



of Home Theater and High Fidelity review

Usher CP-6381 Floor-Standing Speakers - August 2007

"... the Usher CP-6381s are incredible ..."

BY JOHN E. JOHNSON, JR.

"In sum, the CP-6381's strong points are neutral timbre, clarity, and tight bass."

INTRODUCTION

Usher is one of these speaker companies whose products I have always drooled over at conventions because they have the look of fine furniture.

The company has several lines, including the 6 Series and Dancer Series.

The 6 Series - of which the CP-6381, reviewed here, is a member - has several models. The CP-6381 is near the top of that line.

If you look at the photo on the left, it is obvious that the color/wood scheme is very modern. The wood is considered an accent, with the colored portion making up most of the enclosure. Black can sometimes appear very plain, but Usher has turned it into art. They are also available in white (the review sample), yellow, red, and silver. The colors are not stains or paints, but molded polymer, so they look like the finish on a car or yacht.

My picture of the audiophile who purchases a member of this line would be about 25-45 in age, and I might have said . . . making a good living. But, to my surprise, these beauties are only \$3,400/pair. Keep in mind they are more than four feet tall, a three way design, and weigh nearly 140 pounds each. If you haven't shopped around, that is a lot of speaker for \$3,400/pair. How do they make them for this price? Like so many things these days, Usher speakers are built in Asia.

The tweeter is silk dome, while the midrange and woofer are paper cones. You can see in the photo that the woofer has a rough surface. This is because it is made using pulp paper that is laid over a mold to dry, rather than forcing a dried paper sheet into the cone shape. What this does is relieve the cone of stress that occurs when the cone is forced into its shape.

Paper cones have been around since the invention of speakers, way, way back in the early 20th century. Perhaps it was because



that is all they had then, and it was inexpensive. But, as it turns out, paper is a wonderful material to use. It's light and strong, and it doesn't stretch like rubber material. That is why it is still used today. Not because it's cheap, but because it's good.

THE CP-6381

This particular model is three-way design, with a 1.25" silk dome tweeter, 7" midrange, and 8" woofer.

It comes with the base separate, so you need to install that yourself.

First, lay the speaker with the bottom propped up on something. I used the styrofoam packing material. Then, with at least two of the included bolts in hand, place the cast iron base against the bottom, lining up the holes so that you can hand screw the two top bolts into place, which will hold the base so that you can put in the remaining two bolts and screw them all in tight.

The base must be attached so that the protruding end is to the rear of the speaker. This is because the CP-6381 leans backward to aim the sound at a slight upward angle.

Then you screw in the included brass feet, one at each corner (green arrow above, and photo below).

There are also some included metal discs that you can use if you have rugs or wooden floors that you don't particularly care to punch holes in.

The binding posts have four connectors for bi-wiring or bi-amping.

The tweeter sits with about half of its enclosure above the top of the main enclosure.

This close-up of the tweeter shows its fabric design. The material is doped with an adhesive to make it stiff.

The midrange uses a pulp cap, but the main body of the cone is a conventional paper design. The midrange driver and woofer each have their own separate enclosure internally, and each is ported in the rear.

The woofer cone is totally a paper pulp design.

".. a very focused soundstage, natural timbre, and low distortion."

THE SOUND

I tested the Usher CP-6381s with a McIntosh MCD201 SACD player, Lamm L2 Reference preamplifier, and McIntosh MC1201 power amplifiers. Cables were Legenburg.

I placed the speakers about 8 feet apart, toed in slightly towards the listening position, several feet out from the side and rear walls.

It's a bit early to be using Christmas music for a review, but we just received this new Telarc release of Nutcracker (SACD-60674), and I love the music, so I thought, "What the heck."

"Overture": violins and flute with triangle which was easily heard in the background. Clear, detailed, no strange harmonics. Very natural timbre. No tizziness or extra sibilance.

"Scene 2": Full orchestra; string bass very tight, not boomy at all. "Scene 9": Piccolo and violins together. Easily separated.

Ballad for Edvard Grieg (EMI Classics 0-94639-43992-8): "Piano Concerto in A minor": The opening bars of this piece are recognized by everyone, whether big music fans or not. The piano notes span from top to bottom, and each was near perfectly rendered.

Ballet Favorites (Telarc SACD-60625): "Fanfare to La Peri": French horns and trumpets

playing together, and easily distinguished.

"Cortege de Bacchus from Act III, Sylvia": Full orchestra blasting away, Tympani were still tight.

"Sabre Dance from Gayane": Xylophone and woodwinds playing together. Separate from one another.

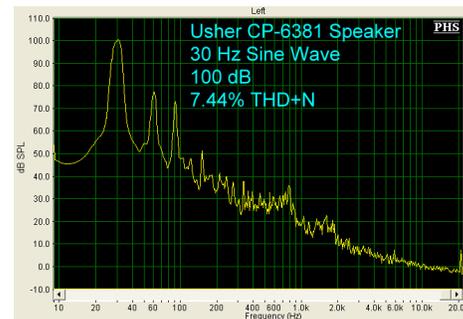
Evgeny Kissin: "Schumann Piano Concerto" (EMI Classics 0-946-3-82879-2-6): Again, thunderous piano at the opening. Tweeters didn't compress. When orchestra and piano were playing together, the piano was not buried in the other instruments.

In sum, the CP-6381's strong points are neutral timbre, clarity, and tight bass. If there is a weak point, it would be the lack of deep bass (20 Hz - 30 Hz). With an enclosure of this size, I would have preferred it to have a larger bass driver, say 12" to 15", mounted on the side to maintain the narrow profile on the front. But, since they are the way they are, just use a good subwoofer to add the depths of the lowest octave.

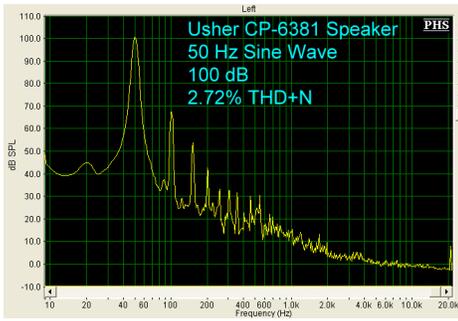
ON THE BENCH

For the THD+N tests (bandwidth 10 Hz - 22 kHz), the microphone was placed 1 foot from the respective driver. For the room response, the microphone was at 1 meter, pointed at the center of the enclosure.

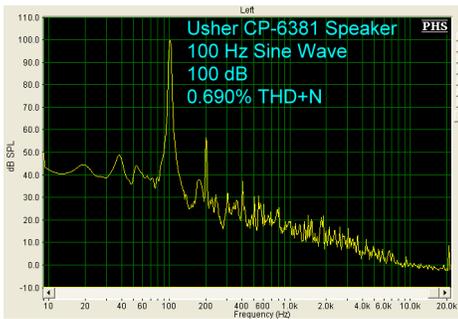
At 30 Hz (woofer), THD+N was less than 10% and 100 dB output, which is acceptable, especially for only an 8" driver.



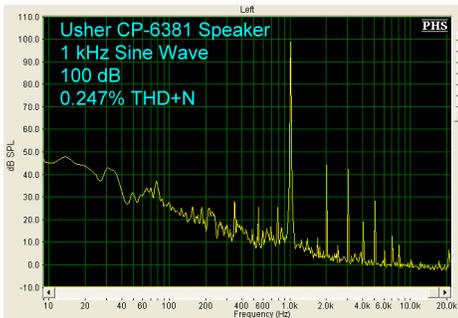
At 50 Hz, THD+N was less than 3%.



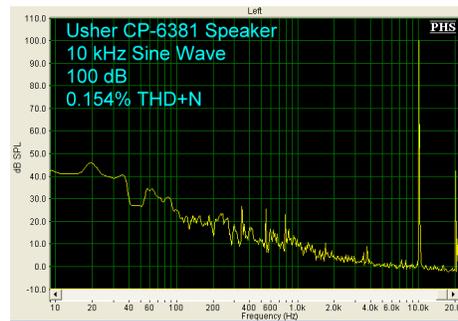
And at 100 Hz, less than 0.7%. All in all, pretty reasonable performance for the woofer.



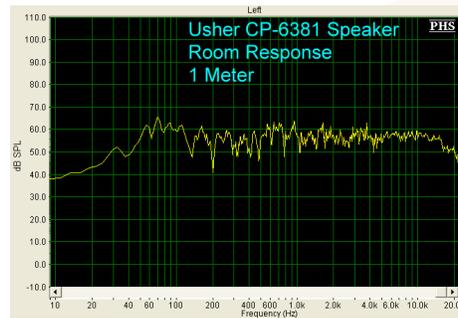
The midrange driver had less than 0.25% THD+N at 1 kHz.



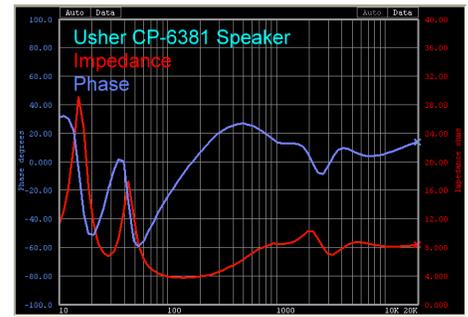
And, the tweeter had less than 0.2% THD+N at 10 kHz. If you compare these results with some of the other speakers we have performed bench tests on, you will see that the CP-6381 has very good distortion figures in the midrange and tweeter.



The Room Response was relatively flat up to 16 kHz and then rolled off. At the low end, there was a bump at about 70 Hz, and the response rolled off below 50 Hz.



The impedance stays pretty close to 8 ohms between 1 kHz and 20 kHz, but dips to 4 ohms in the 100 Hz range. The electrical phase stays between + 400 and - 600. These speakers seem relatively easy to drive, so any amplifier should work, but I would suggest at least 100 watts per channel.



CONCLUSIONS

Frankly, for \$3,400/pair, the Usher CP-6381s are incredible. I am used to seeing a price tag of \$10,000/pair for something that is built like and sounds like these speakers. They have a very focused soundstage, natural timbre, and low distortion. And, don't forget, the CP6381s are in the middle of Usher's price and quality range. I can only imagine what the Dancer Series sounds like. Hmmm . . . let's get a pair of those and find out.

Specifications:

- Design: Three-Way, Ported
- Drivers: One 1.25" Silk Tweeter, One 7" Midrange, One 8" Woofer
- MFR: 29 Hz - 28 kHz; - 3 dB
- Sensitivity: 87 dB/W/M
- Nominal Impedance: 8 Ohms
- Power Handling: 150 Watts
- Crossover Frequencies: 290 Hz, 2.57 kHz,
- Dimensions: 51" H x 13.8" W x 25.6" D
- Weight: 139 Pounds/Each
- MSRP: \$3,400/Pair USA;
- Available in Red, Black, White, Silver, Yellow



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