

Mainstream MULTICHANNEL

Chris Martens

Definitive Mythos ST 5.1-Channel Speaker System

About a year ago Definitive Technology President Sandy Gross called me, sounding excited. “I wanted to tell you we’re working on a new kind of Super Tower speaker that will use a variation on those mid/bass drivers you liked so much in our ProCinema 1000 system. We’re going to call it the Mythos ST.”

The \$1649 ProCinema 1000 rig, which I reviewed in Issue 168, featured mid/bass drivers so sophisticated they would not have seemed out of place in costly high-end stereo speakers. I had often wondered what would happen if Definitive used those drivers in a more ambitious speaker.

“So the new speaker is going to be a Super Tower *and* a Mythos model at the same time?”

“Yes,” Sandy replied. “It will be a slender floorstander with an aluminum enclosure, taller and deeper than past Mythos models, but styled to have the traditional Mythos look. Each ST will have a forward-firing D’Appolito array on top, and a powered subwoofer on the bottom. And each one will have the same bass output as one of our SuperCube subwoofers.”

“How will SuperCube drivers fit inside a Mythos enclosure?”

“Oh, they won’t,” said Sandy. “The ST cabinet is too narrow for traditional round woofers. Instead, we’ve designed ‘racetrack-shaped’ woofers and passive radiators just for this speaker, and we’ll drive them with built-in 300-watt amps.”

“Are you doing a new tweeter, too?” I asked the question because Definitive’s past aluminum dome tweeters, though good, were not in the same league as its superb mid/bass drivers.

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“Sort of,” Sandy said. “We’ve revamped our tweeter, tweaking lots of design elements to cut non-linear distortions in half. I think the new one sounds much better, but you can judge for yourself when you hear them.”

I first heard the Mythos ST (\$3798/pair) at CES 2007 and three things impressed me from the outset. First, the speaker offered terrific amounts of low-level detail and high-frequency “air” coupled with an underlying treble smoothness. Second, it reproduced depth and imaging cues in an effortless way, so that images broke free from the speaker cabinets. Third, it delivered bass that was powerful, tightly controlled, and fast. In short, the Mythos ST struck me as being hands-down the best-



“Pure Magic”

sounding speaker Definitive had yet made — and one that arguably established performance benchmarks in its price class. I considered doing an immediate review, but decided to wait until the companion Mythos Ten center channel came out, so that I could test a complete Mythos ST surround-sound system. And now that I’ve heard that system, I can confidently say its performance puts many higher-priced rigs to shame.

The Mythos Ten essentially takes the D’Appolito array section of the ST, flips it on its side, then stretches the chassis just enough to fit in a pair of oblong passive radiators similar to, but smaller than those used in the ST. The Ten’s bass doesn’t reach as low as the ST’s, but its voicing is otherwise identical to its bigger brother. Completing the

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system is a pair of compact Mythos Gem XL surround speakers, also based on two-way D’Appolito arrays. Because the XLs are an earlier-generation design, their drivers aren’t quite as sophisticated as those in the ST and the Ten. Nevertheless, the Gem XLs would easily qualify as main speakers in most systems, meaning they’re more than adequate for audiophile *surround* applications.

The Mythos ST system draws together three essential sonic qualities — resolution, dynamics, and 3-D imaging — that add up to a fourth: a touch of pure magic. Let me explain that comment in practical terms.

On film soundtracks, the ST system produces an articulate, neutrally voiced and decidedly muscular sound that simply takes command of most listening rooms. In the initial chase scene from *Terminator III: Rise of the Machines*, a deadly robotic Terminatrix (Kristanna Loken) drives a motorized crane, pursuing John Connor (Nick Stahl) and his spouse-to-be (Claire Danes) through crowded city streets. The ST system reproduced the ensuing mayhem of the crane ripping through phone poles, cars, and even buildings with terrific dynamic impact. Yet even through the thickest action-film soundtracks, the ST system never lost sight of two essential qualities: overarching clarity and low-level detail. In the final shootout scene from *Open Range*, for example, the ST system displayed both raw power (delivering the ear-splitting “craakkKK” of individual gun shots) as well as impressive textural subtlety. You can hear the ratcheting “clicks” of Colt revolvers being cocked, the sharp “whir” of shards of wood sizzling through the air as shots go astray, or the gently modulated moan of the prairie wind in the background. The point is that the Definitive system weaves together small, seemingly inconsequential details to create a fabric of sheer realism.

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But superb though the Mythos ST system is in a home-theater context, it is at its best when reproducing music — and the higher the resolution the better. In fact, the biggest “problem” you might encounter with the Mythos ST system could be finding electronics, source components, or recordings good enough to tap its full potential.

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Let’s start with the basics. The ST system is sensitive and easy to drive, in part because its built-in powered subwoofers shoulder the lion’s share of the bass workload. (Definitive’s Sandy Gross, for example, drives his personal pair of Mythos STs with a modest 17Wpc tube amplifier.) Further, the ST system offers smooth neutral tonal balance; delicate and extended highs; deep, powerful, and lightning-fast bass response; and the ability to capture *very* fine levels of detail. And therein lies the genius, but also the only potential drawback, of this system.

The good news is that the ST system resolves subtle textural and dynamic details more effectively than other systems at its price. For instance, the ST shows how subliminal outdoor sounds — birds and insects chirping or the rustle of a soft passing breeze — contribute tremendously to the pastoral vibe of “The Park” from Feist’s *The Reminder* [Cherrytree/Interscope]. But the not-always-good news is that the Definitive rig sometimes exposes shortcomings in associated equipment or recordings. For example, the ST system shows how Feist’s

SPECS & PRICING

MYTHOS ST

Type: Three-way floorstanding speaker with built-in powered subwoofer
Drivers: One 1" aluminum dome tweeter, two 5.25" mid/bass drivers, one 6" x 10" "racetrack-shaped" woofer, two 6" x 10" passive radiators
Frequency response: 14 Hz – 30 kHz
Built-in subwoofer amp: 300 watts
Sensitivity: 93 dB
Impedance: 4 – 8 ohms
Dimensions: 6.75" x 51.5" x 9.5"
Weight: 70 lbs.

MYTHOS TEN

Type: Two-way center-channel speaker
Drivers: Same tweeter and mid/bass drivers as ST, but with two 5" x 8" passive radiators
Frequency response: 31 Hz – 30 kHz
Sensitivity: 92 dB
Impedance: 4 – 8 ohms
Dimensions: 6" x 34.5" x 4.375"
Weight: 16.7 lbs.

MYTHOS GEM XL

Type: Two-way surround speaker
Drivers: One 1" aluminum dome tweeter, two 4.5" mid/bass drivers
Frequency response: 50 Hz – 30 kHz
Sensitivity: 89 dB
Impedance: 4 – 8 ohms
Dimensions: 4.5" x 12.625" x 5.5"
Weight: 7.25 lbs.
Price: \$5395

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Oppo DV-980H and NAD M55 universal players, Panasonic DMP-BD10 Blu-ray disc player, Toshiba HD-A1 HD-DVD player, Arcam Solo Movie 5.1 universal player-A/V receiver, Anthem Statement D2 A/V controller and Statement P5 multichannel amplifier, JVC HD-70FH96 70-inch HD RPTV, RGPC 1200 power condition, Ultralink/XLO cable system

vocals vary in sound quality from track to track, ranging from dreamy smoothness on “How My Heart Behaves” to a raw, hard-edged sound on the closing chorus of “The Park.” For better or worse, the ST system faithfully reports whatever it “hears.”

When recording quality is high, as on Sara Hickman’s luminous vocals on “In the Fields” from *Shortstop* [Elektra], the ST system becomes downright holographic, its rich details and overall sense of “air” bringing vocals, instruments, and even the recording space to life in a vivid way. And thanks to Definitive revamped tweeters, treble details always remain smooth (a step forward from past Definitive tweeters, which occasionally became a bit rough or coarse).

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Bass textures and transients likewise exhibit clarity, punch, and speed. Listen to a recording that showcases acoustic bass, such as the Blue Chamber Quartet’s arrangement of the Astor Piazzolla composition “Kicho” (*First Impressions* [Stockfisch SACD]), and you’ll be floored to hear how this system captures the size, weight, and tightly focused growl of the instrument. The STs simply don’t *do* bass boominess, and the longer you listen, the more you’ll appreciate their lithe, accurate low end. The system has few drawbacks, and those that do arise almost always result from excessive volume settings (a serious temptation, given how gracefully the system plays at loud levels). On loud prolonged pipe organ passages and the like, the subwoofer can be over-driven, resulting in momentary, atonal “chuffing” sounds. Similarly, at *very* high levels the mid/bass drivers can exhibit hints of upper-midrange forwardness that bespeak strain. But at sane volumes, the system rarely breaks a sweat.

Let me also offer two small performance tips. First, check periodically to make sure the speakers’ metal floor spikes remain firmly tightened into the speakers’ granite floorplates; the spikes can “buzz” a bit if they work loose. Second, when using the STs in home-theater systems, run speaker cables to the STs as you normally would, but also route line-level subwoofer signals to the speakers’ dedicated LFE inputs. This subtle set-up touch gives the system fuller, better balanced bass on movie soundtracks.

“Definitive’s Mythos ST system is one of the rare few that sounds great on movies, but even greater on music playback ... hear the ST system expose rich new layers of information you’ve never heard before.”

Definitive’s Mythos ST system is one of the rare few that sounds great on movies, but even greater on music playback. Exceptionally revealing, the ST package will show you how your system components and favorite films or tunes really sound. Don’t be surprised to hear the ST system expose rich new layers of information you’ve never heard before — even on materials you think you know well. In simple terms, the Mythos ST system places you in the performance ballpark of speaker systems carrying five-figure price tags for about half the cost. **TAS**

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