

Castle Compact CC3 system

Small but perfectly formed surround sound

Quality build and a fine sound are hallmarks of a space-saving package, says Tony Williams

Castle's new speaker system can be bought as a traditional 5.1-channel package – a centre speaker, four satellites and an active subwoofer – or as individual components, allowing 6.1 or even 7.1 systems to be built. As standard the 5.1 set costs £1000, while the satellites can be bought for just under £230 a pair, the centre for £180 and the active subwoofer, called the Compact Cube, for a few pence shy of £400.

The Compact Satellites stand just 20cm tall, and are designed to be used close to, or on, walls, this positioning aided by a relatively shallow 16cm depth, a weight of just 2.3kg and the fact that this is a sealed-box design. Thus they exhibit none of the problems commonly associated with ported designs, which can boom when too close to the wall, or lack bass in free space.

The Compact Satellites are designed to give a frequency response of 80Hz-40kHz when used close to a wall, and have a stable 8ohm impedance to make them easy to drive. They're suitable for amps of 15-70W, which makes them well suited to the majority of AV receivers.

The drive units here are a 20mm soft dome tweeter and a 11cm glass-fibre-cone mid/bass driver, and these are shared with the Compact Centre LCR speaker.



The Castle package: centre, subwoofer and compact satellite speakers

In fact, this speaker uses two of the mid/bass units in the traditional design for speakers of this type, yet is very compact at just 32cm wide and 14cm tall.

Completing the system is the Compact Cube subwoofer. It's a relatively hefty (19kg) unit, around 35cm on each side, and houses a 25cm paper cone drive unit, forward-firing and tuned with a downward-venting port, driven by a 150W internal amp.

Performance

From the outset it was clear that this system can sound much bigger than those tiny main enclosures would suggest. If the idea was to offer full-scale surround sound without filling the listening room with huge loudspeakers, it delivers.

With Benoît Jacquot's 2002 film of Puccini's *Tosca* the Castles burst into life from the first notes, conveying the drama of the opera with both transparency and power. Most of all I was taken with the sense of space and ambience in the sound, along with the speakers' ability to reveal the character of performers' voices.

The system pulled off the same trick with a film of a rather different genre, powering out Rob Marshall's *Chicago*. Even when used with relatively modest playback and amplification, the Castle speakers put out a big, brash and hugely enjoyable sound. Quite apart from the striking visuals, this disc has a remarkable DTS soundtrack of subtlety and fabulous dynamics, and the Castle speakers make a very fine job

CASTLE COMPACT CC3

Type 5.1 channel speakers

Price £1000

Drive units 20mm soft dome tweeter, 11cm glass fibre mid/bass; 25cm paper cone woofer (Cube)

Cube amplifier 150W

Cube connections Stereo speaker terminals/phones

Cube subwoofer controls Crossover, level, phase

Dimensions (W x H x D)

20 x 14 x 16cm (satellites);

14 x 32 x 16cm (centre);

35 x 35 x 36cm (cube)

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indeed of the big production numbers, right from the opening 'And all that jazz'.

Given Castle's heritage, it should come as no surprise that these speakers are also highly accomplished when playing music without pictures, as was clear when multichannel SACD and DVD-Audio discs, not to mention conventional CDs, were played through them.

This is by no means the least expensive system of its kind, but it more than justifies its cost with user appeal and all-round ability. In fact, this is a very fine speaker package indeed. 🎧