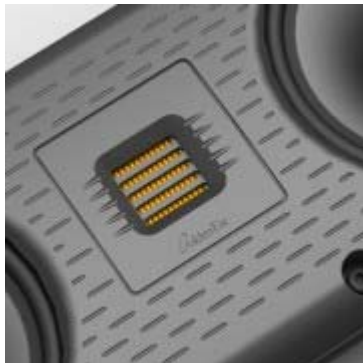


Review: GoldenEar Technology SuperCinema 3D Array

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I've always been fascinated by denotations and connotations—that is to say, the difference between the dictionary definition of a word and its implicational baggage. A soundbar, after all, is by definition a single speaker cabinet designed to replicate the effect of a stereo or surround sound speaker setup. What that definition politely avoids mentioning is that a soundbar is almost always a compromise. Sure, a soundbar is a great upgrade over TV speakers, and many of them probably represent the best sound some people will ever experience at home. But one buys a soundbar primarily for aesthetic reasons, in lieu of a proper array of standalone speakers, and no one expects a soundbar to actually sound as good. Unless, of course, they've heard **GoldenEar Technology's** SuperCinema 3D Array.

Out of the box, the **SuperCinema 3D Array** (SC3DA) hardly looks different from your typical soundbar: it's short, shallow, wide, and non-descript in a rather pleasant way. Beneath its cloth grille, though, the SC3DA boasts six GoldenEar 4½-inch High-Definition Cast-Basket Multi-Vaned Phase Plug Mid/Bass Drivers (quite the mouthful, I know), and three of the company's High-Velocity Folded Ribbon Tweeters.



The latter is GoldenEar's own unique spin on Oskar Heil's **Air Motion Transformer**, which, unlike the typical dome tweeter, consists of a thin diaphragm folded into an accordion-like shape, which moves air by squeezing it rather than pushing and pulling it. If all of that is too technical for your tastes, it's enough to understand that GoldenEar's speakers, the SuperCinema 3D Array included, use a very different type of speaker technology than you're probably used to, and the result is an incredibly distinct sound—incredibly clean, with no discernible distortion. The audio feels like it's coming from the air in the room, rather than a box on the other side of it.

It's a sound I'm quite familiar with, though, since I keep a full 5.1-channel set of GoldenEar speakers in my bedroom home theater, ready to hook up at a moment's notice when I'm finished reviewing smaller speaker systems. That, combined with the fact that the SuperCinema 3D Array is a soundbar, made the bedroom a logical location for setup and testing. It's where I test all soundbars, since, quite frankly, it hardly feels fair to test them in the main home theater, which hosts large tower speakers, an Anthem D2v A/V processor and A5 amp, and 9500 watts' worth of powered subwoofers.

And yet, after hooking the SC3DA up the bedroom, calibrating it, and putting it to a few preliminary tests, I decided that it definitely deserved a chance to shine in the big home theater. It should be noted that, of the two types of speakers typically referred to as *soundbars*—completely self-contained, self-powered devices designed to be connected straight to a TV; and integrated speaker cabinets, which feature binding posts and require external amplification—the SC3DA falls into the latter group. So you'll need a receiver or processor and amplifier, but GoldenEar has thankfully made speaker connections incredibly simple by grouping its three sets of binding posts in a centered recess, which also makes cable management a snap.



After connecting the SuperCinema 3D Array to my Anthem A5 via three matched and pre-terminated Straight Wire Encore II speaker cables, I ran Anthem Room Correction to balance and EQ the speakers and adjust crossovers, and immediately sunk into my seat for some serious listening.

Of course, many an audiophile would probably scoff at my first choice of listening material, but I started off with *Downton Abbey* Season 2 on Blu-ray. The sound may be stereo only, but *Downton* sports some truly amazing sound design, and the DTS-HD Master Audio track makes up for its lack of channels with wonderful fidelity. One of the most surprising things about SuperCinema 3D Array's performance with the show is how well it handles dialogue. I'm quite the Anglophile myself, but even I struggle at times to understand Daisy and Mrs. Patmore's hastily delivered Yorkshire brogue. Through the SuperCinema 3D Array, dialogue is absolutely flawless—truly amongst the best I've heard from *any* speaker. So much so that my dad, who struggles with dialogue in his home theater even with the most neutral of voices, noted that he wasn't struggling a bit to understand "the ones that are speaking English."

But even more shocking than that is the way it delivers the dense World War I actions scenes early in Season 2. Without the benefit of rear channels to fill in the rear of the room, the SC3DA still pushes the sounds of mortar fire out into the listening space and even behind my head, in a way that doesn't evoke most of the faux-surround processing technologies I've ever heard. For a moment, I honestly thought my D2v's display was lying and that it was, in fact, processing the audio as surround sound.

Much of that effect can be attributed to the SC3DA's truly unique crosstalk cancelation technology, which works to ensure that sound from the left channel reaches your left ear, and likewise the right channel and your right ear, and not vice versa. That not only results in the incredibly convincing surround experience even if you're not using surround speakers (or listening to surround-encoded material), but it also results in an incredibly wide and penetrating front soundstage. The SC3DA falls about three inches short of reaching the edges of the 58-inch Samsung plasma on which it's presently perched, and the distance between its left and right high-frequency driver fall about three feet short of my preferred speaker placement in this room. But in spite of that, the front soundstage reaches from wall to wall. Close your eyes and guess where the speakers are, and you'll probably find yourself at a complete loss. But pressed hard enough, you'd probably point to a spot well outside the reach of the cabinet.



It's an effect that works just as well with full-blown surround soundtracks, as well. Impressed by how well the SC3DA handled the difficult dialogue in *Downton Abbey*, I fired up another particularly difficult test for vocal clarity: *The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring* Extended Edition on Blu-ray. If you have the set and you want to play along at home, cue up the second disc and skip a few minutes into Chapter 32, the scene where Saruman bellows, "So, Gandalf, you try to lead them over Caradhras. And if that fails, where then will you go?"

I've played that scene through every speaker system I've reviewed in the past two years, and given passing marks to center channels if they could render that line of dialogue clearly at all. With the SuperCinema 3D Array, though, it isn't merely a matter of intelligibility; there's a level of verisimilitude here that's downright unsettling at first. The important thing to note is that it doesn't render the dialogue so clearly by cutting *down* on the cacophony around Saruman; instead, the dialogue cuts *through* the din, all of which still fills the room so wonderfully that after a few minutes of adjustment, you sort of forget that you're listening to speakers and merely get lost in the film, exactly as you'd hope to do with the best of speakers. Battle sequences in the film are also delivered with the utmost visceral impact and an incredible sense of space, and although the SC3DA is tasked with keeping pace with two Paradigm SUB12s and a Sunfire SubRosa flat panel sub in my main theater room, it blends beautifully with the bass, even at GoldenEar's rather high recommended crossover point of 120 Hz.

The SuperCinema 3D Array also performs shockingly well with music, and the higher the resolution, the better. I've positively murdered large tower speakers before with Blue Man Group's *Audio DVD-A*, with its pounding percussion and incredibly dynamic mix, but after hearing what the speaker was

capable of with movies, I couldn't resist giving it a go. I started off gently, of course, setting the volume at a significantly less-than-satisfying level at first, but every incremental upping of the volume knob left the SC3DA begging for more. At this phase of my testing, I populated the rear of the room with a pair of MartinLogan Motion 40 towers (which feature high-frequency drivers very similar to GoldenEar's), and the SC3DA blended beautifully with them, sending out a sphere of palpable sound that left no gap between front soundstage and rear. It also performed equally well with more melodic offerings, delivering a rich, tangible midrange; sparkling, penetrating high-frequency performance; and an incredible sense of space and scale with everything from Andrew Bird to Frank Zappa. ***So, suffice it to say, the GoldenEar SuperCinema 3D Array is, in no way, shape, or form, a compromise.***

In fact, it bests many of the better floorstanding tower speakers I've auditioned in this room, and does so with an installation flexibility that no larger speaker could match. GoldenEar sent along a Center Stage Center Channel Speaker Bracket so I could perch the speaker on top of my plasma in the theater—which isn't wall mounted—and indeed, the speaker sounded wonderful from way up there, with a bit of aiming. But the SC3DA also features a set of keyholes on the back for wall mounting, which is the route I took in the bedroom at first, and I'm happy to say that wall mounting didn't degrade the quality of the speaker's sound one itty bitty bit. That may well be because the 3D Array is so incredibly dense, and therefore inert—for such a small enclosure, it weighs a hefty 20 pounds. But no matter the reason, it's an incredibly versatile speaker in terms of placement, as long as you put a bit of effort into aiming it.

In addition to its incredible performance, not to mention the minimal amount of real estate it takes up, GoldenEar Technology's SuperCinema 3D Array is, at \$999, by any measure a bargain. Considering that it breaks down to about \$333 per speaker (that's not counting the integrated crosstalk cancelation technology), and that it outperforms standalone speakers costing multiples as much, I'd recommend auditioning this amazing little speaker even if you're in the market for a much larger multi-speaker setup.

Of course, if you have a particularly décor-conscious significant other, you could always pretend you're compromising—settling for a speaker that takes up so little space at the expense of better sound.

I won't tell if you don't.