

MartinLogan Crescendo Wireless Music System

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AT A GLANCE

Plus

Quick setup Bluetooth streaming Impeccable build quality Excellent bass and tonal balance

Minus

Pricey

Restricted soundstage

THE VERDICT

Crescendo is an elegant tabletop music system that shines with vocal and acoustic music, but it might leave you yearning for a broader soundstage.

Let me just get this out of the way right up front: MartinLogan's Crescendo is a work of art and perhaps the most beautiful tabletop music system on the planet. It's also not at all what you expect from a company that's been building fine electrostatic speakers for three decades. But who can fault a company for broadening its horizons and doing it in a way that upholds its long-standing dedication to quality? Crescendo is, after all, a classy addition to the MartinLogan family.

As I lifted the crescent-shaped structure out of the box and removed its protective wrappings, I was immediately struck by its impeccable build quality, mirror-like black finish (also available in walnut veneer), and polished aluminum stand. Even the slender remote that comes with the system is made of extruded aluminum. I had already cleared a spot for the Crescendo on top of a 3-foot-tall chest of drawers at one end of my 13 x

25-foot living room. Setup was a simple matter of running its removable power cord to a nearby outlet and putting batteries in the remote, which was actually a bit tricky because you have to unscrew a tiny panel to get to the battery compartment.

The fabric grille pops off with a firm push in either corner, revealing an oval woofer, flanked by a pair of rectangular Folded Motion tweeters—the same accordion-like tweeters MartinLogan uses in their Motion Series speakers (see our review of the Motion 40 system on soundandvision.com); the woofer is housed in its own ported chamber, and the tweeters are angled away from the center to encourage stereo separation. Electronics include a 48-kilohertz/24-bit digital signal processor/preamp and a 100-watt Class D amplifier, securely mounted in the sturdy MDF enclosure.



The front control panel—if you can even call it that—is as simple as it gets, with a standby/mute button, an input button to cycle through wireless/Ethernet, auxiliary, Bluetooth, and USB modes, an LED indicator that changes color as you switch inputs, and volume up/down buttons. Around back, you'll find input and power connections, an RCA-style subwoofer output with an on/off button, and a reset button. The remote is of the basic variety, offering a set of standard transport buttons (for use with Apple devices only) plus buttons for volume, bass boost, and input selection.

Performance

I began my listening evaluation by pressing the remote's Bluetooth button and pairing the Crescendo with a Samsung Galaxy S3 smartphone. In less than a minute, I was streaming Brad Paisley's "Some Mistakes," marveling at the crisp, clear interplay of guitars, mandolin, and banjo that opens the song, the immediacy of Paisley's distinctive voice, and ultimately, the simmering outro featuring the native West Virginian's rollicking, twang-infused guitar solos. All very impressive, although the sound became a tad congested on the busy chorus, and when I sat directly in front of and a few feet back from the system, there wasn't much depth or width to the soundstage. I had to remind myself that this is a tabletop system, intended for casual listening while moving about a space—and at that, it excelled.

My listening continued with a variety of material—from Mike Viola (look him up) to Dave Matthews to Mumford & Sons—played on a variety of sources, including a Pioneer universal player connected to the system via the supplied optical audio cable/adaptor and an iPod nano connected via USB. The system also supports wireless playback via Airplay/Wi-Fi, and its auxiliary minijack handles both analog and digital audio, the latter via the optical cable and mini adapter I used.



Whether I was listening to Weezer’s wall of guitars or a smoky blues number from Made Up Mind, the new Tedeschi Trucks Band album, the Crescendo had no trouble filling the room with robust sound and blows away Sonos systems I’ve heard in terms of clarity and tonal balance. For the most part, I didn’t feel compelled to call the subwoofer output into action, the exception being when I listened to remastered SACD versions of a couple of early ’70s classics: the Allman Brothers’ *At Filmore East* and Derek and the Dominos’ *Layla*. The system delivered surprisingly full bass in its Bass+ mode, which I almost always preferred over the Normal position (both selectable via buttons on the remote).

I found myself coming back to acoustic and vocal music, thanks to the Crescendo’s pleasing tonal balance. Israel Kamakawiwo’ole’s beautiful medley “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”/“What a Wonderful World” put the performer and his ukulele in the room. The character of the sound on this and other vocal-oriented tracks was outstanding.

Conclusion

The elegant Crescendo tabletop music system will bring any room to life with crisp, clear, full-bodied sound. If you’re looking for a flexible solution for high-quality casual listening and aren’t worried about an expansive soundstage, the Crescendo delivers the goods. It doesn’t come cheap, but you have to remember you’re also getting a work of art that you’ll be proud to display.