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# 2008



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**Cabasse is on a Roll!**

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# HAVE A BALL

*The tiny Cabasse iO2 spherical speakers roll out a huge sound.*

Leave it to the French to come up with a fresh approach to speaker design. Last year, Cabasse unveiled its ultimate design statement, La Sphere, an all-digital stereo speaker system. It may be the smallest of the world's great speakers, but La Sphere is still pretty big. For this review, I'm looking at one of Cabasse's most affordable spherical speakers, the iO2. It's a grapefruit-sized, metal alloy orb fitted with a molded cloth grille.

Sure, the iO2's roly-poly shape will grab eyeballs, but it is also a highly functional design. A sphere is inherently rigid, so it doesn't need internal bracing. The rounded interior eliminates internal standing waves. It also rids the speaker of diffraction (spurious reflections off the speaker cabinet), thus allowing the little speaker to almost disappear as a source of sound. Add Cabasse's unique Spatially Coherent Source driver technology and you have a speaker that can produce remarkably three-dimensional sound. And because it produces an impressive 92 decibels of sound from 1 watt of power, it can be used even with low-powered amps.

If you're looking for a versatile design, you've come to the right place. The wee balls can be placed on a table or shelf, or wall-mounted with Cabasse's nifty magnetic base. A special floorstanding version with a truly elegant, flat blade look is also available. For

a more discreet installation, Cabasse offers the iO2 in pivotable in-wall and in-ceiling mounts. The freestanding versions come in pearl white or pearl black, while the in-wall/in-ceiling version comes in matte white.

Alexandre Desplat's score for the film *Birth* turns out to be the ideal music to acquaint myself with the iO2. The speakers almost let you feel like you're in the presence of real, live music; they can project sound above the speakers' actual locations. The sense of hearing almost life-size instruments is another remarkable benefit of Cabasse's radical design. *Birth's* opening "Prologue," with its delicately played flutes, harp, bells, and chimes, totally pulls me in. I can hear even their most subtle gestures and dynamic nuance. The orchestral strings are so sweet and airy I can hardly believe this wonderful sound is coming from these tiny speakers. The rolling thunder of tympanis, courtesy of Cabasse's Santorin 21 8-inch subwoofer, completes the sonic picture. The iO2 can play fairly loud, but it really shines during quiet, late-night music and movie soirées. Even when the sound is turned down low, the detail is still there. I love the film, which stars Nicole Kidman, but when I listen with my eyes closed the music absolutely stands on its own.

Convinced of the iO2's refinement, I move onto Cream's Royal Albert Hall 2005 concert



*The mount at the bottom of the iO2 “speaker ball” can be used to stabilize the speaker when it is placed on a table, stand, or bookshelf. It can also be repositioned to serve as a wall mount. Acoustically, this model is identical to the floorstanding model.*

DVD. The five balls rock and, yes, roll with more gusto than I would have thought possible. Ginger Baker’s drum kit has a lot of punch. I can feel each resounding “thwack” of his sticks hitting the drum heads. Eric Clapton’s blazing guitar flash has just the right edge, but Jack Bruce’s bass guitar is a little muddy and some notes are much louder than others. The iO2 doesn’t produce any bass at all—it’s totally dependent on the subwoofer for that—so there’s bound to be some discontinuity between the sats and the sub. Cabasse offers a range of excellent subs, but even so, achieving the smoothest possible satellite/subwoofer blend requires

careful setup. For best results you will need to place the sub as close as possible to the front three satellites; in my room it’s directly behind the front right satellite. The ideal crossover point is unusually high (180 hertz), so make sure your A/V receiver or surround processor can accommodate that. For this review, I use the Santorin 21 subwoofer, but



*A 13-inch-diameter base keeps the floorstanding version of the iO2 upright and provides a place for the cable binding posts. Supplied spikes stabilize the speaker when it is placed on carpet.*

the larger Santorin 25 can deliver more low-end mojo for those who need it. Both subs are available in gloss black or white.

Even after I do my best to smooth the sat/sub blend, King Kong’s growls feel a little anemic, so it’s clear the iO2’s home theater skills are no threat to larger speakers and subs. That said, the DVD’s jungle scenes sound spectacular, and the sense of room-filling envelopment of the giant bugs and buzzing insects is superb, but Kong’s car-tossing antics on the streets of New York City make the Santorin 21 sub rattle and buzz. Bass-heavy music also overwhelms the Santorin 21’s 8-inch woofer; perhaps the larger Santorin 25 would do better.

This is looking like a very good year for Cabasse, which was recently acquired by Canon Europe to develop speaker systems for the high-end luxury consumer market. The new U.S. distributor, StJohn Group, was

selected specifically to bring the Cabasse to a wider market more oriented toward home theater and custom installation. The iO2’s sonic refinement, compact size, and installation flexibility should win a lot of converts to Cabasse. This company is on a roll! **[HE]**

#### ■ DESCRIPTION

Speakers for home theater or stereo use. Subwoofer mandatory

#### ■ COMPONENTS

**iO2:** 1.1-inch tweeter mounted coaxially in front of a 5-inch woofer

**Santorin 21:** 8-inch woofer, 250-watt internal amplifier

#### ■ CONNECTIONS

**iO2:** Five-way binding posts

**Santorin 21:** Five-way binding posts for stereo speaker-level input, stereo RCA jacks for line-level input and output

#### ■ DIMENSIONS

**iO2:** 6.3 inches diameter, floorstand version 41.5 x 12 x 12 inches (hwd)

**Santorin 21:** 13 x 13 x 14.2 inches (hwd)

#### ■ PRICE/CONTACT

**PRICE:** on-wall/table iO2 \$ 867 each, in-wall/ceiling iO2 \$1,000 each, floorstand iO2 \$2,044 each, Santorin 21 \$1,156

**CONTACT:** 877.588.0075, stjohngroup.com, cabasse-usa.com



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