

IsoTek Systems Ultimate Set-Up Disc

If you are a regular reader you may well have a version of this disc in your possession. A cut-down version was covered mounted on the November 2011 issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*, so if you missed it this piece might have you kicking yourself because it's choc full of useful material for getting a system precisely set-up. What the full retail version adds are three stereo imaging test pieces and a pair of frequency range test tracks which are very worthwhile features.

Essentially we're talking about speaker set-up here; there are channel and phase tests to ensure that the source, amp and speakers are correctly connected, but the rest of the 'tune-up' tracks are all about achieving true 3D stereo imaging. Of course, you don't get stereo imaging if channel and phase are wrong, so those two are an important part, albeit one that is covered on plenty of previous examples. To be honest this is not the sort of disc I usually try out, but a respected colleague in the industry said that it was very useful for setting up speakers in difficult rooms, so I gave it a spin...

In use

This disc has a number of useful tracks to assist with achieving strong stereo imaging, all of which are preceded by a spoken description of the result you should expect. The first critical one is track four, which is for loudspeaker position and adjustment. It features a voice and castanet to check relative loudness and tonal balance for each channel, and also places the same sounds at a position halfway between the centre line and

the individual channels to assist in achieving correctly symmetrical imaging.

The soundstage test is probably the most useful one for finding the correct position of loudspeakers with, as it's fairly clear whether or not the sound is coming from the various indicated positions, such as outside each speaker or a quarter of the way across the soundstage. In my system I found that one channel needed to be moved slightly outwards to get the right result.

The voice and castanet continues for the rest of the test tracks; first up being a 360-degree sweep where the castanet is walked around the room, albeit without any footsteps. This is a novel effect, if a tricky one to adjust the system for best results with.

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The stereo image depth tests, numbers one through three, are made in a reverberant acoustic and combine the aforementioned sounds moving together and relative to one another. It's rather like the demonstration records made in the heyday of stereo, but without steam trains or journeys into sound – you can't have everything! At least the chap doing the talking has lovely diction.

The final two test tracks are of tones that slowly increase in frequency for one and decrease for the other; this reveals if there are any significant tonal aberrations in either the room, the loudspeakers or your hearing. It's a bit like the speaker response sweeps that are used in some quarters to measure loudspeakers, except you don't get a readout, and instead have to spot the variations with your ears. These would be useful for finding bass humps that a bit of loudspeaker movement could offset, however sometimes bass requires something more drastic to restrain it.

The final six tracks are samples from different artists in the Opus3 catalogue, these include Eric Bibb, Eva Taylor and the Omnibus Wind Ensemble, whose rendition of Frank Zappa's majestic *Dog Breath Variations* always gets my vote. Opus3 recordings are consistently excellent – I've written about several of the albums that are sampled here in the past and always in glowing terms.

This is an unusual and useful disc, made all the more helpful to the newcomer by the information sheet that is available to download from the IsoTek website. This tells you what to do if the results do not tally with those that the voice tells you should be audible, which is always the tricky bit and makes this a set-up disc proper and not merely a demonstration of what the system can achieve. **JK**

