

Cambridge Audio Minx 100

Many of us have extensive music libraries stored in compressed form on phones, tablets and computers and sometimes we just want to tap or swipe to listen to our favourite tunes, in reasonable quality. Wireless or portable speakers provide a convenient and fun way to enjoy music, especially in rooms such as kitchens and bedrooms.

And when it comes to enjoying online music and radio as well as music stored on a portable device the simplest way is to stream wirelessly, using AirPlay or Bluetooth, or as in the case of the Minx 100, both. Previously, speakers with physical docks ruled the roost but it's unsatisfying not being able to use your handheld iDevice as it's moored up across the room. Other factors such as Apple's move to a different physical connector and the introduction of apt-X Bluetooth transmission in CD quality means that manufacturers are ditching physical docks and adopting the airwaves.

Cambridge Audio says the Minx is designed to blend seamlessly with its environment rather than take it over. Instead of taking a bold, risky approach to the speaker's aesthetics, the company has played it safe, and for some the grey mesh front cover and white lacquered body may be just a bit too dull. There's no arguing with the build quality, however, and the scratch-resistant ceramic cabinet, rubberised underside and ergonomic, soft-touch controls feeling reassuringly durable.

Behind the scenes

Behind the grille a 100W Class D digital amplifier powers twin 4in BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) speakers and there's a passive subwoofer with the bass port cleverly incorporated into the carry handle. A more powerful model is also available, the larger Minx 200, which boasts a 200W amplifier and an active subwoofer.

The power cord input located on the rear panel is complemented by a bass gain control (also duplicated on the credit card-sized remote control), an Ethernet port, service port, generic MP3 line-in and analogue stereo phonos, allowing you to use the Minx with a TV, Blu-ray player or PVR. The Ethernet port provides a hard-wired alternative to wirelessly connecting the Minx to a router, perhaps using a powerline connection.

Cambridge Audio has cleverly integrated internet radio access into the Minx, with five preset stations stored in five buttons on its top side. To change the station settings, and to get the most out of the Minx, you need to use the Minx Air app. It has an attractive interface that combines radio station icons and pop-up controls for adjusting the volume, bass and selecting from a range of preset EQs. One nice touch is that searching for internet radio can be filtered by bit-rate quality to eliminate some of the ropier stations.

Why offer AirPlay as well as Bluetooth? The latter is universally available and immune to network drop-outs which can ruin a musical moment. But AirPlay's wireless range is a lot greater than Bluetooth; I was able to get



upstairs in my thick-walled Victorian house with AirPlay, and no further than the next room with Bluetooth. Also, once you've got the Minx on to your network, it will always appear automatically as a speaker option when you play music. Bluetooth can be a little bit more work, plus apt-X isn't compatible with all operating systems.

Sound quality

The full potential of the BMR drivers can be realised by hooking up to a CD or DVD deck using the stereo phonos. A FLAC recording of Britten's *Young Persons' Guide To The Orchestra* has terrific dynamic range, with a powerful, room-filling orchestration from the lower and middle registers and good clarity with distinctly heard individual instruments. The passive sub isn't the most detailed but it's tightly controlled and well matched to the main drivers, blending and underpinning the mid and upper ranges.

Switch to an MP3 rip streamed over AirPlay and the percussion becomes a little muddy and the strings lack the open warmth of the CD version. It's still a decent sound though and the unit keeps everything together as the brass section kicks in and the strings carry the piece to a forté crescendo.

Rock music streamed over Bluetooth or AirPlay highlights the Minx 100's most obvious weakness, which is its narrow, almost non-stereo, sonic imaging and tendency to highlight cramped vocals. MP3 rips of rock music show – as does internet streamed radio – there's little the Minx can do about the flattening effects of compression, especially with higher frequencies. Tina Turner's vocal range in *Private Dancer* illustrates the problem well with her bassy murmuring at the start effortlessly engaging while the higher-pitch screams are shrill, thin and typical of digital amplification; a little on the bright side.

Using apt-X delivers a more detailed sound than AirPlay or regular Bluetooth at 352kbps in 16-bit, 44.1kHz). The problem is that portable iDevices don't support it and in order to get a MacBook Pro to use it I had to first play a 16-bit FLAC recording in Vox (a free audio player) before switching to iTunes.

Overall, the Minx 100 has plenty going for it, with versatile connectivity, solid build quality, decent power and an engaging, articulate (if somewhat narrow) sound. The Minx Air app also makes it a real pleasure to own and operate. **AJ**

DETAILS

PRICE: £330

WEBSITE:
CAMBRIDGE
AUDIO.COM

OUR VERDICT

