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Artison Masterpiece Home Theater System

Hidden In Plain Sight

Artison CEO Cary Christie is a man on a mission, which is to build ultra high-performance “plasma speakers” that integrate so perfectly with flat panel TVs that they seem to disappear. Not content to stop there, Christie has also created the most innovative surround speakers we’ve heard in a long time, plus—get this—a radical reactance-cancelling subwoofer that plays very low and very loud with almost no cabinet vibration. The result is a system that looks and sounds great yet can literally be hidden in plain sight.

FEATURES At the heart of this system are Artison’s ingenious Masterpiece LCR speakers, which come with a special bracket and hardware kit that allow you to position them flush against the sides of your TV. The company also offers grilles that are size- and color-matched to fit most popular sizes of flat panel sets.

The Masterpiece LCRs ship in matched, mirror image pairs that cover the left, center, and right channels. To pull this off each speaker has two sets of forward-firing drivers, each consisting of a tweeter and mid-bass driver. One set handles the left or right channel (depending on the speaker), while the other carries half of the center channel workload.

The center channel drivers in each LCR are angled inwards to create a focused center image, while the main channel drivers are angled outwards to help create a front soundstage much wider than the TV screen. The Masterpieces also incorporate rear-firing tweeters, which add ambience and greater perceived depth.

For the rear surround channels, Artison offers its innovative LRS Surround satellites, available either in freestanding/on-wall or in-wall versions. Each LRS sports two tweeters and a mid-bass driver in a hybrid

monopole/dipole configuration, which provides precise spatial cues from the midrange on down, but becomes more diffuse at higher frequencies to make surround effects sound smoother and more enveloping.

Completing the system is Artison’s two-piece “reactance can-

celing” RCC 600-FS floorstanding subwoofer system, which consists of a four-woofer bass module (an in-wall version is also available), plus a remote-controlled 600-watt amplifier. Christie’s unique woofer enclosure places two pairs of racetrack-shaped woofers in opposition to one another, so that their mechanical vibration forces cancel out. The amplifier module provides extensive controls for phase, crossover frequency



The unique design of the two-piece RCC 600-FS sub cancels out almost all vibration.

Ratings
(Compared with mid-\$5k surround systems)

Transparency and focus	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □
Imaging and soundstaging	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □
Tonal balance	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Dynamics	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □
Bass extension	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □
Bass pitch definition	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Bass dynamics	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □
Value	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □

◀ Poor Good Excellent ▶



The Last Word



- Elegant aesthetics
- Clear, smooth, powerful sound
- Superb surround speakers
- Vibration-canceling sub



- Soundstages not as wide as some

Specifications:

Masterpiece Home Theater System

Main Speaker

- Driver complement: two 1" "ring radiator" tweeters, one 1" rear tweeter, two 5.25" Kevlar mid-bass drivers
- Frequency response: 70Hz–50 kHz
- Sensitivity: 89dB
- Impedance: 6 ohms
- Dimensions: 27" x 6" x 3.5" without grilles
- Weight: 32 lbs/pair
- Price: \$2500/pair

Surround Speaker

- Driver complement: Two 1" tweeters, one 4.5" Kevlar mid-bass driver
- Frequency response: 80Hz–20 kHz
- Sensitivity: 89dB
- Dimensions: 9" x 9.5" x 3"
- Weight: 12 lbs /pair
- Price: \$500/pair

Subwoofer

- Driver complement: Four 5" x 8" "racetrack" woofers in a reactance-canceling enclosure
- Dimensions (in room version): 23.5" x 9.4" x 12"
- Weight: 56 lbs
- Price: \$1200
- Outboard amplifier power: 600 watts
- Dimensions: 2.63" x 19" x 16.25"
- Weight: 35 lbs
- Price: \$1000

System Price: \$5200

Manufacturer Info

(775) 833-4344
artisonusa.com

and slope, and equalization settings, along with an Auto EQ system with calibration mic that tests and adjusts the sub's in-room frequency response. The sub provides a MUSIC mode, which extends the bass as deeply as possible with maximum accuracy, and a MOVIE mode, which doesn't go as deep but provides more headroom for large-scale low-frequency sound effects.

PERFORMANCE The longer I live with this system the more it impresses me with its stunning good looks, sheer ingenuity of design, and pure sound. Visually it simply disappears as the speakers become part of your TV. This system is a godsend for performance-minded apartment dwellers who want great sound but are pressed for space.

You'll have to find places for the wall-mountable LRS Surround speakers, but they are so compact and elegant looking that you could put them on end tables. Finally, the two-piece RCC 600-FS sub fairly begs to be installed in open-walled equipment cabinets or bookshelves. And because the woofer design cancels out enclosure vibrations, you won't have worry about the woofers shaking your furniture apart.

Overall, the Masterpiece LCR system sounds comparable to and in some respects better than the best like-priced floorstanding or stand-mount surround systems I've

heard. Better yet, it takes up little (if any) floor space, depending on where you put the sub.

On movies, I was impressed by the system's clarity, smoothness, big-hearted dynamics, and very good surround sound imaging. One film that brought all these qualities into play at once was *Déjà Vu*. When the terrorist's car bomb detonates in the horrific ferryboat explosion scene, the shock wave produced by the Artison sub was clean, potent, and genuinely scary, while the rest of the system captured the grisly sound effects with sobering realism and impact. Smaller, more focused details came into play in the aftermath of the explosion: anguished cries for help from survivors in the water, the sound of police boats churning to the rescue, and the urgent "whup-whup-whup" of helicopter blades passing overhead.

Through all this the Masterpiece system performed beautifully, with one minor caveat. The front part of the soundstage was not quite as wide as it would have been with a conventional speaker setup. Still, I think many homeowners would

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find this a more-than-acceptable tradeoff, given that the system is so compact and unobtrusive. On the other hand, the Masterpieces decisively outperformed conventional systems in one key area: center imaging. Owing to their unique design, the speakers produced center images that appeared to originate from the center of the screen—not from above or below it as with many traditional setups. This made centered sounds seem more connected or “anchored” to onscreen images.



The LRS Surround Satellites round out the Masterpiece system.

But if this system is good on movie soundtracks, it may be even better for multichannel music. I put on Sara K's *Hell or High Water*, an exquisitely produced, folk/jazz SACD recording on the German Stockfisch label. Sara K's voice is at once high and breathy-sounding, yet with darker, more earthy-sounding undertones, and the Masterpieces captured the character of her voice with terrific clarity

and nuance. But what I found really breathtaking was the transparency of the sound—the way the speakers captured the high overtones and plucking sounds of acoustic guitars, the subtle touches of reverb, and the deep, richly textured snarl of Hans-Jörg Maucksch's fretless electric bass. It's downright eerie to listen to this system for the first time because you hear a big, lavishly detailed soundstage, though you don't see any speakers. That is the magic of Artison's Masterpiece system.

As for Artison's RCC 600-FS, it is one of the besting-sounding and most versatile subs I've ever heard at any price. In “music” mode, the thing is just wonderfully clean, clear, and powerful, with no looseness or tubbiness. Yet in “movie” mode, the sub shifts gears to produce big, high-impact effects that will shake your room (but not your furniture or the woofer enclosure itself).

BOTTOM LINE Artison's clever Masterpiece system is an aesthetic and engineering tour de force that merges elegant and unobtrusive visual elements with top-flight sound quality—sound that's right in line with, and in the areas of bass and center imaging, better than what you can expect to hear from traditional surround systems in this price range. **TPV**

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