

Bowers & Wilkins MM-1 Computer Speakers

Yes, they're that good

We've reviewed a number of great speakers, but we haven't been this excited about a set of boom boxes since we laid hands on the eponymous Cambridge SoundsWorks MicroWorks in the very first issue of *boot* magazine—way back in September 1996.

Listening to Peter Gabriel's new album *Scratch My Back* on Bowers & Wilkins' MM-1 computer speakers sent chills down our spines, a sensation rapidly followed by slack-jawed awe. We downloaded the album from B&W's Society of Sound music club, which has the exclusive rights to distribute the album in studio-master quality: losslessly encoded in FLAC with 24-bit resolution at a 48Hz sampling rate. The MM-1 delivers audio quality that's so exquisite, so pristine, that it makes the mighty AudioEngine A5—our previous favorite 2.0-channel speakers—sound almost muddy in comparison.

We were particularly impressed with the MM-1's bass response: There's no subwoofer, so this system will never rattle your floor joists; in fact, frequency response bottoms out at 57Hz. But those lows are absolutely clean, lusciously well rounded, and perfectly balanced with the most scintillating highs and midrange frequencies we've ever heard from desktop speakers. In fact, this system is already pushing the Klipsch Pro Media 2.1 off our Best of the Best list—and that product took up its perch only last March (you'll find our review at <http://bit.ly/bP2aP6>). And yes, we're taking games and movie soundtracks as well as music into consideration.

The MM-1 sounds so magnificent that we don't even mind that it's a USB speaker system that bypasses the PC's audio circuitry; in fact, that's a major plus—unless you've invested in a high-end soundcard like the kick-ass Asus Xonar Essence STX we reviewed in June 2009 (read our review at <http://bit.ly/dPIQv>). Our only other mild criticism is that B&W decided to use a proprietary cable hardwired to the right speaker (which contains the amplifier and DAC) to connect the



B&W tells us it didn't need to move a lot of MM-1s to earn a profit—no surprise there—but would the system sound as sweet if it were produced en masse?

left speaker, and the cable is just long enough to position the speakers on either side of a 30-inch display.

If you ever needed proof that sheer power doesn't necessarily ensure great sound, give the MM-1 a listen. The amp delivers just 18 watts to each of the four drivers (two one-inch Nautilus tube tweeters and two three-inch glass-fiber woofers), and while B&W considers them strictly near-field monitors, we found they had no difficulty filling our 80-square-foot home office with music. The speakers look as gorgeous as they sound, too, wrapped in stretchy black fabric with spun-aluminum tops and surface-mounted volume and power buttons embedded in the aluminum band around the right cabinet. You'll find a line-in jack for a digital media player and a headphone jack there, too. A flat, ovoid remote

controls volume and the transport mechanism for your favorite music software (we tried it with Media Monkey, iTunes, and Foobar 2000). Thick rubber bases on both speakers isolate them from your desktop.

We'd like to tell you that the MM-1 is comparably priced to speaker systems made by the likes of Logitech, Altec Lansing, or even Klipsch, but 500 clams puts it at the opposite end of the spectrum. If you're as passionate about audio quality as you are about the rest of the components in your rig, on the other hand, that's not such a high price to pay. —MICHAEL BROWN

SPECIFICATIONS

Amplifier Power	18 watts x 4 channels
Frequency Range	-6dB at 57Hz and 22kHz
Tweeter	One-inch Nautilus tube (two)
Woofer	Three-inch glass-fiber (two)
Inputs	1/8-inch line-in; USB 2.0
Outputs	1/8-inch headphone



VERDICT

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BOWERS & WILKINS MM-1 SPEAKERS

+ SIGNAL

Exquisite audio reproduction; elegant design.

- NOISE

Very expensive; short-ish, hardwired cable on right speaker cabinet.

\$500, www.bowers-wilkins.com