

## Infinity Cascade

Chris Martens

### 5.1-Channel Speaker System

# Sculpture for the Eyes and Ears

**N**othing excites dyed-in-the-wool audio folks more than new technologies, and so I had an almost Pavlovian response to Infinity's Cascade-series speakers, which feature innovative MRS (Maximum Radiating Surface) drive units. What's the big deal with MRS drivers? Well, for starters they neither look nor behave quite like traditional piston-type drivers.

First, MRS drivers are rectangular—not round—and feature light, stiff CMMD Ceramic Metal Matrix diaphragms whose front surfaces are ribbed and indented for improved rigidity. The rectangular shape means the drivers disperse well across their narrow axes, yet still have sufficient surface area to produce authoritative dynamics. Second, side-by-side pairs of oblong voice

**Infinity's rectangular MRS drivers disperse well across their narrow axes yet have sufficient surface area to produce authoritative dynamics.**

coils power the MRS drivers, supporting them over their entire operating area. The upshot is a mid-bass driver that, in essence, offers the lightning fast transient speed and resolution of a good tweeter, yet also has plenty of dynamic punch and the ability to handle fairly low frequencies.

Our comparatively deluxe Cascade test system consisted of a pair of Model Nine two-way, three-driver floorstanders, a Model Three C center channel, a pair of Model Seven floorstanders (essentially two-driver versions of the Model Nine), and a 300-watt Model Twelve powered subwoofer. The Twelve, like all higher-end Infinity subs, features the firm's RABOS (Room Adaptive Bass Optimization System) EQ system, which helps the woofer achieve clearer, smoother in-room bass response. Add everything up, and the system comes in at \$5394.

If, like me, you view speakers as sculptural objects, then you should know these beauties look like speaker systems that, say, Calder might have designed.

The Cascades are, hands down, the most visually appealing surround speakers I've ever tested, and more than a few first-time viewers have reacted to



**Model Nine Floorstanders**

AUDIO REVIEW

them with long, low wolf-whistles of appreciation.

From the outset, the Cascades impress with two characteristics: stunning clarity and terrific surround sound imaging. You'll

Sound SACD Sampler, enjoying in particular the "Marche au supplice" (March to the Scaffold) movement from the Järvi/ Cincinnati performance of the Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*. The

piece that sounds fabulous when it's cleanly reproduced, but that turns into mush through many speaker systems. Through the Cascades, however, the voices of individual instruments remained



### Model Three C Center Channel

notice the speaker's clarity every time you put on music recordings or soundtracks that are rich in textural details, or that combine multiple complex voices or sound effects. I tried Telarc's *The Absolute*

movement combines the dark humor of low brass and string passages set against low percussion, with a recurrent march theme featuring high brass outbursts punctuated by tympani playing a march-time beat. It's the kind of

clear, pure and distinct—even when the going got thick and the orchestration became complex. These speakers can disentangle the contents of complex mixes with the greatest of ease. Imaging and soundstaging were excellent, too,

**"The Cascades are, hands down, the most visually appealing surround speakers I've ever tested..."**

**"From the outset, the Cascades impress with two characteristics: stunning clarity and terrific surround sound imaging."**

**"On movie soundtracks, the Cascade system's imaging came into its own, creating a 360 degree surround sound field that placed listeners in the center of the action."**

**"...Infinity's Cascade system is visually stunning, and offers superb clarity and imaging. Dynamic contrasts are beautifully reproduced, too."**

Model Twelve Subwoofer



exhibiting a certain amount of upper mid-range/lower treble prominence and an apparent response dip between the lower midrange and upper bass. After much experimentation with subwoofer crossover frequencies and level settings I eventually achieved fairly balanced sound, but the system never did match the easygoing, natural warmth that, say, the Gallo Reference A/V system so effortlessly conveys.

Bass from the system's Model Twelve subwoofer was, after careful RABOS

with the Cascades presenting a wonderfully coherent and enveloping sound-in-the-round listening experience.

From the perspective of tonal balance, my one complaint would be that the Cascade system sounds a little too lightly balanced,

tuning, quite articulate and punchy. This woofer does better with pitch definition than it does with extremely low-frequency extension, and it is generally so clean that listeners may be tempted to push it too hard, leading to some momentary distortion. For best results in larger rooms, consider using two Model Twelves.

On movie soundtracks, the Cascade system's imaging came into its own, creating a 360 degree surround sound field that placed listeners in the center of the action.

Unlike most surround systems, this one can create the illusion of sounds coming from the sides of the room—as in *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, where car chase scenes sometimes provide first-person sounds of cars being struck from the side. I was also impressed by the Cascade system's ability to reveal dynamic contrasts. The trick is that the Cascades can play very loudly without apparent compression yet remain crystal clear at whisper levels—as in the mur-

mured conversation between Captain Aubrey and Dr. Maturin following the opening battle scene in *Master and Commander*.

Though not without minor imperfections, Infinity's Cascade system is visually stunning, and offers superb clarity and imaging. Dynamic contrasts are beautifully reproduced, too. If Infinity can find a way to give the Cascades a touch more bass extension and lower midrange warmth, this system will realize its full potential as a top-tier performer. **TPV**

### The Last Word



- Awesome clarity and surround sound imaging
- Excellent dynamic contrasts
- Good bass pitch definition
- RABOS subwoofer EQ really works



- Overly light tonal balance
- Sub and Cascade speakers could use more bass extension
- RABOS setup is complicated and time-consuming

### Specifications

#### Cascade Model Nine floorstanders (mains)

- Driver complement: One 1" CMMD dome tweeter, two 7.75" x 3.37" MRS mid-bass drivers
- Frequency response: 80Hz-20kHz ± 3dB
- Sensitivity: 87dB (1W/1m)
- Impedance: 8 ohms
- Recommended amplifier power: 10-150 Wpc
- Dimensions: 47" x 10.5" x 11.5"
- Weight: 28.2 lbs.

#### Cascade Model Three C center channel

As for Model Nine above, except for the following:

- Dimensions: 5.5" x 30.75" x 6"
- Weight: 18 lbs.

#### Cascade Model Seven floorstanders (surrounds)

- Driver complement: As for Model Nine, but with just one MRS mid-bass driver
- Frequency response: 100Hz-20kHz ± 3dB
- Sensitivity: 85dB (1W/1m)
- Impedance: 8 ohms
- Recommended amplifier power: 10-100 Wpc
- Dimensions: 47" x 10.5" x 11.5"
- Weight: 24.7 lbs.

#### Cascade Model Twelve powered sub

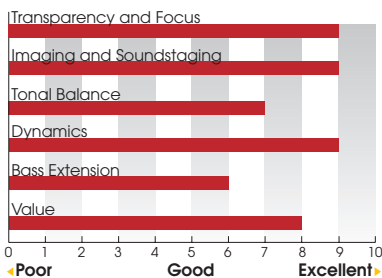
- Driver complement: One 10" MMD woofer, two 10" MMD passive radiators
- Integrated amplifier power: 300 Watts
- Dimensions: 20" x 15" x 13.87"
- Weight: 42 lbs.

- System Price: \$5394

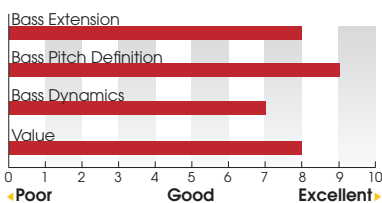
### Infinity Cascade 5.1-channel speaker system

(relative to comparably-priced surround speaker systems)

#### Main speakers and center channel




#### Subwoofer





**TECHNOLOGY • PERFORMANCE • DESIGN**

250 Crossways Park Drive, Woodbury, NY 11797 USA • 516.674.4INF • [www.infinitysystems.com](http://www.infinitysystems.com)

 A Harman International Company