

## NHT Classic

## The Perfect Vision

Chris Martens

## 5-Channel Speaker System

## Leaders of the Pack?

In recent years, NHT (the acronym stands for Now Hear This) has made waves with its excellent but expensive self-powered, DSP-controlled Xd speaker (favorably reviewed in *The Absolute Sound* Issue 163). Fortunately, NHT has applied insights gleaned from the Xd development effort to create its affordable new Classic series speakers, which are said to represent the firm's "best efforts to date in passive loudspeaker design." To put that claim to the test, we chose a 5-channel system consisting of two Classic Four floorstanders used as L/R mains, one Classic Three C center channel, and a pair of Classic Three stand-mount monitors used as surrounds.

Significantly, the top Classic models all share a common, core *three-driver* array, which consists of a .7-inch aluminum dome tweeter, a 2-inch aluminum dome midrange, and a 6.5-inch aluminum-coned mid-bass driver. To this array, the Classic Four floorstander adds a 10-inch aluminum woofer in an internally isolated enclosure to



These X-shaped dampers are essential.

handle the low-bass workload. These anodized aluminum drivers give the Classic speakers a significant leg up on the competition in terms of overall clarity, detail, and openness.

To test the Classics' resolving power, I put on the "Movement IV" of Jennifer Higdon's haunting *Concerto for Orchestra* [Telarc, SACD], which features harp, piano, celesta, and a veritable potpourri of percussion instru-

## FACTOID!

NHT's Classic-series speakers leverage technologies developed for the firm's exotic, self-powered Xd speaker system.

ments. The Classics faithfully reproduced the distinctive timbres and voices of each instrument, capturing the attack and decay individual notes with terrific purity. They also did a superlative job of capturing the acoustics of the reverberant recording venue. The only downside I observed was that the Classics occasionally showed faint traces of midrange edginess, which may be the price to be paid for all the detail and definition those agile aluminum drive units deliver. Neverthe-

**The Last Word**



- Terrific transparency and openness
- Creates deep, wide, holographic soundstages
- Main speakers serve double-duty as subwoofers
- Tasteful piano black finish
- Solid value



- Occasional hints of midrange edginess
- Won't generate "hyper-bass" favored by some

**Specifications**

**Classic Four L/R main speakers**

- Driver complement: One 10" aluminum woofer, one 6.5" aluminum mid-bass driver, one 2" fluid-cooled aluminum dome mid-range driver, one .7" fluid-cooled aluminum dome tweeter
- Frequency response: 27Hz-20kHz ±3dB
- Sensitivity: 86dB (1W/1m)
- Impedance: 6 ohms
- Recommended amp power: 250Wpc max
- Dimensions: 41" x 7.5" x 16"
- Weight: 64.3 lbs.

**Classic Three monitor/surrounds**

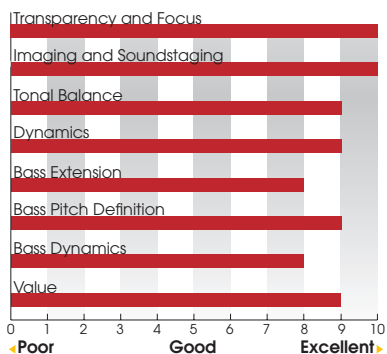
- Driver complement: Same as the Classic Four, minus the 10" woofer
- Frequency response: 45Hz-20kHz ±3dB
- Sensitivity: 86dB (1W/1m)
- Impedance: 8 ohms
- Recommended amp power: 200Wpc max
- Dimensions: 13.7" x 7.5" x 10.4"
- Weight: 17 lbs.

**Classic Three C center channel speaker**

- Driver complement: Similar to Classic Three with two 6.5" mid-bass drivers
- Frequency response: 73Hz-20kHz ±3dB
- Sensitivity: 87dB (1W/1m)
- Impedance: 8 ohms
- Recommended amp power: 150Wpc max
- Dimensions: 7" x 21.9" x 8.3"
- Weight: 23 lbs.
- System Price: \$3200 (Classic Fours, \$900/each; Classic Threes, \$400/each; Classic Three C, \$600/each)

**NHT Classic 5-channel speaker system**  
(relative to comparably-priced surround speaker systems)

**System as a whole**



less, I found the clarity of the Classics addictive.

NHT has also paid close attention to enclosure design, giving the Classic speakers rigid, low-resonance cabinets with thick, curved, baffle plates designed to reduce edge reflections. To further control dispersion and to minimize unwanted driver interactions, NHT supplies X-shaped foam rubber dampers that get installed between the dome tweeters and midrange drivers. Together, these design touches help the Classics present huge, spacious, three-dimensional soundstages—the kind normally heard only from pricey high-end designs.

The Classics' imaging is just scary good. For example, on John Abercrombie, Eddie Gomez, and Gene Jackson's *Structures* [Chesky, SACD], a multi-channel jazz recording that has no center channel mix, the Classic Fours produced such compelling center-fill images that guest listeners swore the center channel speaker was playing (though it was not).

Another example drawn from the film *Open Range* will illustrate the system's soundstaging prowess. Early in the film a cowboy crew hurriedly sets up

camp to take shelter from an approaching thunderstorm, as bolts of lightning flash in the distance. Suddenly, a giant thunderclap explodes behind the camp, and when it does first-time viewers sometimes flinch involuntarily and look to the rear of the room with real apprehension in their eyes. The point is that the Classics' spatial characteristics can lift listeners out of their comfort zones to place them in the center of the action.

While on the subject of thunder, let me mention that the Classic speakers tend to produce accurate though not necessarily "spectacular" bass. This will be fine for many listeners, but some might find the low frequency response of the Classic Fours too lightly balanced. For added low-end emphasis, use your tone controls or add NHT's X2 crossover and one or two A1 power amplifiers to bi-amplify the Classic Fours.

Overall, I believe NHT's Classic system stands as a new mid-priced performance leader. Few systems this price can match the Classics' openness, detail, and three-dimensionality—qualities guaranteed to enhance your enjoyment of music and films. **TPV**