



Usher Audio Technology 6371 Loudspeakers

Ushering In Real Value From Taiwan

Mike Wright

July 2004

Associated Equipment:

Analog Front End

Turntable: Merrill Heirloom
Tonearm: Rowland Compliment
Cartridge: Audio Technica OC-9

Digital Front End

CD Player: Sony XA7ES

CD Player:
Electrocompaniet EC-1
CD Player: Consonance Opera
DAC: Levinson #36

Amplification

Conrad-Johnson Premier 18LS
Sonic Euphoria PLC
Thor TA-1000 Mark I
Thor TA-3000 Mark I
Phono Preamp

Electrocompaniet AVV-220
Conrad Johnson MF-2500A
Soaring Audio SLC-A300

Loudspeakers

Martin Logan Quests
Von Schweikert 4.5

Cabling

Dynamic Design Platinum
Blue Marble Audio
Sonic Euphoria
Virtual Dynamics Nite

Getting introduced to the Usher

When I first joined the staff at Stereo Times, one of the first manufacturer's reps I was introduced to was Stan Tracht of Dallas, Texas-based Thee High End. I found Stan to be very affable, helpful and knowledgeable about audio equipment in particular and the high-end industry as a whole. He spoke highly of the Usher Audio loudspeaker line and with good reason. Not only are they extremely attractive and exceedingly well built but they sound fantastic too. Simply put, they represent one of the very best values in home audio.

I met the speaker's designer Mr. Tsai Lien-Shui at the 2004 Winter CES in Las Vegas. It was interesting to see how Mr. Tsai's fellow countrymen would come in to the Usher room to pay there respect to him and congratulate him on a job well done. You would have thought he was just given a lifetime achievement award and entrance into the audiophile "Hall of Fame". I got the distinct impression that if his work got this type of response from so many people that he must be doing something special. So I just had to get a pair of his speakers into my house to hear what everyone else was hearing. Weeks later, I finally got the Usher 6371s in for a review. I was not disappointed. The 6371s are part of Usher's new "Six Series" loudspeaker line.

I first heard Usher speakers over at Dave Thomas' house when he was doing a review on the splendid Usher AC-10s and was very impressed with what I heard. When the 6371s arrived, I opened the box and was stunned at what I saw. I had seen these speakers at CES but they were sitting on the side amongst a row of other Usher speakers and were not being played. But now here was this simply beautiful speaker sitting in my room. It has a high-tech looking silver gloss finish with real birch side panels. I'm thinking to myself, "These speakers have got to retail for about \$9,000, but knowing what I do about Usher, they'll probably go for about \$6,000." Silly me. That's just how impressive these speakers look. I'm sure that if someone



were anal enough, they may be able to find some little flaw to nit-pick about this speaker's fit and finish (I could not), but to us regular fellows, the 6371 will easily be one of the most beautiful and elegant looking pieces of audio gear to enter your home. It wasn't until I was already more than a month into the review process before I asked Stan how much the speakers cost. When he told me they were only \$3,000, I was just dumbstruck. In the weeks to follow, whenever I would have a listening session, I would ask my friends to guess the price of the speakers. I routinely got responses in the \$5-8,000 range except for my sister-in-law Peggy who guessed \$800. Bear in mind that Peggy saw the fabulous \$350,000 Maybach 62 at the 2004 Chicago Auto Show and thought it cost around \$60,000. To me, that says a lot about the value and performance of the Usher and very little about Peggy's ability to recognize quality.

Delivering the Ushers

The 6371s come in 3 boxes: One box for each speaker and a smaller, heavy box for the stands. The stands feel like cast iron and must be affixed to the bottom of the speakers with long, heavy-duty screws. Getting the speakers out of the box was easy but mounting the speakers on to these stands was a bit tricky. Care should be taken during this procedure so as to not damage the tweeter housing that is made of the same walnut as the side panels but is located on the top of the speaker. Stan Tracht told me a couple of good ways to do this but I figured out another way on my own. [Author's note: I am trusting everyone who reads this review not to tell my wife how I accomplished this, otherwise, I'm sunk.] What I did was take a thick, soft cushion off of the couch, set it on the floor and then turned the speaker upside and rested the top of the speaker on the cushion. I'm sure not all of you can get away with this act of war without being noticed like I did, and will have to depend upon your skills of negotiation to use other household artifacts to accomplish the job. Good luck gentlemen. Oh, I almost forgot. When mounting the stand to the speaker, the end with the large rectangle goes towards the rear of the speaker. I had this backwards and felt very inadequate when I stood the speakers back up, only to find that I had mounted the stands backwards. I also recommend using a powered screwdriver because the screws that mount the stand to the speaker are long. There are also four spiked bolts per speaker and you'll need all of the strength in your wrist to screw the spikes into the stands. These spikes are large, solid, have a very confidence-inspiring feel to them and are only to be used for carpeted floors. As a nice touch Usher also supplies a second set of spikes made of plastic that are to be used on wooden floors. These speakers are truly a physicist's delight because they can sit on the floor without being mounted to the stands even though the top of the speaker slopes back from the bottom at about a five-degree angle. This is a very cool look.

On the front of the speaker, beneath the top-mounted tweeter, are two 7" woofers that cover the midrange and bass frequencies. A gray grill cloth covers the drivers and also adds to the attractiveness of this package. On the back of the speakers is a 4" port you can use to further affect the bass response of the speakers in your room. There are two sets of binding posts towards the bottom of the speaker for bi-wiring. This brings me to my only real caveat with the speaker. The connectors are recessed into an opening that does not allow for the use of speaker cables that use large spades without getting cramped in that confined space. It's not so bad if you want to use jumpers and or banana plugs for your second set of speaker cables if you're bi-wiring, but can get tight if you use spades.



One other item I need to mention about the speakers is that there is a compartment on the back of the speakers, below the connectors, where you can add sand or leadshot to load the speaker's bass performance to the room. Now I must confess that I didn't take advantage of this compartment, even though Stan Tracht urged me to. One reason was because I got good bass response from these speakers in whichever location I had them in my room. NO, it wasn't quite room-shuddering bass. The bass was always tight and tuneful and had enough warmth to it to make you feel that it was there. The other reason was because the audio policewoman (a.k.a. wife) that I live with caught me bringing leadshot into the house and asked me what I was planning to do with it. When I explained what I was going to do with it in relation to the bass performance of the speakers, she pointed out my penchant for making messes and mentioned something about not wanting to find any leadshot on her nice carpet. I considered her words, carefully, and formed a response to her in kind. But once I considered the price to be paid in loss of life and property value, I decided to hold back my smart tongue and relented. Sorry about that Stan.

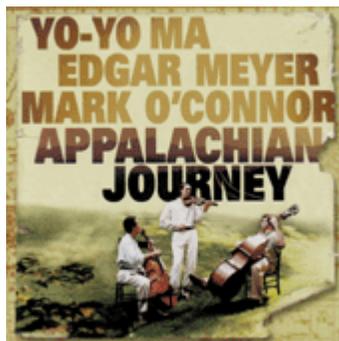
To get into the technical aspects of the 6371's I contacted the legendary Joe D'Appolito, Usher's design consultant: *"The design goals for the CP6371 were flat on-axis response and broad uniform horizontal polar response. The first goal yields accurate first arrival information critical to imaging. The second goal assures a balanced reverberant field and broadens the sweet spot. This is required because we judge overall frequency balance psycho-acoustically by fusing (i.e., integrating) direct and reflected arrivals over a period of 5-30 milliseconds (the Haas fusion zone). To this end, the CP6371 is a two and one-half way (2.5-way) system. The lower woofer crosses out at 350Hz to prevent combing response errors in the vertical plane. It doubles the low-bass output and compensates for the spreading loss. The overall woofer pair/tweeter crossover is an acoustic 4th-order in-phase linkwitz alignment at 2450Hz.*

The crossover uses heavy gauge air core coils and quality film capacitors mounted on glass fiber reinforced printed circuit boards. All the drivers used in the CP6371 (and all the Series 6 speakers) have been designed by Mr. Tsai and are manufactured in-house by Usher. Here are some details on the drivers: Two 8945A woofers are used in the CP6371. The 8945A woofer is a very sophisticated low-distortion woofer. It comprises a cast aluminum frame and a carbon fiber filled paper cone, a T-shaped pole piece with copper shorting ring and copper sleeve Low-loss linear suspension with a large flat spider and large half-roll surround. The sophisticated motor yields very low distortion at high SPLs. The T9950 is a very low-distortion tweeter with a 28mm coated silk dome, an aluminum voice coil former, optimized pole piece geometry, large rear chamber for low resonance and light ferro-fluid damping. Internal wiring is four 9s OFC and the connectors are by Faston."

The design of all Usher loudspeakers is a joint effort between Mr. Lien-Shui Tsai, President of Usher Audio Technologies, and Mr. D'Appolito, who consults with Mr. Tsai on the models to be produced. Mr. Tsai then decides on the model details, including the driver selection and enclosure design and cosmetics. Mr. D'Appolito is responsible for the crossover design and final voicing of the system.

The Ushers deliver

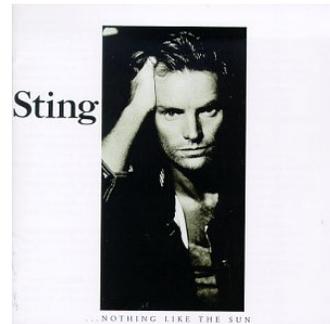
I set the 6371s up in my listening room and experimented with different locations. I settled in on the speakers being six feet from the rear wall and four feet from the sidewalls, eight feet apart. I broke the speakers in for about a week before I did any serious listening to them. When I finally did begin to listen to them, the first thing I thought was speed. These speakers are fast. I called Dave and asked him if he had the same impression that I had in terms how fast the speakers sounded and he concurred. I listen to electrostatics, mostly, and had to ask myself if I had been wrong all this time. The generally held notion is that electrostatic speakers are faster than dynamic driver speakers. I do have to admit, compared to my Martin-Logan Quests, the transition from the highs to the midrange is not quite as seamless but it was something I hardly noticed. The speakers throw a wide, deep stage with good stage height. I got the distinct impression that I could walk up to performers and get the sensation that they were in their own space.



On Mark O'Connor's "Appalachian Journey" [Sony Classical SK66782], you can easily hear O'Connor's violin spread across the stage along with cellist Yo-Yo Ma and bassist Edgar Meyer. Another area of the speaker's performance I feel compelled to share with you is that the speakers are a little on the forward sounding side. The electronics and cables you use will greatly effect this. With the Dynamic Design White and Platinum series of cables, which I consider to be very neutral, the forwardness was quite clear. When using Roger Tiller's wonderful sounding Blue Marble

Audio cables and the equally as good sounding Virtual Dynamic Nite cables, the sound was not as forward. I did not find this objectionable at all. Of all of my fellow audiophile buddies who came by and listened, only one did not like the forwardness of the speakers. Most didn't feel that it mattered and several commented that this is the way they like their music portrayed. I only mention this because some readers really get into how forward sounding or how far back a speaker's image is. I feel that this is cable dependent and recommend anyone considering buying this speaker to try different cables. I'm sure you'll find a cable that will dial your stage in just right for your listening biases.

Another quality this speaker has is musicality. That special little something that makes you enjoy the musical experience to the point of wanting to nod your head or tap your toes along with the music. This added to my enjoyment of listening to Sting's "Nothing Like The Sun" [CD 6402/DX 2163] where The Lazarus Heart and History Will Teach Us Nothing had all the drive and head nodding you could want. Listening to Beethoven's Symphony #3 as performed by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and led by Zubin Mehta [CBS/Sony 38DC2], you could



really get a sense of Avery Fisher Hall, which is where this performance took place. It was easy to clearly delineate the different sections of the orchestra and get a good feel for the layering. Going to the opposite end of the spectrum, Luiz Bonfá's "Non-Stop to Brazil" [Chesky JD29], is more of an intimate type of performance and he and his mellow, romantic guitar playing felt like they were in the room. On Fourplay's new CD "Journey" [Bluebird 82876-613582] I could easily feel and follow Nathan East's bass line on *Cool Train*. Another example of the 6371s' tuneful bass could be found on Buster William's "Tokudo" where he really gets into the track entitled *Fuego*. Here, Buster's chord progressions and deft finger work could really be appreciated on the dynamic and lively sounding Ushers. Female vocals are also rendered beautifully by the 6371s. My new favorite female vocalist, Jane Monheit, has a fantastic CD out called "In The Sun" [Warlock NC-4234-2] that is simply enrapturing. I just love her voice, her style, and her range. To me, her tone and her phrasing are special. On the tracks, *Once I walked in the Sun* which is a duet with Ivan Lins, *It Never Entered My Mind* and *Haunted Heart*, all of these qualities are clearly displayed. She also has a light, up tempo spin to *Cheek to Cheek* that I enjoyed as well. The 6371 put her front and center in my listening room as I know she was putting on a performance just for me.

Winding it up

The only speaker I had on hand to compare the 6371s to were a pair of the classic Von Schweikert VR-4.5s. The 4.5s have the Ushers beat in the area that the VRs do best, bass. Even though I didn't mass load the speakers with the leadshot, I don't believe that the two 7 inchers on the Ushers would best the two 9 inchers on the 4.5s. That being said, the

6371s, over all, were faster, more detailed, and had better focus while the 4.5s had a small edge with a wider and deeper stage. With the speed, detail, focus and overall musicality of the 6371s, I would give it the edge over my venerable 4.5s. What would be an even more interesting comparison would be the Von Schweikert VR-4jrs with the Usher speakers. Amplifier wise, the 6371s sounded really good with the Electrocompaniet AW-220s but I had the most enjoyment with the Soaring Audio SLC-A300 and the Conrad Johnson MF2500A driving them. I enjoyed the speed and transient response of the 6371/Soaring Audio combination as well as the fuller, warmer bass and a larger stage and with the level of musicality that the speakers had with the 2500A. All in all, with awesome fit and finish, excellent musical performance, and a real-world price, you get an extremely good value for your money. It's not hard at all to give these speakers a very high recommendation.

Specifications:

2 Way system: tweeter 1" (9950-20), midbass (2) 7" (8945A)
Sensitivity: 90dB @ 1 watt/1 meter
Nominal Impedance: 4 ohms
Frequency Response (-3dB): 30Hz ~ 28kHz
Power Handling: 120 watts
Crossover Frequency: 2.7Hz
Weight: 52.5kgs (including base)
Dimensions (w x d x h): 14" x 25.5" x 50"
Finishes: Glossy Black, Glossy Silver, Glossy White
Price: \$3,000

Address:

Usher Audio
Thee High End (U.S. Distributor)
6923 Inwood Road
Dallas, TX 75209
Telephone: 214-704-6082
Fax: 214-357-0721
Email: Stan@theehighend.com
Website: <http://www.theehighend.com>

Reprinted from StereoTimes. www.stereotimes.com July 2004