

The New York Times

SOUND/Hans Fantel

©1988 Ohm Acoustics Corp. ©1988 The New York Times

A New Ambiance For Home Music

Listeners who like multidirectional loudspeakers are usually quite vocal about their preference, extolling the spacious sound typical of such designs. Yet for all their enthusiasm, these listeners remain a minority, and multidirectional speakers are therefore relatively rare and frequently expensive. Modestly priced and musically competent additions to this group are doubly welcome.

Two such models have been sounding off lately, and though different in design principle, they are similar in their acoustic effect. Both the Ohm Acoustic Sound Cylinder and the Bose 401 create a sense of sonic ambiance that make the listener feel as though he is hearing the music in an appropriate hall rather than within the confines of domesticity.

Both models, each in its own way, attempt a reconciliation of seemingly conflicting precepts. Traditionally, it was believed that the spacious sound characteristic of multidirectional speakers could be attained only at the sacrifice of precise stereo imaging - i.e. being able to locate the musicians, by ear, on an imaginary stage.

As in some of their earlier products, Bose and Ohm set out to prove once more that such a sacrifice is unnecessary. Sonically, at least, it is possible to have one's cake and eat it too.

Good stereo imaging is normally associated with conventional, forward-facing loudspeakers that project their sound mainly toward the listener. Spaciousness, by contrast, is best attained by scattering the sound in various directions so as to elicit reflections from many points along the walls.

Multidirectional speakers, though relatively rare, have a coterie of devoted fans.

To combine both these attributes, the Ohm Sound Cylinder - priced at \$549 a pair - projects the greater part of the frequency spectrum in almost a full circle. It also radiates upward, so as to create a dome-shaped pattern of sound dispersion. Yet this multidirectional sound spread is supplemented by a small, forward-facing tweeter

to provide the narrower directionality needed to pinpoint the location of the players within the overall sound space.

The appearance of this speakers is as unusual as its concept. It takes the shape of a circular column, 31½ inches high and 11½ inches in diameter, topped with a cap of fabric that conceals the unorthodox sound radiator. The main body of the column acts as a vented bass chamber and is covered with walnut-grain vinyl. Optionally, at an added cost of \$76, it is always available in genuine wood veneers, including oak, walnut, teak and rosewood. Fabric covers, at \$46 a pair may be ordered to match the speaker to a variety of decors.

From a technical point of view, the omnidirectional element has the advantage that the various frequencies emerge in their natural phase relationship - more so than in conventional designs. To what extent this accounts for the speaker's fine sound may be debatable, yet there is no question that the Ohm Sound Cylinder represents an excellent bargain, with a clarity and richness of sound rarely found in speaker of this size and price.

•••