

MUSIC ICON PETER GABRIEL UNPLUGGED!

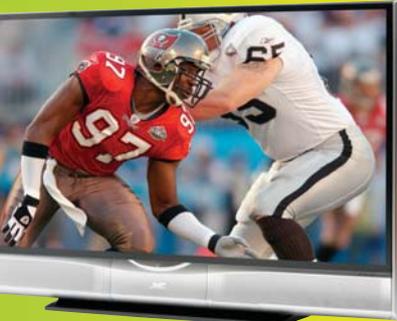


# HOME Theater



www.hometheatermag.com • Electronically reprinted from September 2005

## EXPERIENCE FOOTBALL IN

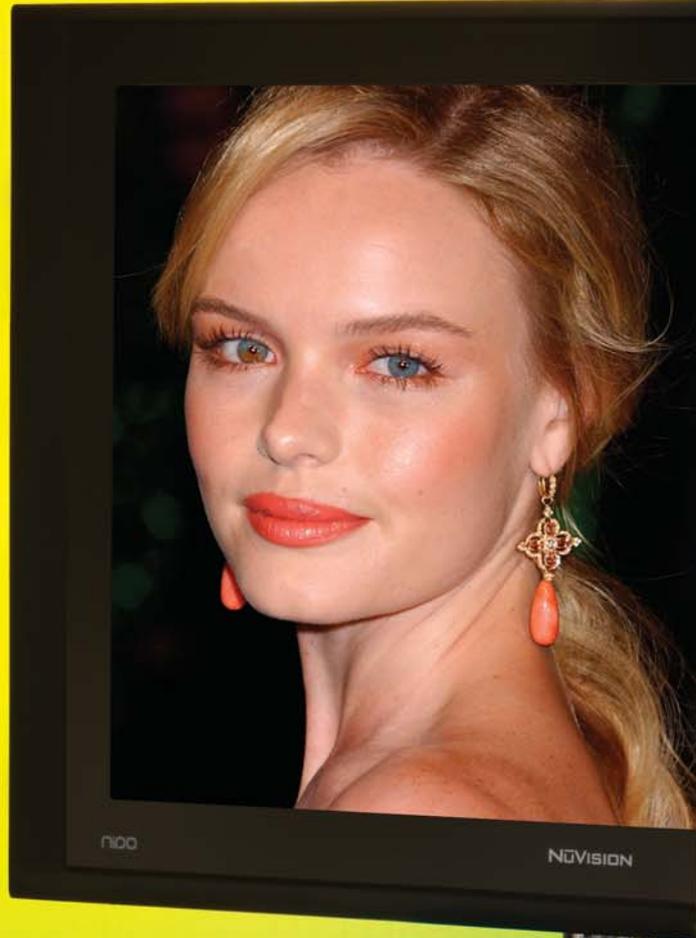


# HD

❖ We Take You Behind the Scenes

❖ Gridiron Star **Simeon Rice's** Home Theater

**Remote Roundup:  
One for Every Wallet**



Kate Bosworth stars in *Beyond the Sea*. See our review inside.



# Orb Audio Mod1 Speaker System

A new global power?



BY KEVIN HUNT

## Orb Audio thinks globally.

There's just no way around it when the only speaker you make is a modular, one-size-fits-all ball of carbon steel with a 4-inch waistline. Orb also sells a traditional subwoofer, but it sports rounded edges and a circular cloth grille. That's it for now in the Orb speaker department.

Yes, it's an extremely small Orb world. You couldn't track down Orb's Mod1 speaker system with a GPS device, even if you tried. Like all Orb products, it's only available online. You'll need a mouse to

sniff out this little system, which is \$749 for five Mod1 satellites and a Super Eight subwoofer. (Add \$9 for shipping.) It's worth a global search, though. At the very least, it's the most significant mini-spherical-speaker system since, oh, the Gallo Nucleus Micros of the late 1990s.

In fact, the Orb Mod1 could be the Micro's long-lost twin brother. (Conspiracy theorists point out that "Orb" is "bro" spelled backward.) Well, maybe it's not such a coincidence. Gary Pelled, who founded Orb Audio with Ethan Siegel in 2002, was once a partner of Anthony Gallo's at Gallo Acoustics.

Orb has apparently modified the Gallo formula enough to avoid a conflict. "Other than being round," says Siegel, "there is actually nothing that similar about the speakers." Except for a few things, like the big, open, smooth sound. These are not, mind you, a poor man's Micro. Yes, the Mod1 satellite uses a single 3-inch full-range driver—the tweeter sits out this dance—but it's constructed with a neodymium magnet, which is smaller and more potent per ounce than the common ferrite or ceramic magnet.

The less bulky magnet, says Siegel, allows for more useable air space inside the cabinet. This, combined with the driver's increased excursion, enhances performance, including output capability in the low-midrange frequencies. That's how the Mod1 sounds: much bigger than its size.

The spherical cabinet isn't designed simply for decorative purposes, either. It also reduces sonic coloration and, in extreme emergencies, makes a mean bocce ball.

For the hand-polished-steel set that I auditioned, or for the new antique-copper finish, add up to \$150 to the system's price. The Mod1 system comes with desk stands in either pearl white or metallic black gloss. Orb also offers assorted stands, from stud wall mounts (\$12.50 each) to the upscale HOSS (hunk of solid steel) floor stands (\$299 per pair).

Orb recommends the 5.1-channel Mod1 system for any room smaller than 14 by 20 feet. Any bigger, and you'll need more Mod1 satellites. Using this modular system, you can create a lineup of bigger speakers—your own Mod Squad. Just piggy-back the satellites using jumper cables and a desk-stand extension bracket attached to the speakers' 0.25-inch threaded inserts. Combine two speakers, and you've got a Mod2. Next from Orb, a Mod Quad: the floorstanding Mod4 consisting of four Mod1 modules.

You shouldn't underestimate the upgrade option. Budget buyers could start with as few as two Mod1 speakers, then work up to a 5.1-, 6.1-, or 7.1-channel setup. A basic Mod1 home theater could also potentially benefit from adding a second speaker to the center channel, an \$85 upgrade that's available in the basic colors. With the modular options, it's tough to outgrow the Mod1 system. Call Orb Audio for more possibilities.

The basic Mod1 system was more than big enough for my 10-by-14-foot home theater. The steel Mod1s were color-coordinated with my Dell W4200HD, a slick 42-inch plasma, and the center Mod1 was small enough that I could place it directly in front of the Dell's low-profile pedestal stand without violating the screen's space. The satellites' effortless sound instantly brought me back to earlier speakers—not the Gallos, but the tiny Cambridge SoundWorks cubes designed a decade ago by the legendary Henry Kloss.

The Super Eight subwoofer was an even bigger surprise. As I ran the customary test tones through the system to see how low it could go, the Super Eight kept chugging all the way down to 25 hertz in my

room. That's deep-bass territory for a budget sub, although it won't play loudly at those depths. Aside from the big boom, it also negotiated tricky terrain, picking up the mid-bass region where the Mod1 left off. For a system at this price point, the Super Eight is an outrageous little subwoofer in a 12-inch cube.

Setup was simple except for using

the satellites' little spring-loaded binding posts. Although they're of noticeably high quality, these gold-plated, push-down connectors don't allow enough room to easily accommodate wire much thicker than 16-gauge. When I wired a Mod2 setup, with speaker wire and the jumper cables together, I felt like I was threading a needle.

## AT A GLANCE ORB AUDIO MOD1 SPEAKER SYSTEM



### SUBWOOFER: SUPER EIGHT

Connections:	Line-level input, speaker-level inputs/outputs
Enclosure Type:	Vented (flared snorkel port, bottom)
Woofer (size in inches, type):	8, composite paper, high-density ABS cone
Power Rating (watts):	150 (400 peak)
Crossover Bypass:	No
Available Finishes:	Black (detachable gray cloth grille)
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	12 x 12 x 12
Weight (pounds):	31

Price listings are based on the manufacturer's stated price. HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

### SPEAKER:

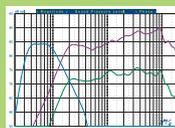
Type:	One-way, satellite
Full-frequency driver (size in inches, type):	3, polypropylene cone
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	8
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	15–110
Available Finishes:	Pearl White Gloss, Metallic Black Gloss, Hand-Polished Steel (\$100 system option), Antique Copper (\$150 system option)

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	4.19 x 4.19 x 4.88
Weight (pounds):	17 ounces
Price:	\$219/pair; \$749 for system; \$85 each additional speaker in packaged system

### MOD1

Type:	One-way, satellite
Full-frequency driver (size in inches, type):	3, polypropylene cone
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	8
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	15–110
Available Finishes:	Pearl White Gloss, Metallic Black Gloss, Hand-Polished Steel (\$100 system option), Antique Copper (\$150 system option)
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	4.19 x 4.19 x 4.88
Weight (pounds):	17 ounces
Price:	\$219/pair; \$749 for system; \$85 each additional speaker in packaged system

## HT Labs Measures: Orb Audio Mod1 Speaker System



••• Satellite Sensitivity:  
84.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

••• Center Sensitivity:  
90.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Mod1 satellite (purple trace), Mod2 center (green trace), and Super Eight subwoofer (blue trace). All passive loudspeakers were measured at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

The Mod1's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +5.60/-2.63 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 170 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 144 Hz. Impedance reaches a mini-

mum of 7.84 ohms at 609 Hz and a phase angle of -57.06 degrees at 224 Hz.

The Mod2's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +3.19/-1.56 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +2.83/-1.47 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 173 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 146 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.47 ohms at 531 Hz and a phase angle of -54.70 degrees at 224 Hz.

The Super Eight's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 34 Hz and the -6dB point is at 30 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 111 Hz with the crossover control set to maximum. —MJP

Kentucky Derby day arrived, and I couldn't let it pass without giving this system a workout with *Seabiscuit*. It was a breeze for the Mod1. The system captured the clank of the metal starting gate and the rush of horses' hooves, yet it also flared the fiddle accompaniment to Seabiscuit's test run at Santa Anita across the room.

At times, the single-driver center channel also proved to be even more adept at delivering dialogue than the familiar center-channel speaker with a woofer-tweeter-woofer configuration. Such speakers sometimes suffer when the listener isn't sitting directly in front of them. When you're seated off-axis, the woofers tend to cancel one another, making for lumpy response. Things got so bad with my own horizontal-type center-channel speaker that I recently resorted to closed-captioned subtitles while I watched HBO's *Deadwood*. Its brand of X-rated, Shakespearean frontier dialogue is already tough enough to follow. Not so with the Mod1.

A DTS demo disc demonstrated that the Mod1 system could shake the floor with *X2: X-Men United* and negotiate the storm sequence from *Pirates of the Caribbean* with excellent dispersion, imaging, and dialogue intelligibility. *The Incredibles* then walked on water. At this rate,

maybe the Mod1 system could, too.

Music sounded so good for speakers of this size that I would recommend the Mod1s for even a 2.1-channel stereo setup in an office or den, or hooked up to a computer. The Mod1s have a lot of sonic integrity—they sound good under almost any circumstance. Certainly, there were some limitations. A particularly heavy bass line on "Luisas" from Cibelle, a Brazilian Beth Orton, sounded boomy, but only slightly. Vocals were a little dry but not shrill. With their huge soundstage, slight midbass emphasis, and restrained midrange, the Mod1s are built for long-term listening.

Acoustic instruments sound almost too good through the Mod1s. Jane Monheit's vocals, by comparison, were somewhat detached on "Taking a Chance on Love." An exhilarating exchange between saxophonists Joel Frahm (tenor) and Donald Harrison (alto) overshadowed her, with Frahm in the right speaker and Harrison's response in the left. When I reconfigured the system to a Mod2 stereo setup, I heard what the extra Orbs can do: Music became more dynamic while retaining the same character and smoothness, without any hint of top-end sheen. Vocals became notably better, catching up with the acoustic

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Theater-in-the-round speakers at a direct-sales price
- Huge, nonfatiguing sound
- A subwoofer that rocks is rare in a budget package

instruments. Likewise, a Mod2 in the center channel of a 5.1 system produced even better dialogue clarity and more punch across the front soundstage.

Throughout more than a month of daily listening, not once did I have to interrupt the music or movie to adjust the Super Eight subwoofer. This is a nicely integrated system. Orb Audio says the Mod1 system would cost far more—even more than the still-vibrant Gallo Micros—if they marketed it at regular retail markup.

Like many other Internet-only companies, Orb Audio offers a risk-free, 30-day trial. It'll be difficult to do much better for \$749 at your local retailer. Even though you might want to act locally, you're probably better off thinking globally this time. At this price for a small-scale system, the little Mod1 is in a world of its own. 📶

ORB AUDIO MOD1 SPEAKER SYSTEM					OVERALL RATING
Build Quality	Value	Features	Performance	Ergonomics	92
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Balls of carbon steel</li> <li>→ Binding posts are constructed of gold-plated metal, not plastic</li> <li>→ Metal speaker grilles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Direct, online sales eliminates retail markup</li> <li>→ Comparable in both looks and quality to Gallo Micro spheres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ The modular design allows for upgrades and customized systems</li> <li>→ Ounce for ounce, the Mod1 is one tough speaker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Sound is sweet and enveloping</li> <li>→ Excellent sub/sat integration</li> <li>→ Good enough for a music-only, 2.1 system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Threaded inserts accept a variety of stands</li> <li>→ Easy placement on or near a TV</li> <li>→ Push-button binding posts are too small for thick wire or banana plugs</li> </ul>	
93	94	88	94	88	
<b>General information</b>					<p>These little Orbs will steal your heart with their combination of rugged construction, a modern look, and nonfatiguing sound. They're a budget alternative to some of the brand-name little cubes and spheres. It's hard to believe you're listening to a 4-inch, 17-ounce satellite.</p>
<p>Mod1 Speaker System, \$749 → Orb Audio, (877) ORB-AUDIO, <a href="http://www.orbaudio.com">www.orbaudio.com</a> → Dealer Locator Code ORB</p>					