

A3X review by Recording Magazine

In November 2010 Lorenz Rychner of Recording Magazine has reviewed the smallest member of the AX family – the A3X. Please read some passages of that review below.

[...]

The lowdown

Ah, that's where the petal hits the metal. And I use the word petal to stop me from using even more flowery language. I know what you're thinking – what kind of bass can this little box produce? Glad you asked. P-l-e-n-t-y. Crank the bass on a lively track, light a match within five inches of the port-holes and watch the flame die, just like that. And it's tight bass, right up to the point where – if you overdo it on the volume knob – the woofer starts to flop and flap. But if you stop just short of that unreasonable volume setting, you'll have heard enough bass in your tracks to know what's going on. Then if you need the bigger bass that „gives good client“, by all means switch to a sub, the little A3X won't be offended ...

I wanted to put my review pair to the test by making sure there was no help in the bass range from nearby surfaces, so I put them out in the middle of a sizable room, on 5' tall stands, with nary a surface closer than 6 feet. Played my most bass-heavy CDs. Still liked the bass.

High points

The ribbon tweeter that we learned to like on the previous models we reviewed again impresses us. What I like most about it is the way it portrays the edge of brass instruments that makes them sound realistic – not shrill, not brittle or overly bright, fullbodied but with every expressive nuance a jazz trumpeter puts into slightly „dirty“ notes fully there, sounding just as if I were sitting three feet from the stage, with the bell pointing at me. Right now it's trumpeter Claudio Roditi, alternating solos with saxist Paquito d' Rivera and trombonist Jay Ashby (CD Return to Ipanema) and I could swear they're „in the house“.

D' Rivera again, this time guesting on the brilliant Imani Winds' CD Terra Incognita (flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, bassoon, and piano), sounds like he's in the room when I close my eyes; the subtleties of the wind instruments, from breathiness of the piccolo to the low snarl of the bass clarinet, are reproduced to perfection.

The tweeter also does justice to stringed and otherwise trebly instruments, with details like singing rosin on a violin, finger slides on a busy acoustic guitar track, the hard fingernails on the strings of a flamenco guitar, the ping and sizzle of cymbals – it's all there.

The midrange is firm and forward, voices are well positioned, guitars shred when asked to shred, and pianos are round and even throughout the full range, there is none of the tinkliness in certain octaves we sometimes hear on hyped equipment. It's easy to tell a Hamburg Steinway from its US counterpart – not always the case on small speakers!



Who what where when why

Who benefits from the A3X? Anyone who needs to hear, from up close, what's going on in their tracks, with enough clarity and volume to work with confidence.

What role will the A3X play best? In a small to medium setup, it will be an excellent main monitor. In a larger setup, it will be an excellent alternative to bigger speakers, providing accurate near-field information, and offering relief from ear fatigue that a large system can inflict.

Where should the A3X sit? Small as they are, the temptation will be to put them too close to reflecting surfaces, just because they will fit into nooks and crannies. Don't – give them space, let the sound bloom on its own so that you hear what's coming out of the speakers rather than what's being bounced off your environment.

When should you use the tweeter adjustment? When you're absolutely sure that your room environment is messing with the highs coming from the A3X. Listen critically, compare with excellent recordings you trust before you go that route – and don't use that knob indiscriminately.

Why should you try to hear the A3X at a dealer near you? Because unless you do, you don't know what you're missing.

Lorenz Rychner, Recording Magazine, November 2010
<http://www.recordingmag.com>