

High-End Surround Sound For the Rest of Us

GoldenEar TritonCinema Two 5-Channel Surround System

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Source: The Perfect Vision



GoldenEar TritonCinema Two 5-Channel Surround System



GoldenEar SuperSat 50C center channel speaker

What's really needed in order to get the job done, and what Gross and Givogue are uniquely well qualified to provide, is the elusive combination of vision, experience, genuinely keen and discerning ears, a restless and inventive streak that won't settle for mediocre solutions, pure technical know-how and lots of it, and, importantly, proven business and customer service models that have stood the test of time. Put all these ingredients together and what you get is GoldenEar Technology.

GoldenEar's first product was the flagship Triton Two floorstanding loudspeaker (\$2449.98/pair), which has been winning friends, blowing minds, and influencing people since the moment it debuted last fall at CEDIA 2010. Now, we have a chance to audition GoldenEar's TritonCinema Two 5-channel surround system (\$3499.95), which consists of a pair of Triton Two floorstanders used as left/right main speakers, a SuperSat 50C center channel speaker, and a pair of SuperSat 3 satellites used as surround speakers.

Interestingly, the system neither specifies nor requires standalone subwoofers, since both of the Triton Two floorstanders contain highly capable, built-in powered subwoofers of their own. All elements of the system are precisely voice-matched to one another with the sonic results that are, as you'll learn in a moment, breathtakingly good. As a result, the TritonCinema Two system not only offers stunning value for money, but is exceedingly good when judged by any standard (meaning the attractive pricetag seems, well, like extra icing on the cake).



In the early 1970's Sandy Gross helped co-found Polk Audio and then teamed with Don Givogue in 1990 to found Definitive Technology. Now, Sandy Gross and Don Givogue have joined forces once again to create a third loudspeaker company: GoldenEar Technology. To say that these guys

have speaker manufacturing in their blood would be, if you'll pardon the pun, a gross understatement. But look deeper and you'll see a common conceptual thread that links all three of these firms across the decades: namely, a passionate commitment to the idea that high-end audio should be accessible to the vast majority of music and movie lovers — not just to an elite few with the deepest of deep pockets.

I would say that Sandy Gross and Don Givogue have consciously taken a pragmatic approach to high-end audio, which might seem like a contradiction in terms to some, but that is a concept that Gross and Givogue have, over the years, turned into an art form. In practice this means several things. For starters, it means that Sandy and Don understand, appreciate, and enjoy legitimately great high-end audio components — the kind that deliver no-excuses performance first and last, and that reach that elusive place where science and art merge, yielding no small amount of sonic magic. It also means, however, that Gross and Givogue are painfully aware that relatively few would-be enthusiasts can actually afford the top-shelf components whose sound they so deeply admire (spirits are willing, but wallets are not). Faced with this dilemma, and never being ones to accept the status quo, Gross and Givogue have made it their near-lifelong mission to figure out ways and means of building speakers that deliver genuine high-end performance, yet can profitably be sold at Everyman prices (thus providing what I call, "high-end sound for the rest of us").

This is not, of course, a new idea, but the truth is that while many speaker makers have learned to talk the talk, few can actually walk the walk, which is a shame. The road to hell, as the old saying goes, is paved with good intentions, and in the loudspeaker universe I think it is also paved by ostensibly good product designs that are crippled by inadequate engineering resources and a lack of manufacturing know-how, or that fall prey to half-baked business plans.



GoldenEar's SuperSat 3 satellite speaker

Important note: while this may not be the first review you read of the TritonCinema Two system, we believe it may be one of the first to cover the final production version of the system (just like the ones enthusiasts will be able to buy). The fact is that early GoldenEar press samples of the Triton Two's (including the ones sent to The Perfect Vision) were identical to the pilot production models first demonstrated at CEDIA 2010. The Perfect Vision learned, however, that GoldenEar had made small but significant improvements in the control circuit for the Triton Two subwoofer amplifier — changes that have been incorporated in all production model Triton Two's shipped to GoldenEar dealers. Accordingly, TPV elected to delay its review until its Triton Two review samples could be retrofitted with final production-version amplifier control boards, which proved to be a good decision. The change essentially redefines the neutral tonal balance point for the user-adjustable subwoofer amp, giving the production Triton Two's an even clearer, better balanced sound than the CEDIA demo units exhibited (plus a more usable real-world range of amplifier adjustments).

OVERVIEW

Consider this system if: You have always wanted a serious, high-end, high-performance home theater speaker system, but couldn't afford the cost of entry (often up in the high four-figure to five-figure range). This system will take you where you want to go on a performance level, but at a far more manageable price than you might have thought possible. In particular, consider the TritonCinema Two system if, at heart, you are both a home theater enthusiast and a dyed-in-the-wool, music-minded

audiophile. Either way, the GoldenEar system has your needs well covered. Finally, note that this system is relatively easy to drive, meaning you won't have to drop a bundle on associated electronics (unless you wish to do so).

Look further if: You like listening to vigorous action film soundtracks at ear-bleed volume levels; the Triton Two system has plenty of dynamic clout for most applications, but when pushed really hard the Triton Two subwoofers will exhibit audible signs of compression. Also note that the Triton Two system does not offer quite the same levels of "see-through" sonic transparency that some planar magnetic and electrostatic systems do. But having said that let me add that nothing I've heard at or near the TritonCinema Two system's price can touch its performance.



Ratings (relative to comparably-priced surround speaker systems)

Transparency and Focus: **10**
Imaging and Soundstaging: **10** (imaging so good it makes us wish our 10-point rating scale went up to "11" — or possibly beyond)
Tonal Balance: **9**
Dynamics: **9**
Bass Extension: **10**
Bass Pitch Definition: **9.5**
Bass Dynamics: **9.5**
Value: **10** (the phrase "off the charts" comes to mind)

FEATURES

Triton Two: The Triton Two is a 3-way, five-driver, dual passive radiator-equipped, floorstanding loudspeaker with a built-in powered subwoofer. Among audiophiles, the Triton Two has already begun to earn a reputation as a radical overachiever that delivers shocking performance for the money. Happily, some of the same qualities that endear the Triton Two to music lovers also make it a great platform upon which to base a home theater system. Design highlights include:

- An HVFR High-Velocity Folded Ribbon tweeter whose design is patterned after the pioneering work done by Dr. Oskar Heil on what he called the "Heil Air Motion Transformer." GoldenEar says, "The HVFR tweeter propagates sound waves and moves the air by squeezing it with its accordion-like pleated diaphragm, rather than pushing it as conventional drivers do." The result is a high-frequency driver with exceptional frequency extension and transient speed, but with essentially no (obviously unwanted) "ringing" distortions as with metal dome tweeters. The tweeter is also capable of high output levels with very low distortion.
- The Triton Two incorporates dual, cast-basket, MVPP Multi-Vaned Phase Plug-equipped 4½-inch mid-bass drivers with "a computer optimized cone design." These mid-bass drivers are arranged as a D'Appolito-type array, with the MVPP mid-bass drivers flanking the HVFR tweeter mentioned above. Significantly, the MVPP mid-bass drivers are said to "achieve smooth linear frequency response extending above 20kHz" (a frequency far above the driver's actual operating range as used in the Triton Two). The upshot of this extended-range response is that the mid-bass driver is said to offer sufficient transient speed to keep up with the lightning-fast HVFR tweeter.
- The lower, "subwoofer" section of the Triton Two's enclosure houses dual "quadratic" 5-inch x 9-inch "subwoofers" that couple with dual 7-inch x 10-inch planar passive radiators (GoldenEar calls these "infrasonic radiators"). The oblong shape of the drivers and passive radiators is said to help break up or forestall certain types of diaphragm resonances that can occur with traditional circular woofers. Together, the subwoofers and passive radiators give the Triton Two bass that extends down to a claimed lower limit of 16 Hz.
- A 1200-Watt, DSP-controlled digital amplifier powers the subwoofer section of the Triton Two. GoldenEar says, "the amp has a Programmable Logic Device (PLD) based state machine with a nearly instantaneous 278ns update time to perfectly manage a myriad of functions including soft-clipping, DC offset control, output-stage anti-saturation protection and discrete multi-band limiting."
- Under most circumstances the subwoofer amplifier draws its input signals directly from the Triton Two's speaker taps, though a separate LFE input jack is also provided for enthusiasts who wish to supply separate LFE signal feeds from an AVR or A/V controller. The amp turns on

automatically when it senses that audio signals are present, remaining on until signals are absent for a prolonged period of time (in which case the amp reverts back to a "standby" mode). A rear-panel mounted amp level control knob provides suggested neutral tonal balance marking, while providing an ample upward and downward range of adjustment so that users can tune the speaker's woofer output levels for most any room.

- Note that one benefit of basing a surround system on the Triton Two floorstanders is that you wind up with two powered subwoofers — not just one as in most home theater systems, which tends to foster noticeably smoother and more evenly balanced in-room bass response.
- The Triton Two's, like Henry Ford's famous Model T, are offered in "any color you want as long as it's black." The entire speaker enclosure, whose airfoil-like shape is a sculptural delight, is covered by a sleek, stretchy black fabric grille "sock," which looks great while also saving buyers the cost of expensive lacquered or veneered cabinet surfaces.
- As a subtle but very pleasing visual touch, GoldenEar provides a gloss black upper trim panel that clips to the top rear surface of the speaker and that covers over the seams of the grille sock, giving the fabric covering a delightfully organic and literally seamless appearance. A matching gloss black mounting plate helps steady the tower-type enclosure, making it resistant to potential tip-over accidents. The speaker is supplied with threaded floor spikes.

SuperSat 50C: The SuperSat 50 and 50C are the larger of two series of satellite or LCR-type speakers offered by GoldenEar (with the 50C moniker denoting the center-channel version). The SuperSat 50 is a slim, 2-way, three-driver, dual passive radiator-equipped design that borrows driver technology directly from the Triton Two. Design highlights:

- The SuperSat 50C uses the same HVFR tweeter and dual MVPP 4½-inch mid-bass drivers similar to those found in the Triton Two (though the 50C's tweeter is rotated 90 degrees to accommodate its expected horizontal mounting orientation).
- The SuperSat 50C incorporates dual 4-inch x 7-inch passive radiators conceptually similar to, but smaller than, the 7-inch x 10-inch passive radiators used in the Triton Two. The passive radiators help extend the SuperSat 50 C's bass response down to a claimed roll-off point of 60Hz.
- The SuperSat 50C enclosure is made of "aerospace-grade aluminum" and finished in gloss black. The enclosure is suitable either for tabletop or wall-mount applications. Note: the SuperSat 50 can also be used with optional floor stands.
- To accommodate wall-mount applications the speaker features a pair of keyhole-type mounting slots in its rear panel, as well as threaded inserts for use with third-party mounts.
- To support tabletop (or shelf-mount) applications, GoldenEar supplies a pair of ingeniously designed, user-adjustable, tilt-back mounting feet that bolt into the threaded inserts on the rear of the SuperSat 50C enclosure. The tilt feature is extremely helpful for angling the speaker either upward or downward toward the main listening area, as necessary. The adjustable feet are finished in gloss black to match the 50C enclosure.
- As an alternative, GoldenEar will offer optional, extra-cost floor stands for the SuperSat 50.

SuperSat 3: The SuperSat 3 and 3C are the smaller of GoldenEar's two series of satellite or LCR-type speakers (where the 3C would be the center-channel version). The SuperSat 3 is an extremely compact, 2-way, three-driver speaker that, like the larger SuperSat 50/50C, borrows driver technology from the Triton Two. Design highlights:

- The SuperSat 3 uses the same HVFR tweeter and dual MVPP 4½-inch mid-bass drivers similar to those found in the Triton Two.
- Unlike the SuperSat 50C, the SuperSat 3 enclosure is constructed "from a rigid, non-resonant marble-powder infused polymer" and finished in gloss black. The enclosure is suitable for tabletop, floor stand-mount, or wall-mount applications (as explained below).
- To accommodate wall-mount applications the speaker features a pair of keyhole-type mounting holes in its rear panel, as well as threaded inserts for use with third-party mounts.
- To support tabletop (or shelf-mount) applications, GoldenEar ships each SuperSat3 with a clever matching stand that fastens into the keyhole slot in the rear of the SuperSat 3 enclosure. The adjustable stand is finished in gloss black to match the SuperSat 3 enclosure.
- As an alternative, GoldenEar will offer optional, extra-cost floor stands for the SuperSat 3.



SONIC CHARACTER

Starting with first things first, let me observe that the TritonCinema Two system offers exceptionally smooth and neutrally balanced tonal response, with excellent extension at both frequency extremes. Up high, GoldenEar's HVFR tweeter provides gorgeous treble detailing, sumptuous high-frequency harmonics, and beautifully conveys the sense of "air" surrounding instruments, yet does so without the slightest hint of edginess, stress, or glare. Honestly, the HVFR tweeter will spoil you rotten, as it tends to make many other high-frequency transducers (even some quite good ones) sound slightly edgy, etched, or just plain "stressed out" by comparison.

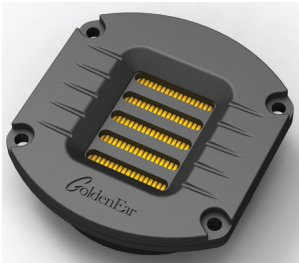
Down low, the Triton Two's powered subwoofer provides real live, no jive, no-excuses full-range bass, yet without sounding thick, bloated, or overbearing. After listening to the TritonCinema Two system for a while you may find, as I did, that the system routinely reaches way down low to reproduce deep bass notes or sound effects that somehow seem to elude many other ostensibly full-range systems. The moral of the story is that it is one thing to say your system offers full-range bass, but another to deliver the goods. Happily, the TritonTwo system is the real deal.

Bass-to-midrange integration in the TritonCinema Two system is very, very good, but not quite up to the lofty standards established by some of today's very best \$5k – \$10k/pair stereo speakers. There's not much missing, though, apart from subtle touches of heightened mid-bass transient speed, textural finesse, and focus — qualities you might find and enjoy in speakers such as the new MaSgnepan MG3.7 (\$5500/pair). But in fairness, note that a pair of Maggies costs thousands more than the whole 5-channel GoldenEar system does, that the TritonCinema Two system offers significantly deeper bass extension than the Maggies, and then note that the GoldenEar rig is easy to drive, whereas the Maggies are famously power hungry (got Watts?). My point is that while the GoldenEar system's bass performance is not perfect, its all-around combination of low-frequency virtues is well balanced and makes plenty of sense.



MVPP midrange driver

something that's much easier said than done.



HVFR Heil-type tweeter

One of the nicest aspects of the TritonCinema Two rig involves its unexpected levels of midrange purity and refinement — qualities exhibited not only by the Triton Two main speakers, but also by all the other speakers in the system (which, remember, share the exact same tweeters and similar mid-bass/midrange drivers). GoldenEar's MVPP midrange driver looks conventional enough, but it produces an authentic and very sophisticated sound, complete with excellent transient speed, textural nuances galore, and wonderful qualities of easygoing openness and transparency. But one of the best and most essential aspects of the midrange driver is that it is fast enough to blend seamlessly with the HVFR Heil-type tweeter —

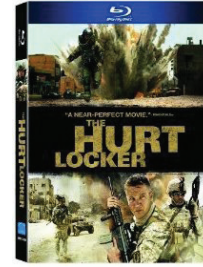
If you have much prior experience in listening to speakers equipped with Heil-type tweeters, then you know without my saying so that it can be very, very difficult to get them to blend properly with other drivers. The problem, as a rule, is that Heil-type tweeters sound great in their own right, but tend to make everything else sound sluggish and slow by comparison. Well aware of this problem, both Sandy Gross and Don Givogue pushed the GoldenEar engineering team hard to create a piston-type midrange driver that would be light enough, fast enough, and subtle enough to keep pace, and their efforts have paid off handsomely. I have never, ever heard a piston-type midrange driver

blend more perfectly with a Heil-type tweeter than in the GoldenEar system — not even in über-pricey high-end speakers costing many times the price of the entire TritonCinema Two rig. As far as I'm concerned, it's the uncannily sweet, smooth marriage of GoldenEar's MVPP midrange driver and HVFR tweeter that's responsible for much of the sonic magic of which this system is capable. The bottom line is that you hear two drivers speaking as one, which is as things should be.

And speaking of magic, let's focus for a moment on what might be the TritonCinema Two system's single most spectacular quality: mind-blowingly good 3D imaging and soundstaging. Assuming you have the system more or less properly set up, you can expect to experience moments where sounds become almost completely set free from the speaker enclosures, so that you almost have the sense that the sounds are occurring on their own — without any intervention or effort on the speakers' part at all. This remarkable ability to set sounds free unleashes the kind of holographic imaging that, for many listeners, will I think be a stunning revelation. Once you hear the spooky three-dimensionality of the GoldenEar rig in action, many competing systems seem terribly flat, constrained, or mechanical sounding by comparison.

The one area where I found the GoldenEar system to be very good, but not necessarily mind-blowingly great, involves its handling of ultra large-scale dynamics — dynamics of the type you might encounter in over-the-top movie soundtracks with volume levels cranked to the nines. While the system is easy to drive and has truly substantial output capabilities, it does have its limits — though these rarely if ever become apparent on music. But if you really hammer the volume levels on bombastic, hyper-dramatic, blockbuster action film soundtracks, you will eventually hear signs of compression and congestion (probably the DSP circuit intervening to prevent woofer damage). But even under worst-case conditions the GoldenEar subwoofer system keeps its composure, never sounding overtly distorted or distressed. All that happens when cuckoo-level bass effects present themselves is that the subwoofer amp temporarily applies soft-clipping/limiting functions for a few moments, and then promptly resumes normal operation. And consider this: while there might be comparably priced systems that could potentially play a tiny bit louder than the TritonCinema Two system can, most would have a very difficult time matching the GoldenEar system's other compelling sonic strengths.

MOVIE PERFORMANCE



and Specialist Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) go out on patrol together for the first time.

I turned to an old favorite test disc to give the GoldenEar system a workout; namely, the Blu-ray of *The Hurt Locker*. If you know the soundtrack of this Academy Award-winning film well, then you might agree that what makes it so effective is the artful juxtaposition of external sounds of conflicts erupting in the streets of Baghdad versus internal, point-of-view sounds presented as if we are, like bomb disposal expert Sergeant James (Jeremy Renner), looking at the world from within the stifling and hyper-stressful confines of a tightly sealed bombproof suit. Never is this more apparent than in the first sequence where James and his teammates Sergeant Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) go out on patrol together for the first time.

After receiving a report that a possible improvised explosive device may be buried at the far end of a lonely and nearly deserted street, James suits up to investigate (against the advice of his teammates, who argue for sending a camera-equipped robot instead). Undaunted, James seeks help with the visor of the suit and then heads off, soon dropping a smoke grenade that partially block his teams' view of his action. From the outside, we hear the hard, sharp "clack" of the smoke grenade going off, while from the mildly distorted earphones and radio of the suit we hear the sound of James' steady breathing and the increasingly frantic voice of Sergeant Sanborn shouting, "what are you doing?"

Tension ratchets upward as James moves down the street as we hear the screech of tires and the revving of an engine as an Iraqi cab driver-turned-insurgent blasts past a checkpoint and heads straight for James. The external racket of the careening cab, augmented by shouts from checkpoint soldiers, becomes louder and more frenetic, even as James calmly draws his sidearm, points it straight at the cabbie's head, and then very softly says into his microphone, "I got this." At the last moment, the cab screeches to a halt, soldiers voices struggle to decide whether to come to James' assistance or to stand back out of range of possible bomb fragments, while within the suit James continues his slow, steady breathing, then peers intently at the sweating face of the cab driver and murmurs — almost to himself — "what are you thinking?" After firing several warning shots into the ground, and then through the windshield of the cab, James eventually stares down the cabbie and forces him to back up, where he is promptly dragged from his cab and arrested. The bark of James' 9mm pistol seems almost unbearably loud and harsh in contrast to the relative silence from within his bombproof suit.

What makes the scene so powerful is the way the GoldenEar system's vividly and realistically reproduces the loud, cacophonous, and at times violent sounds from the street, complete with reverberations and echoes that help us instinctively outside the danger inherent in the narrow city street. But what is even more compelling is the system's simultaneous ability to capture the eerie and almost surreal calm that James both experiences and projects from within his bombproof suit — even as he faces one life-or-death situation while en route to another. In ways too subtle and powerful to capture in words, the GoldenEar system helps us to understand that Sergeant James is either one very cool customer, an adrenaline addict of the first rank, or perhaps a bit of both. I've experienced surround sound this good before, but never from a system as affordable as the TritonCinema Two rig.

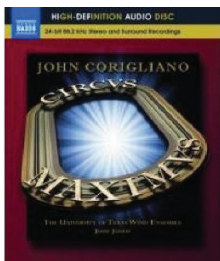
To better understand my comments, above, concerning the TritonCinema Two system's dynamic capabilities, try listening to the soundtrack of another spectacular Academy Award-winning film:



Inception. In particular, pay close attention to the sequence where Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) introduces the young architect Ariadne (Ellen Page) to the limitless creativity that is possible in the context of a shared dream. As Cobb guides Ariadne through one of his own dreams, he allows her to witness an implausible series of slow-motion explosions (complete with strangely phase-shifted low-frequency sound effects), to show her how suggestive dream images can unleash the mind to fill in oddly razor-sharp details of its own. The TritonCinema Two system handles the off-kilter and almost overwhelming sound of those dream explosions without any problems at all.

But even more vigorous soundtrack material arises as Ariadne starts to grasp the peculiar rules of dream-state creativity and then deftly (and to Cobb's great surprise) uses her imagination to fold the structure of the cityscape upon itself, so that the streets slowly bend up and then over their heads. To emphasize the sheer strangeness of the images unfolding onscreen, the soundtrack designer introduces a plethora of loud, jarring, and disjointed ultra-low-frequency effects as Ariadne performs her space-bending trick. Those effects represent, quite frankly, a low-end torture test that pushes most systems — the TritonCinema Two rig included — right to their limits. The good news is that, unlike several systems I've tested with this brutally demanding soundtrack, the TritonCinema Two system navigated those large-scale effects without either shutting down or exhibiting other signs of undue distress. But the system did become audibly compressed as the most violent waves of bass passed by, and so missed out on the fullest measures of impact and depth of which the *Inception* soundtrack is capable. Even so, I felt the GoldenEar system deserved very high marks for keeping its composure under extraordinary pressure (bearing in mind that this soundtrack has forced some subwoofers to throw up their hands and cease operations altogether!).

MUSIC PERFORMANCE



If anything, the TritonCinema Two system does an even better job of reproducing music (especially multi-channel music) than it does with movie soundtracks, which is saying a mouthful. To appreciate what I mean, try listening to the high-resolution recording of Jerry Junkins conducting The University of Texas Wind Ensemble in its performance of John Corigliano's *Circus Maximus* [Naxos, Blu-ray]. What is fascinating about this piece is that Corigliano composed *Circus Maximus* with the explicit intent that it be performed in the *round* (in this case, in the Bass Concert Hall in Austin, TX). Thus, over the course of the performance, listeners will hear a large stage band in the front

of the hall, a marching band that starts out at the rear of the hall, and a smaller "Surround Band," which features small clusters of instruments placed above, behind, and to the sides of the audience.

In *Circus Maximus*, Corigliano invites comparisons between the *Circus Maximus* of Rome in decline with today's media excesses where, as Corigliano says, "many of us have become as bemused by the violence and humiliation that flood the 500-plus channels of our television screens as those mobs of imperial Rome who considered the devouring of human beings by starving lions just another Sunday show." The result is a striking piece of music that is, by turns, beautiful, savage, and strange, and at times a bit unnerving.

One of my favorite movements is "Screen/Siren," which begins with a saxophone quartet and string bass playing from high above the listener to the left side of the hall. Two things jumped out at me during this movement. First, the GoldenEar's perfectly nailed the voices and timbres of the saxophones and bass, making them sound highly realistic. But second, the TritonCinema Two system presented a convincing sonic image of the instruments that — sure enough — appeared to emanate from above and to the left side of the listener. Now most audiophiles are familiar with experience of hearing fine speaker system create precision images to the front of the room. But what is not very common at all is to hear a moderately priced surround sound system pull off exactly the same feat, but directly to side of the room, and with images that remain precise, stable, tightly focused, and highly believable.

Another compelling movement is "Night Music II", which is noteworthy both for the sheer beauty and complexity of the timbres on display and for the remarkable dynamic "mood swings" presented. As "Night Music II" opens, the instrumental voices evoke a dark, mysterious, and initially tranquil nighttime scene, with flutes and higher wind instruments softly carrying the melody as the faint, evanescent sound of a high-hat supplies delicate rhythm accents. But before too long, violent percussion and horn outbursts shatter the mood, with loud low percussion instruments being struck, and with low brass and woodwind sections presenting aggressive back-and-forth exchanges with their higher-pitched brass and woodwind counterparts. It's thoroughly bracing material that poses a stiff dynamic test for any speaker system — a test the TritonCinema Two system passes with flying colors.

Several aspects of the system's performance captured my attention. First, I was wowed by the system's ability to maintain timbral purity and, for want of a better word, authenticity in the face of the movement's radical melodic and dynamic shifts. Throughout "Night Music II", instruments sounded purely like themselves and remained easy to distinguish from one another. Second, I was struck by the system's ability to turn on a dime in a dynamic sense, sounding delicate and almost heartbreakingly hushed in one moment, and then brash, violent, and powerful the next — all without losing composure or context. Finally, and this is the really impressive part, I was floored by the system's ability to continually present stunning, holographic imaging as the movement unfolded. The soundstage produced by the GoldenEar system was huge and three-dimensional, perfectly capturing the dimensions and acoustics of the recording venue. Moderately priced surround systems just aren't supposed to sound this good, but apparently GoldenEar didn't get the memo, and thank goodness for that.

Whatever you do, then, please don't make the mistake of dismissing the TritonCinema Two package as "just another home-theater system." In truth, this is a music-first system that would do most any audiophile proud.

BOTTOM LINE

GoldenEar's TritonCinema Two system qualifies as a true benchmark product as it establishes new high-water marks in terms of performance per dollar, while also exhibiting certain performance characteristics (such as almost eerily-good 3D imaging and soundstaging) that are tough to beat at any price.

First off, the system gets all of the big things right, offering smooth and neutral tonal balance, good sensitivity, full-throated dynamics (within reasonable limits), and, again, absolutely killer surround-sound imaging. But it also provides many of the small but significant performance touches that differentiate great speaker systems from merely good ones — elements such as transient quickness, textural subtlety and finesse, and superb resolution of low-level sonic details. This is one of those rare systems that can convey a desirable and elusive quality of sonic effortlessness.

Listeners who care passionately about music and movies yet are not made of cubic money may well find this system represents the point of diminishing returns (meaning that to do significantly better, you'd potentially need to spend eye-popping sums of money). Once again, Sandy Gross and Don Givogue have provided a solution that places the truly good stuff within reach for the rest of us.

SPECS & PRICING

GoldenEar Technology Triton Two floorstanding speaker

Type: 3-way, five-driver, dual passive radiator-equipped, floorstander with built-in powered subwoofer

Driver complement:

- One High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (Heil-type) tweeter,
- Two 4½-inch mid-bass drivers,
- Two 5-inch x 9-inch quadratic subwoofers,
- Two 7-inch x 10-inch planar passive radiators.

Built-In Amplifier: 1200-Watt subwoofer digital/DSP-controlled amplifier

Frequency response: 16Hz – 35kHz

Sensitivity: 91 dB

Impedance: Compatible with 8 Ohms

Dimensions (HxWxD):

- Speaker: 48" x 7.5" x 15" (height includes mounting base, without spikes)
- Mounting Base: 11.5" W x 18" D (mounting base)

Weight: 60 lbs.

Warranty: 5 years (drivers and cabinet), 3 years (subwoofer amplifier)

Price: \$1249.99/each

GoldenEar Technology SuperSat 50 C center channel speaker

Type: 2-way, three-driver, dual-passive radiator-equipped center channel speaker

Driver complement:

- One High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (Heil-type) tweeter,
- Two 4½-inch mid-bass drivers,
- Two 4-inch x 7-inch passive radiators.

Frequency response: 60Hz – 35kHz

Sensitivity: 92 dB

Impedance: Compatible with 8 Ohms

Dimensions (HxWxD): 4.75" x 27" x 2.5"

Weight: 8 lbs. each

Warranty: 5 years

Price: \$499.99/each

GoldenEar Technology SuperSat 3 satellite speaker

Type: 2-way, three-driver, sealed enclosure satellite speaker

Driver complement:

- One High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (Heil-type) tweeter,
- Two 4½-inch mid-bass drivers.

Frequency response: 80Hz – 35kHz

Sensitivity: 92 dB

Impedance: Compatible with 8 Ohms

Dimensions (HxWxD): 12" x 4.75" x 2.7"

Weight: 6 lbs. each

Warranty: 5 years

Price: \$249.99/each

System Price: \$3499.95