integrated amplifier; PNF Audio Symphony and Icon speaker and interconnect cables; RPG acoustic treatment panels; RGPC 1200S Power Conditioner

DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION

THEE HIGH END

6923 Inwood Road
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(214) 704-6083
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Price: \$6900–\$7735, depending on baffle finish