

Bringing Soundtracks ALIVE!

Atlantic Technology 2200 5.1-Channel Speaker System

Chris Martens



My Dad is a gifted mechanical engineer, and one of the most important core values he's passed on to me is this: There's just no substitute for the art and science of intelligent design. Perhaps for this reason, I find there's something deeply soul satisfying about a well thought-out loudspeaker system—the kind where you can see the wit and wisdom of the designers shining through in design details large and small. Let me begin this review by saying that, almost from the moment I pulled the thoughtfully packaged system components from their shipping boxes, **Atlantic Technology's System 2200 struck me off as being one smart surround sound speaker system, a system that has proven satisfying on many different levels.** Better news still is the System 2200 is one of the two least costly surround systems Atlantic has ever offered (its total price in dollars is lower than its model number), meaning it can fit within the household budgets of many more enthusiasts than can Atlantic's excellent but expensive flagship speaker systems (which can run—gulp—all the way up into the 5-figure price range). Let's start by looking at the components that comprise System 2200.

System 2200 borrows some technologies and considerable design know-how from more expensive Atlantic products (e.g., System 4200, 6200, etc.), and is offered as a classic 5.1 channel speaker package comprised of a 2200 C center channel speaker, two 2200 LR L/R main speakers, two 2200 SR surround speakers, and a Model 422 SB powered subwoofer. The system's front three speakers use identical drive units to ensure consis-

"...this system was born to make film soundtracks come alive in your home-theater..."

tency of voicing, channel-to-channel, and nearly identical configurations: all three speakers use D'Appolito-like midrange-tweeter-midrange (MTM) driver arrays, with the L/R main speakers placing drivers vertically (for best horizontal dispersion) while the center channel speaker arranges its drivers horizontally (the better to fit above or below your system dis-

play). Recognizing that the center channel speaker may do the lion's share of the work in a surround system, **Atlantic equipped the 2200 C with three small but important features that I found clever in concept and useful in practice.** First, there is a 3-way High Frequency Energy control that enables users to adjust the tweeter's power response to fit the acoustic characteristics of their rooms (there are settings for "Reverberant," "Average," or "Damped" rooms). Second, there is a 2-way Boundary Compensation switch that adjusts the center channel's lower frequency response to compensate for colorations that can arise when the center channel is placed close to a display panel, mounted on a wall, or enclosed within a stand or cabinet (the switch provides settings for "Boundary Compensation" or "Normal"). Third, at the bottom of the center channel speaker are found two angled, padded runners or "rails" that fit neatly within a recess milled into the top of a shallow mounting tray provided with the speaker. This system allows you to aim the speaker straight ahead, or to tilt its face upwards or downwards, whichever is appropriate for your room, to direct the speaker's output toward your listening position (because the padded rails grip

the mounting tray, the speaker always stays put and never rattles or buzzes, no matter what mounting angle you choose).

You see similar attention to detail in the system's 2200 SR surround speakers. Unlike many systems I've seen, where the surrounds tend either to be identical to or else smaller versions of the L/R main speakers, Atlantic gave its surrounds their own distinctive configuration, and for good reason. The 2200 surrounds are dipolar/bipolar speakers equipped with two sets of 2-way drivers (again, identical to those used in the front channel speakers), with one set of drivers on each side of the speaker's "V"-shaped face (which points inwards toward the listening area). A switch on the rear of the surrounds allows you to select dipolar output (where drivers on one side of the "V" operate out of phase with drivers on the other) or bipolar output (where drivers on both sides of the "V" operate in phase). Why offer the dipolar/bipolar option? Atlantic explains that dipolar output tends to sound more diffuse (which helps surround information on film soundtracks blend more smoothly with output from the front channels), while bipolar output tends to sound more focused (which can



Center

be appropriate for certain multichannel audio mixes).

Finally, rounding out the system is the comparatively large, model 422 SB powered subwoofer, which is equipped with a 225 watt amplifier, a 12" long-throw, composite cone woofer, and (unlike many subwoofers in this price class) an acoustic suspension—rather than ducted/bass-reflex—woofer enclosure. Cosmetically, the system's front speakers and sub fea-

ture gloss metallic silver side panels (black and wood finishes are available, too, but the silver is my personal favorite) that contrast with the speaker's matte black center sections, while the surrounds are finished entirely in matte black (more than most, this system's aesthetics have drawn compliments from family and friends). The back panels of both the L/R main and surround speakers provide recessed keyhole brackets to facilitate wall mounting, and all speakers except the sub feature attractive and sturdy perforated metal grills that attach magnetically (a welcome safety touch for those of us whose five-year-olds find dome tweeters endlessly fascinating). As you can tell from the preceding discussion, Atlantic's designers have taken the time to ask and then answer some very intelligent (and practical) questions about how System 2200 will be used in the real world. But, this leads to our next question: How does System 2200 perform in practice?

Let me say from the outset that this system was born to make film soundtracks come alive in your home-theater; if you rated the system's ability to draw and then hold the viewer's attention per unit money, its performance/price ratio would soar way up near the top of the charts. A concrete example: Several nights ago, I watched *Master and Commander, The Far Side of the World* [20th Century/Fox] with my family, and my wife—who ordinarily

does not volunteer comments on equipment I'm reviewing, suddenly said, "These speakers make this film sound a lot better than it did when we first saw it in the theater." Given that our first viewing had been in a modern, metropolitan theater whose sound system was quite good, that's really saying something! Several factors work together to make this system click on films.

First, the system's subwoofer is sim-



Front L/R

ply terrific; it is able to go low, play loudly, and—most importantly—stay tightly focused at all times. This woofer can tackle big low-frequency moments (e.g., the ships' cannon-fire in *Master and Commander*) at quite high levels, without becoming boomy or losing control. Let me underscore this point; once you hear the clear, vigorous bass of the 422 SB sub, you'll realize that many other comparably-priced subs sound loose, ill-defined, and perhaps a little like "one note wonders." What is more, the woofer sounds "fast" (meaning it shows quickness of attack with no apparent overhang), so that it melds nicely with the main and center channel speakers. I attribute Atlantic's success, here, to their use of an obviously well damped, acoustic suspension enclosure (I have no axe to grind with bass reflex subwoofer designs, but my observation would be that when they err, they almost always err in the direction of boominess).

Second, the 2200 main and center channel speakers combine two specific qualities, dynamic responsiveness through the midrange and fairly smooth and extended treble response, that together bring dialog to life and promote effective, "wraparound" blending of the system's front three speakers. Jeffrey Blitz's documentary film *Spellbound* [Columbia Tristar] provides some good examples of

what the 2200 system can do with dialog, in that the film revolves around hearing young regional spelling champions talk about what it's like to compete in the



Surround

National Spelling Bee (which, as you may know, is a sudden-death, winner-takes-all contest). What fascinated me was the sheer clarity with which these speakers caught both the sound and the emotions in the contestants' voices, so that when they struggled through the stress of trying to spell impossibly bizarre words, I *felt* the pressure right along with them. I find this level of engagement in the world of the film, where you identify strongly with the characters, is pretty rare and doesn't come easily; it takes really expressive speakers to reveal the small details and textures in the soundtrack that help pull you in, and accurate reproduction of such details is something the 2200 system's front speakers do particularly well. One other observation I would make is that the front speakers do a very good job of speaking with one common voice. As you watch films, you are rarely aware of there being left, right and center channels in play; instead, you perceive one continuous sound field that spreads smoothly from the center of the screen, wrapping gracefully around to your left and right.

Finally, the 2200 surround speakers are highly effective, especially when used in their more diffuse-sounding dipolar playback mode. In truth, most home-the-

aters have a centrally located, prime viewing seat from which soundtracks sound their best, but I've found that a good set of surround speakers can greatly improve the sound heard from less-than-prime seats (in essence, helping you enjoy reasonably seamless surround sound from many different locations in the room). The trick to the 2200 surrounds is that, in dipole mode, they allow you to hear surround channel information without actually seeming to be the sources of that information—and this holds true even when you are seated within a few feet of the surrounds. With most systems, viewers prefer not to sit too close to surround speakers since surround channel output can be distracting when heard at close range, but with the 2200 system no one minds sitting on the end of the couch closest to the surrounds, since listeners aren't particularly conscious of sound emanating from the surround in the first place. Instead, the illusion is that the sounds originate from further off to the side or rear of the speaker's position. Overall, this means the 2200 surrounds are among the most enjoyable I've heard at their price; they do a lot to promote the system's mission of creating a seamless surround sound environment.

For music playback, I found the 2200 system performed well, but not *as* well as it did with films, and I think I have a handle on why I observed a performance difference in the two contexts. Much of what the 2200 system does with film soundtracks works out beautifully for music playback: the tight and articulate bass from the sub always sounds great, the extended treble response from the front speakers generally sounds delicate and clear (though sometimes just a touch "dry"), and the dipolar/bipolar surrounds almost always do a good job with the rear half of the sound field (some multichannel audio sources sounded better with one surround mode or the other, but in most cases the dipolar mode gave the best results). However, the same quality that gave the left, right and center channel speakers such pleasing dynamic liveliness on film soundtracks proved to be, for music playback, something of a double-edged sword. You should know, then, that

there really are two sides to the question of the 2200's handling of midrange dynamics (and that one man's perceived midrange overshoot may be another's idea of "pleasing liveliness"). I found that on recordings that were either smoothly mastered (e.g., many of the SACD surround sound releases from Telarc) or that featured instruments whose true midrange voices tend to become compressed in the recording process (e.g., closely miked solo jazz pianos), the 2200 system typically sounded fine—even lending a touch of life and articulation to instruments that might otherwise have sounded too "flat" or indistinct. But, on recordings that faithfully captured vigorous midrange action in the music, the speakers occasionally reproduced strong midrange transients (e.g., the leading edges of notes from horns, guitars, percussions, or strings) or loud midrange swells (e.g., brass sections getting loud in unison, female vocalists hitting big high notes, or rock'n'roll tenors belting out half sung/half howled phrases) with more energy and "edge" than sounded accurate or appropriate. In short, when the 2200

"...the system's subwoofer is simply terrific; it is able to go low, play loudly and—most importantly, stay tightly focused at all times."

system errs, it errs in the direction of a "zingy," slightly overwrought quality on hard midrange transients or sustained, high-volume midrange passages. Please don't misunderstand me, though; I listened to hours and hours of music through these speakers and for the most part enjoyed myself. It's just that an occasional rough edge kept them from being as slam-dunk great on music as they are on film soundtracks.

To summarize, then, Atlantic Technology's System 2200 is smart, well thought-through, beautifully built, visually appealing, and one the best-sounding affordable systems I've yet heard for film playback (trust me, it's advantages in this area are not subtle—they are, in fact, stone cold obvious even to casual viewers). The system provides an exceptionally clean-sounding subwoofer, one which will delight film watchers and music listeners alike, and that puts many more



Subwoofer

expensive subs on the market to shame.

Overall, the system's voicing and dynamic characteristics tend to favor film playback over music listening, though it can be quite enjoyable for music—especially when carefully matched with smooth-sounding source components and elec-

tronics. If you want to hear films come alive in your home-theater, and without spending an arm and a leg on speakers, try the System 2200.

Let me leave you with one further piece of good news; if you're drawn to System 2200 (and if you love movies as much as I do, you will be), but can't quite afford its price, you'll want to know Atlantic has voice-matched System 2200 with its *even more affordable* System 1200 components. If System 2200's price is a barrier to you, consider mixing and

Associated Equipment

Integra DTR-7.4 A/V Receiver; Sony DVP-S9000ES and DVP-NS500V DVD/SACD/CD player; Pioneer PDP-505 HD Plasma Display; Chang Lightspeed CLS-HT 1000 Mk II power-line filter; Synergistic Research X2 interconnect, subwoofer, and speaker cables (featuring proprietary Synergistic active shielding system).

Manufacturer Information

Atlantic Technology

343 Vanderbilt Ave.
Norwood, MA 02062
(781) 762-6300
www.atlantictechnology.com

Price: \$2120 for System 2200 in Silver: comprised of 422 SB subwoofer, 2200 C center channel speaker, 2 x 2200 LR main speakers, 2 x 2200 SR bipolar/dipolar surrounds

matching System 2200 and 1200 components to create a consistently voiced system that will still sound great, yet will better fit your budget. Enjoy!

Specifications

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail

Price: \$2000 (Black) - \$2120 (Silver, as tested)

Type: Stand Mount or Wall Mount: L/R Mains and Surrounds

Tabletop Mount: Center

Driver Complement L/R: (2) 4 fi "

Graphite Loaded Homopolymer bass/midrange drivers; 1" soft-dome, ferrofluid-cooled tweeter

Driver Complement Center: (2) 4 fi " Graphite Loaded Homopolymer bass/midrange drivers; 1" soft-dome, ferrofluid-cooled tweeter

Driver Complement Surrounds: (2) 4 fi " Graphite Loaded Homopolymer bass/midrange drivers; (2) 1" soft-dome, ferrofluid-cooled tweeter

Radiation Pattern for Surrounds:

Switch Selectable, Dipole/Bipole

Driver Complement Subwoofer: 12" long-throw, composite cone woofer

Integral Amplifier Power for

Subwoofer: 225 watts

Subwoofer Operating Principle:

Acoustic Suspension

Sensitivity L/R: 90dB

Sensitivity Center: 90dB

Sensitivity Surrounds: 90dB

Impedance L/R: 8 ohms

Impedance Center: 8 ohms

Impedance Surrounds: 8 ohms

Manufacturer Comments

Atlantic Technology 4200 Speaker System

AVguide Monthly Readers,

We are extremely pleased that *AVguide Monthly* has recognized the thought and care that went into the design of our System 2200. Our design goal for this product was to offer something that addressed the real-world requirements of ease of use and performance adaptability, coupled with superb sound, while also utilizing materials and build quality that exceeds what might normally be expected at this price level.

We used our flagship System 8200 as the voicing standard to which we compared and tuned the 2200, and we tried to come as close as possible to that level of refinement and dynamic capability as we could.

Especially gratifying were Chris Martens' comments about the 422 SB subwoofer. We agree wholeheartedly about the benefits of a well-executed acoustic suspension enclosure. When we hear him using words like "focused," "fast," and "clear" to describe the sub's sound, credit should also be given to our clever engineers 'back at the ranch' who have come up with our innovative Clear Filter Technology (CFT). This circuit—which removes the low-level box resonances that can muddy up the sound—is built into all of our subwoofers' amplifiers and it is optimized specifically for the particular woofer-enclosure combination with which it is used.

Thanks again for the kind words.

Sincerely,

Peter Tribeman
Founder and CEO, Atlantic Technology

