



Infinity

Classia Series home theater speaker system

The bar for Infinity's speaker designs stands pretty high, for a couple of reasons. First, there's tradition. Infinity's history encompasses the imposing Servo-Static and Reference Standard Beta and Gamma models from Back When Giants Roamed the Earth (the 1970s and '80s — high-end audio's glory days). These were among the most sophisticated, capable, and expensive speakers then made. Second, there's affiliation. As one of the Harman International family of companies, Infinity has at its disposal some of the very best technical and human resources in the world.

Given all that, I was eager to put Infinity's new Classia Series to the test. The system that the company sent me included the C336 front left/right towers, a CC225 center-channel speaker, and a pair of C255ES surrounds — Janus-headed dual-two-way models that can be set for dipole, bipole, or monopole operation by means of a behind-the-grille switch. Rounding out the suite under test was Infinity's new PSW310W subwoofer, a 10-inch design with the nifty feature of a wireless con-

nection (although you still have to plug it into the wall to make it go "boom").

The Classias (Classiæ?) bear an obvious family resemblance to Infinity's still-current Gumby-browed, flat-panel-driven Cascade Series (reviewed in September 2006 and available on the **S&V** Web site). But the newer models are larger, being an inch or two wider and deeper, and several inches taller. They use conventional, round dynamic drivers, although with Infinity's usual high-tech seasonings — in this case, a laminated, metal/ceramic "CMMD" composite for both tweeter and woofer diaphragms, and a newly devised tweeter waveguide (a tiny horn, sorta) that's said to raise sensitivity for improved dynamic headroom and simplified crossover design.

Whatever its high-tech credentials, the Classia suite certainly looks, well, classy. **These are strikingly handsome speakers with an assertively contemporary design.** Infinity supplied the full system in gloss piano-black lacquer (real cherry veneer is also available). But the C336s' sharply raked tops precluded my habitual piling

up of CD and DVD cases, remote controls, and coffee cups into teetering towers of terror. What were they thinking?

SETUP

Run five speaker wires, and you're done with setting up the main channels. The PSW310W wireless subwoofer sports a little Wi-Fi-style stubby on its rear panel, and its deck-of-cards-sized transmitter has a stub of its own. The transmitter, which accepts a single signal cable from a receiver or preamp's subwoofer output, found the sub immediately. And once I switched the transmitting channel a couple of times, I experienced no interference on the audio system — or on my studio's Wi-Fi or cordless-phone systems.

MUSIC & MOVIE PERFORMANCE

I ran the C336s by themselves in stereo for starters, and I was quickly convinced of their full-range abilities. But I was less happy with their tonal balance where I initially placed them — close against the front wall and flanking my 52-inch Samsung TV. They sounded progressively better the further I moved them away from the wall; I ultimately wound up with nearly 4 feet between the wall's surface and the speakers' front baffles.

The C336s have a neutral sound, with

The Short Form

Snapshot

This system's eye-catching appearance promises — and delivers — precise performance, and it has a wireless sub to boot

Plus

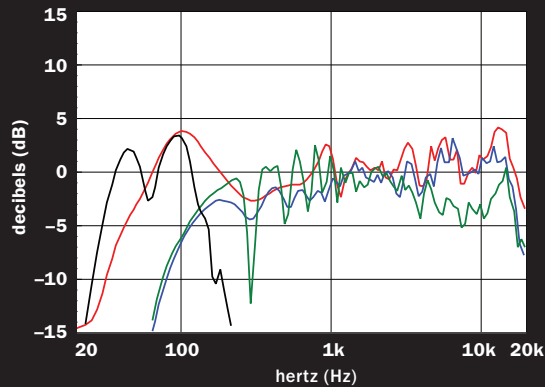
- ⚡ Controlled, detailed, transparent sound
- ⚡ Very good dipole/bipole/monopole surrounds
- ⚡ Wireless sub delivers the low-end goods

Minus

- ⚡ Need to move speakers well out from wall for best balance
- ⚡ Low sensitivity requires lots of amp power

Price \$4,094 (as tested)

Test Bench



L/R 51 Hz to 19.1 kHz ± 3.7 dB Surround 135 Hz to 16.1 kHz ± 6.7 dB
Center 156 Hz to 17 kHz ± 3.9 dB Subwoofer 32 Hz to 130 Hz ± 3.2 dB

The C336 tower's measurements indicate a wide floor bounce centered at 200 Hz, followed by narrow band irregularities beginning at 800 Hz. The CC225 center displays a similar character at higher frequencies, along with low-frequency response that falls quickly below 400 Hz. Overall,

the center speaker's bass-to-treble balance rises at slightly less than 1 dB per octave, with reasonably uniform directivity up to $\pm 30^\circ$. Both speakers' mid/tweeter arrays emitted fairly acute noises when given our ramped test signals at frequencies below their specified bass limit. The C255ES surround speaker displays the narrow bandwidth and irregularities typical of bidirectional speakers. The PSW310W subwoofer has response up to 400 Hz when its crossover is bypassed, making it useful for pairing with small satellites. The sub has relatively limited dynamic capability and low-frequency extension, but its sound-pressure abilities are uniformly distributed over its bandwidth. — Tom Nousaine

outstanding transparency in the mid to high frequencies. This yields the kind of treble that doesn't sound at all bright, yet is all there: clear, quick, and extended, and not in the least bit forward or sparkly. Voices were unfailingly even, balanced, and, well, neutral. Most speakers, even high-end ones, "romance" the vocal range with a subtle extra helping of warmth in the 100- to 200-Hz octave, but not the Classias. This occasionally made them sound a little "cool," but it also encouraged close, high-resolution listening — the kind of sound you hear in a good recording-studio control room.

Something analogous seemed to be happening in the bottom octaves, too, where the C336s delivered solid output to 40 Hz or so, but with less of that penultimate-octave response hump that enhances the impression of bass on so many speakers. The overall effect on material like Richard Thompson's "Hide It Away" (from *you? me? us?*) was intensely but effortlessly intimate, without the tinge of low-end bloat that this midbass-heavy track can often reveal.

On the multichannel front, Infinity's layout demonstrated some welcome abilities. The CC225 center speaker's tonal match

to the C336s was excellent — not perfect, but impressively close for a two-way horizontal design. For instance, comparisons of TV and FM announcers between single- and dual-speaker mono revealed only modest shifts of vocal weight and "hoo," even among baritone male voices. The tonal stability wasn't quite as good when the center speaker was listened to off-axis, but it was still well above average.

The C255ES surround speakers performed admirably in both dipole and bipole settings. They delivered plenty of clean level in my fairly large listening room — even in dipole mode — and made a tight enough tonal match to the C336s in bipole position to please even the most demanding multichannel-music maven.

Gone Baby Gone is one of those 2-hour films that demand full-bore, all-channels excellence for only about 90 seconds — but those 90 seconds are absolutely critical. The brief action interludes are all the more shocking and powerful for the dynamic range they carry, and the Infinity suite delivered this with heart-stopping conviction. For the rest of the film, I was entirely engrossed by its seamless tapestry of dialogue, street-scene and inte-

rior ambience, and subtle musical score. Is there any higher praise for a soundtrack or a sound system?

Last but not least is the PSW310W sub, which has an active 10-inch driver complemented by two 10-inch cones that serve as passive radiators (ports, more or less). It also incorporates Infinity's RABOS single-band parametric EQ, which can help to reduce a primary room resonance. (A kit that includes a test-tone CD and setup graphing tools is a \$60 option.)

The PSW310W didn't get much of a workout from *Gone Baby Gone*, so I turned to a handful of my favorite subwoofer torture tests from classics like *Godzilla* and *The War of the Worlds*. The verdict: impressive. The woof goes admirably low with substantial power, and it sounds clean and tight all the way down. The 'zilla footfalls lacked some of the wall-bending 20 Hz of my everyday sub (a 12-incher about twice the Infinity's price), but they had plenty of slam just the same. It's a solid sub — and did I mention that it's wireless?

BOTTOM LINE

With the Classia speakers, Infinity has managed to combine high sonic capabilities with striking appearance and respectable value. Visually, this system might not satisfy every taste (for the record, I dug them), but for those to whom its unconventional looks speak, it should appeal strongly. Better yet, they'll also enjoy sound that's just as striking. **S&V**

Key Features

C336 (\$1,798/pair)

:: 1-in tweeter; 4-in midrange; (3) 6½-in woofers; 48¾ in high; 56 lb

CC225 (\$499)

:: 1-in tweeter; (2) 5¼-in woofers; 31¾ in wide; 16 lb

C255ES (\$998/pair)

:: (2) 1-in tweeters; (2) 5¼-in woofers; 11¾ in high; 9 lb

PSW310W (\$799)

:: 10-in woofer; (2) 10-in passive radiators; 400-watt amplifier; 17½ x 15 x 14 in; 50 lb

INFINITYSYSTEMS.COM ::
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