

Space saver

Neville Roberts takes a look at a micro system that will appeal to music fans that don't have a lot of room to play with

Hot on the heels of its Ampster BT mini stereo amplifier comes Tangent's Ampster X4 Micro System. I was impressed by the Ampster BT in my *Choice Extra* review (HFC 409) and its versatile connectivity options including Bluetooth 4.0 connectivity (the BT bit of the model name), and am keen to see how it performs when partnered with Tangent's new Spectrum X4 loudspeaker to form a system for those with limited space.

The Spectrum X4 comes in black or white satin finishes with integrated walnut base plinths, and is supplied with a pair of satin gloves to keep fingerprints off the enclosures while installation takes place. It's a two-way bass-reflex design and the compact dimensions make it ideal for use in small spaces. The 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter and 110mm paper-cone mid/bass drivers claim a wide dispersion and are best matched to amplifiers rated between 20W and 100W, making it an ideal partner for the 50W (quoted) Ampster BT mini. Each drive unit is protected by a mesh grille, which is colour matched to the speaker cabinet's enclosure.

As a compact standmount speaker, the X4 is best placed on a dedicated stand positioned close to head height (when seated) for optimum performance. Each speaker has a pair

of threaded inserts in the back panel and comes supplied with matching screws for wall mounting, using special brackets that you'll have to purchase separately (£40).

Sound quality

I pair the amplifier to my Samsung Galaxy S3 smartphone via Bluetooth and start by playing a recording of Vivaldi's *Concerto for Violin, Oboe, Strings & Continuo* in F major played by La Serenissima. The allegro is bright, sprightly and energetic with an incredibly full sound for such a compact setup. Instrument imaging is great too, with a wide soundstage that is not confined to the space between the speakers. There is also some front-to-back depth evident, but it is fairly constrained and follows my earlier experience of the Ampster BT when reviewing it in isolation. It is, nevertheless, extremely commendable to be able to experience such three dimensionality from a system of this physical size and at this price point.

The X4 is certainly full of surprises and is blessed with a very respectable bass response that is well controlled with Elton John's *A Good Heart* from the album *Wonderful Crazy Night*. All too often small enclosure speaker designs suffer from a woolly and unnaturally extended bass response, but not so here – it's wonderfully

tuneful and powerful. Elton's vocals are rich and clear and positioned slightly to the left of centre with the drums slightly to the right and the rest of the instruments filling the remaining soundstage evenly.

A superb digital recording of Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 3* played by the English Chamber Orchestra shows off the system with a full orchestra. The sound is full and open with a great soundstage. When the piano kicks in – a notoriously difficult instrument for an audio system to get right – it is beautifully clear and very believable in my listening room. The strings are bright without being at all edgy, which highlights the ability of the soft-domed tweeter used in the X4.

To finish off, I up the ante and switch the Ampster BT over from the Bluetooth source to a phono stage feeding its line input. I play a half-speed mastered LP of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*. The somewhat menacing heart beat that precedes *Speak To Me* ramps in from nowhere and builds to a climax heralding the start of the music – and is very well conveyed by the system. This first track then leads to the vocals of *Breathe*, which are correctly positioned slightly back in the soundstage with this recording and the complexities of the music are handled with aplomb.

Conclusion

I have heard numerous 'starter' music systems over the years and very few come close to being referred to as 'hi-fi'. The Tangent Ampster X4 system performs way above its price point and is comfortably at home with a wide range of music. Add in the remote control and the Bluetooth streaming capability of the Ampster BT amplifier, and this neat little package reveals itself to be a good choice for any starter or second-room setup around the home ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Tangent Audio
Ampster X4

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
Micro music system

WEIGHT
7.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
Speakers:
146 x 275 x 198mm
Ampster:
190 x 52 x 139mm

FEATURES
● 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter
● 110mm paper-cone mid-bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity: 88dB/1W/1m
● Quoted power output: 2x 50W (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Avoke

TELEPHONE
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WEBSITE
tangent-audio.com



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
LIKE: Large-scale sound from diminutive components; flexible connectivity; Bluetooth streaming

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

WE SAY: A genuine miniature hi-fi system with impressive flexibility at the price

OVERALL

