

Ten O'Clock Tech

Waking Up To Great Sound

Arik Hesseldahl, 01.17.05, 10:00 AM ET

When I was in college, my roommate was a stereo equipment junkie. I never quite got the attraction, but he liked nothing better than trying out new speakers and amps and so on.

Our dormitory room was about the size of two or three standard office cubicles, and one of his two speakers was bigger than the mini refrigerator we shared. Playing the thing produced sound that was too big for such a small room. The only time he ever got any real use out of it was when he pointed the speakers out the window on a sunny day to play Hacky Sack.

Big stereo systems I can take or leave. But I like big sound. And I liked what I heard when I first powered up Boston Acoustics' (nasdaq: BOSA — news — people) MicroSystem CD. If you're familiar with the Bose Wave music system, then you get the idea already. This is Boston Acoustics' answer, and it's priced identically at \$499.

The MicroSystem is basically an alarm clock radio for people who take their sound seriously. I went from unpacking the box to playing music in about 60 seconds flat, and was impressed with the sound right away. Bass was strong and clear, while I was able to pick up subtleties that normally would be lost on the typical CD boom box. This system

is suitable for rooms both small and large, as the sound seems to flow evenly.

I tested the system's radio reception on a local jazz station whose programming I love but whose signal always seems problematic, no matter where in New York City I happen to be. I was surprised to hear it come through with stunning clarity--another radio in the same room, tested separately, found it to be such a static-ridden challenge.

The CD player is slot-loaded, which means you insert the CDs directly into the player, rather than having a tray that slides out to accept the disc. It supports regular commercial CDs, but also will play CD-Rs and CD-RWs that have been burned with MP3 or Microsoft (nasdaq: MSFT — news — people) Windows Media files, which makes it a suitable companion to your digital music collection.

A 1/8-inch stereo input jack lets you connect to an Apple Computer (nasdaq: AAPL — news — people) iPod or other digital music player to hear those songs through the system. Two other auxiliary inputs are on the rear panel. There's also a pair of configurable line-level outputs for use with external speakers, allowing you to select the speakers through which you want to hear the sound. One setting lets you bypass the internal speakers entirely.

Since I lose remote controls easily — the credit-card-sized unit that came with this system looks like a prime candidate



Boston Acoustics' Microsystem CD

for misplacement — I like the fold-out face that contains a slot to hold the remote when it's not being used. I did notice that the response time of the remote seemed a little sluggish when trying to boost the volume; using the buttons on top of the system to adjust volume was much faster.

I've never given much thought to my personal clock radios. I have a cheap Sony (nyse: SNE — news — people) clock radio on my bedside table now, and I usually wake up to the annoying electronic beep rather than the radio. It's too tempting at 5 A.M. to stay in bed and listen, instead of getting up — I wouldn't want a clock radio to sound this good so early in the morning, or I'd never get to work on time. Other than that, I have no problem recommending the MicroSystem CD.

