

Cambridge Audio Minx S325 5.1 Surround Sound Speaker

System *Reviewed By: Tracy Rainwater, September 19, 2011*

Cambridge Audio is one of the UK's most prolific AV manufacturers, churning out everything from amplifiers to DACs with a clear emphasis on quality and affordability. Over the years Cambridge Audio has offered a few different loudspeakers; however it's



never been their primary focus. That could change, for their all-new, highly compact and affordable Minx speaker system isn't out to just challenge the status quo - it's out to destroy it.

The premise behind Cambridge Audio's Minx system is simple: provide a truly high-end experience in a small, décor friendly and affordable package. Let's start by tackling the Minx's size. There are currently two varieties of Minx loudspeakers, the Minx Min 10 and the Min 20. The difference between the two is simple - the Min 10 features a single two and a quarter inch driver or BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) and the Min 20 has two. My review system, the S325, utilized the latter, containing five Min 20s in all, each measuring six inches tall by three inches wide and a little over three inches deep. Each Min 20 weighed a scant one and a half pounds and comes in either high gloss white or black finish.

There are three subwoofers in the Minx lineup, the X200, X300 and X500. The S325 system I received for review came packaged with the X300



subwoofer which shares the same finish options as the Minx satellite speakers, though it's a bit larger at 12 inches high by 10 and a half inches wide and 11 inches deep. The X300 tips the scales at 16 and a half pounds, making it easy to place and hide within a

room. Both the Min 20 satellite's and X300 subwoofer's construction was first rate and their finish (mine happened to be high gloss white) looked stunning, especially considering the S325 system retails for an affordable 1275 €.

The Minx satellite speakers utilize a full-range driver that Cambridge Audio has dubbed BMR or Balanced Mode Radiator, which basically allows for the small full-range drivers to act, more or less, like flat panel drivers, "bending sound waves," versus punching them in a piston-like movement. In other words, the Minx drivers don't just move back and forth, they ripple much like water after you've pierced it with an object like your finger or a stone. According to Cambridge, this gives the Minx a wider frequency response, deeper bass and wider dispersion than other speakers of similar size. Does it work? On paper the Min 20 satellites used in the S325 system have a reported frequency response of 130Hz to 20kHz, which isn't going to win any bass awards but considering the Min 20's dual, two and a quarter inch driver compliment, it's not horrible. The Min 20's have an impedance of eight Ohms but Cambridge does not specify their sensitivity. Though, according to the Min 20's spec sheet, they can be powered by as little as 15-Watts with a maximum of 75 recommended, making them ideal for most any AV receiver out there today - including those made by Cambridge Audio.

As for the included subwoofer, the X300 has a reported frequency response of 33Hz to 200Hz, thanks to its internal 300-Watt amplifier powering its eight-inch, forward firing driver. The X300 does employ an eight-inch passive radiator as well. The X300 uses an active crossover, which is variable between 50Hz and 200Hz to help blend it with the smaller Min 20s, giving the entire system and your ears a full-range performance.

The Hookup

Out of the box, the five Minx satellite speakers are ready for either wall mounting or table mounting, courtesy of their included wall brackets and/or rubber feet. Table and floor stands are also available, though they carry an extra charge. Cambridge Audio designed the Min 20's (and Min 10) binding posts to accept bare speaker wire as well as speaker wire terminated with spade and/or banana ends as well, something you rarely find on speakers of the Minx's size. I connected the five Minx satellites to my Onkyo TX-SR707 receiver



using Transparent's The Wave speaker cables and it couldn't have been easier. Integrating the X300 sub was equally simple, requiring a single

run of Transparent's The Link interconnect and a nearby AC outlet. The whole system was easy enough for a single person, namely me, to install and within about an hour everything was connected and ready to be enjoyed. I took a little longer because I wanted to run the S325 system through my Onkyo's Audyssey EQ setup as well as give everything a once over, including a few days break-in, before sitting down for any critical listening.

Performance

I began with Iron Man 2 (Paramount) on Blu-ray, because big action films are often rife with good demo material, like the scene featuring Tony Stark, played by Robert Downey Jr., preparing to "drop" by the Stark Expo from a cargo plane overhead. As the cargo doors opened, AC/DC's "Shoot To Thrill" roared to life with all 5.1 channels of angst fully engaged. As Stark, wearing his Iron Man armor, leapt from the cargo hold, the accompanying fireworks that exploded around him possessed great impact, detail, texture and sharpness, not to mention dynamics. The low rumble of Iron Man's afterburners was visceral and had good weight behind it, which was impressive considering the S325 system utilizes a smallish, eight-inch subwoofer in the X300. My wife even took the time to comment on how "that little thing" was shaking the room. The Mini 20's coherence was also a welcomed surprise as was their vast soundstage and strong imaging, that when stretched across all five speakers created a truly multi-dimensional experience that put me in the middle of the action. Another thing I noticed was that despite my efforts to get the Minx S325 system to misbehave, I was unable to, for neither the Mini 20s nor the X300 subwoofer seemed to have a limit - at least not in my room, which was unexpected.

Next up I went with Black Swan (20th Century Fox) on Blu-ray. Thanks to the film's beautifully mastered DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack, everything from dialog to the film's numerous musical numbers was presented faithfully through the Minx S325 system. Once again it was the S325's coherence that struck me, for there was never a "hole" in its sonic performance, which further added to the illusion that I was there. Despite their small stature the Mini 20s never sounded small or restricted, actually quite the opposite - in fact, dialog via the horizontally placed Mini 20 was decidedly full-bodied and free of boxy colorations making for a very natural and lifelike sound. I'd even go so far as to say the Mini

20s sound like loudspeakers three times their size, and that when paired to the X300 subwoofer are capable of floorstanding speaker-like performance, though the Minx S325 system is far easier to live with (according to my wife).

As impressed as I was with the Minx S325's multi-channel performance, nothing could've prepared me for its two-channel one. Beginning with Peter Gabriel's "Heroes" from the album Scratch My Back, which I downloaded in 48Hz/24bit FLAC from Bowers & Wilkins' Society of Sound, the Minx S325 system proved to be as adept at music as it was on film. Gabriel's vocals were dynamic and lifelike in their weight and air and his placement within the soundstage was rock solid. The soundstage was nicely appointed with tremendous accuracy throughout, allowing me to close my eyes and easily place every instrument from the orchestra to the grand piano with ease. Even with only two speakers and the X300 subwoofer active, the sound the trio was capable of producing was startling, for it simply sounded bigger, richer and better than expected.

I ended my evaluation with Stevie Ray Vaughn's 1991 release, The Sky is Crying (Sony). On the track "Boot Hill," the Minx S325's midrange performance was sublime, possessing a smooth, liquid demeanor that had appropriate air and rhythm without sounding thin or becoming fatiguing at high volumes. Vaughn's raspy vocals were captured brilliantly and hung effortlessly in space between the left and right speakers. The X300's bass response, as heard in the track's kick drum, was dynamic and clear with good texture. For such a small subwoofer I was often astonished by just how low and rich the X300 could play without distortion.

Overall the Minx S325 never failed to impress and is one of the best small satellite subwoofer speaker combos I have ever heard, for despite its diminutive size the performance the Minx system leaves in its wake is anything but.

The Downside

Despite their wonderful construction and clean, modern look I find the Minx S325's finishes of gloss white or black to be a bit limiting. There are a lot of other satellite subwoofer systems out there that offer a wider variety of finishes beyond just white and black and I feel for the Minx S325 to be truly competitive in this arena, they needed to offer a few more colors.



While the X300 worked wonders in my room, I could see a scenario that those with larger rooms or a propensity for kick-ass bass could need more. Apparently I wasn't alone, for

Cambridge offers a larger subwoofer in the X500 for such an occasion. They also make it easy to daisy chain two X-Series subwoofers together if your AV receiver or preamp doesn't have multiple subwoofer outs.

Lastly, the entire Minx S325 system does take some time to break in and sound its best. I say this because it took a lot longer than even I was expecting. Stick with it and give the Minx S325 time to mature, for the results are well worth it. Competition and Comparison

There are a number of fine sounding 5.1 channel systems utilizing small satellite speakers and a small subwoofer available today. One that immediately comes to mind is Focal's Dome 5.1 Surround Sound Speaker System, which at 1904 € does cost more than the Minx S325 but is also larger and capable of filling larger rooms with ease, not to mention it comes in more finish options than the Minx system.

Another contender would have to be Orb Audio's Mod1 Speaker System, which at 586 € is more affordable than the Minx S325 but also only features satellite speakers with a single, three-inch driver compared to the Mini 20's two, two and a quarter inch drivers. Also, the Minx S325's subwoofer, the X300, is a bit more robust and capable of lower output compared to the Mod1 subwoofer.

Lastly there's Definitive Technology's ProCinema 1000 system, which at 1170€ is probably the most closely matched in terms of price and performance to the Minx S325 system, though if looks are at all important to you the Minx S325 system wins this contest in a landslide.

For more information on 5.1 speaker systems including the latest news and reviews please visit Home Theater Review's Bookshelf Loudspeaker page.

Conclusion

The Minx S325 5.1 speaker system from Cambridge Audio is one of the finest satellite subwoofer speaker systems I've ever heard. The combination of the Mini 20s and X300 subwoofer was a match made in both audiophile and home theater heaven for their combined sound was spacious and airy with all the dynamic punch one would expect from a larger system. The Minx S325 system had electrostatic-like levels of detail and imaging capabilities I've rarely encountered, all the while never sounding harsh or bright. If you're looking for speakers with tremendous form factor that are uber lifestyle and décor friendly, then look no further than Cambridge Audio's Minx S325 speaker system.

