

# Three in One

By Mark Fleischmann

## RATING

Phase Technology Teatro  
TSB3.0 Soundbar

Performance ★★★★★  
Features ★★★★★  
Ergonomics ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★★

# SOUND & VISION

## Phase Technology Teatro TSB3.0 Soundbar

**PRICE \$738**

**THIS MIGHT SEEM A RADICAL** concept, but what if a soundbar were just a speaker, or two or three? What if it had no internal amplifiers, just some really good drivers, a thoughtfully engineered crossover, and sets of speaker terminals, like any other quality loudspeaker?

Is this kind of soundbar a good idea? That depends on what kind of system you want—or, more specifically, whether you want a standalone audio/video receiver in your system. For some people, the AVR is like the guy you'd cross the street to avoid, someone who confuses and bedevils you. For others, the AVR is the key to a cornucopia of features, the cornerstone of a system that unlocks all your desires.

The Phase Technology Teatro TSB3.0 is the kind of soundbar that requires an AVR. Because it has no built-in amp, it's classified as a passive soundbar. Ironically, despite the general connotations of the words *passive* and *active*, an amplex passive bar opens up more possibilities than an amp-equipped active bar. By doing next to nothing, the passive bar gets more done, by allowing the rest of your system to do more. Maybe we should call it a passive-aggressive soundbar.

### Great American Speaker Maker

Phase Technology is the storied American loudspeaker manufacturer founded by Bill Hecht in the 1950s and run by his son Ken. Among other innovations, Bill invented and patented the soft-dome tweeter in 1967, and his devotion to coherent phase response is celebrated in the

## AT A GLANCE

**+** Plus

- It's like having three top-drawer speakers
- Balanced performance
- Passive design allows benefits of an AVR

**-** Minus

- Passive design requires an AVR

company's name. Phase Technology's nine speaker lines cover a broad range of needs. One of those lines is Teatro, with three soundbar models, of which the TSB3.0 is the newest. All three models are passive bars, and each is the equivalent of three speakers built into a horizontal enclosure. The TSB3.0 (\$738) and V3.0 (\$1,272) have two-way driver arrays, while the PC3.0 (\$1,696, reviewed in 2009) is three-way.

The TSB3.0 differs in woofer size, however, with 3-inch polypropylene cone drivers versus the 5.25-inch woofers in the other two models. That reduces the bar's height by only a quarter of an inch, but the real difference is in the depth measurement, which is 2 inches less than that of the other models. In other words, this is a flatter bar that hugs the wall tighter. Each of the three channels is served by two woofers and one of

Phase Tech's famous 0.75-inch soft (silk) dome tweeters. To widen the soundstage, these drivers are augmented by two side-firing 1-inch drivers, which the company calls "full-range" Spatial Field Expanders. In previous models, these side-firing SFE drivers were soft domes that were easily damaged—as I proved by grabbing a bar at the sides and crumpling them. In the new model, evidently idiot-proofed for people like me, they are 1-inch aluminum inverted domes, not convex soft domes, and are protected by a guard structure.

With two woofers and a tweeter for each channel, complemented by the bar's two SFE drivers, the Teatro might strike you as a tough load to drive. But its sensitivity seemed to be reasonable during the audition, and recommended amplifier power is 15 to 100 watts, within range of pretty much any AVR.

The bar is 43 inches wide, cosmetically suitable for a screen of 50-plus inches (though that isn't a strict requirement). On the front of the extruded-aluminum enclosure is a perforated metal speaker grille that conceals the woofers and tweeters. The Spatial Field Expanders are on the ends along with the ports.

On the back are three speaker terminals using L-shaped Euroblock (often referred to as "Phoenix") connectors. These accept bare wire, so I used my cable of last resort, an 18-gauge bare generic cord with banana plugs at one end and bare wire at the other. It wasn't hard to slip the wire ends into the Euroblocks,

tighten the screws, and snap them into the back of the soundbar. You can mount the bar to the wall (using the supplied hardware) or set it on a table in front of your TV. Nine threaded inserts (but no keyholes) are provided for wall mounting. I opted for table mounting.

Associated equipment included a Pioneer Elite VSX-53 A/V receiver along with the surround-channel speakers and subwoofer of my reference system: a pair of Paradigm Reference Studio 20 v.4 speakers for surround duties and a Seismic 110 subwoofer. Also in the loop was an Oppo BDP-83SE universal disc player. All movie demo material was on Blu-ray Disc, and all music demo material was on CD.

### Like Three Speakers

This latest Teatro was the best-sounding passive soundbar I've heard, outpacing even my memories of Phase Technology's own Teatro PC3.0 (which earned a five-star performance rating). Both behaved exactly like three top-quality loudspeakers built into a single enclosure. Due to woofer size, though, the new TSB3.0 was equivalent to three compact satellite speakers, whereas the PC3.0 was more akin to three monitors.

I preferred the new model with its smaller woofers, mostly because—for whatever reason—it sounded *bigger* than I remembered the PC3.0 to be, creating an even more convincing, even more blast-worthy soundstage. The top end was polite all the way down into the middle range, mitigating digital nasties from the presence region. And it sounded wider than the physical dimensions dictated, with credit most likely going



● The wall-hugging TSB3.0 is 2 inches slimmer than Phase Tech's other soundbar models.

## THE VERDICT

**Phase Technology's Teatro** TSB3.0 soundbar dispenses with the fancy stuff and provides the performance you'd expect from three well-engineered and great-sounding speakers.

## SOUNDBAR

### PHASE TECHNOLOGY TEATRO TSB3.0 SOUNDBAR

PRICE: \$738

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will ever accuse Sly's burly baritone of being a musical instrument, it did give the bar a chance to sound deep-voiced, playing against type as a small-woofer weakling. The bar rebelled against its width in more than one way. Yes, it sounded wider than it looked, but it also was

to the side-firing drivers. I should add that my asymmetrical long-wall speaker placement worked against the side-firing drivers by denying them access to nearby, unobstructed side walls—but they improved width anyway, even when firing different distances at highly diffused side walls.

I watched *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (DTS-HD Master Audio) twice, first with an 80-hertz crossover, then at 100 Hz. I knew the first option was wrong for the 3-inch woofers, though to the bar's credit, the disconnect wasn't obvious until the aggressive effects kicked in. With either crossover, the bar did brilliantly with voices, delivering them with natural tone color that remained consistent on or off axis, something that was especially apparent in the wild trajectories of the jabberjay attack. While voicing was on the gentle side—with movies or music—the bar refused to roll off the nerve-shredding assault of the baboons.

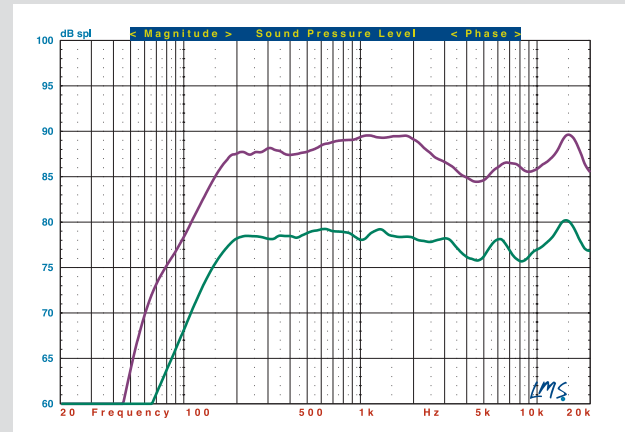
*Escape Plan* (DTS-HD Master Audio) has Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger behind bars in an action-packed prison thriller that puts the following words into Ahhhnold's mouth: "You hit like a vegetarian" (easily the best line that screenwriters have given him since "Hasta la vista, baby"). While no one

spatially deeper—and the localization was less speaker-bound than just about any other soundbar I can recall.

*Parkland* (Dolby TrueHD) dramatizes the assassination of President Kennedy, and even with half a century of perspective, the film is deeply affecting as it uncannily humanizes all-too-familiar figures and events. Fittingly, the bar responded by treating dialogue as a human, not mechanical, phenomenon, free of obvious artifacts and coloration. It was hard to keep my analytical hat on during this movie, so my notes stopped there.

### Vocals Out Front

Moving back to happier territory: The original Beatles CD releases, circa 1987, are much maligned by some audiophiles. Having grown up with the generally inferior U.S. vinyl, I'd say the old CDs compare favorably. Sure, they do have a bit of a bite, but a lot depends on how the speakers treat it. Here the Teatro shone. Not only did the soundbar make the mildly acerbic midrange on *Help!* palatable, but it also detached the lead vocals from the instrumentation, pushing them out front, where they belonged. And it was consistent



**Left Channel (purple)** +1.04/−4.06 dB, 200 Hz to 10 kHz; −3 dB @ 156 Hz, −6 dB @ 128 Hz; impedance minimum 4.41 ohms @ 326 Hz, phase angle −43.28° @ 198 Hz; sensitivity 88.5 dB, 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

**Center Channel (green)** +0.67/−2.86 dB, 200 Hz to 10 kHz; −3 dB @ 152 Hz, −6 dB @ 125 Hz; impedance minimum 4.39 ohms @ 330 Hz, phase angle −46.34° @ 183 Hz; sensitivity 88.5 dB, 500 Hz to 2 kHz.—MJP

**SPECS** 3 in polypropylene woofer (6), 0.75 in silk-dome tweeter (3), 1 in aluminum full-range driver (2); 43 x 6.75 x 2.25 in (WxHxD); 12 lb • **Inputs:** Euroblock speaker terminals (3)

enough to let me use a single volume level for material ranging from the declamatory vocals and clarion electric guitar of "Ticket to Ride" to the reserved acoustic guitar and voice of "Yesterday."

Cellist Nancy Green and pianist Frederick Moyer performed Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Complete Works for Cello & Piano* on a superbly recorded Biddulph CD. "Best bar for music, ever," I enthused into my notebook. The cello was rich, full, warm, and not unlike a human voice—and well imaged in context with the just slightly more diffused piano. It was a big, generous sound, the kind that makes you fall in love with the music, if you weren't in love with it already.

Youssou N'Dour's *Nelson Mandela* is a fun listen, full of rollicking rhythms. The Teatro made the percussion snappy and incisive, and once again it rendered the voice as a warm human presence. If you

don't think Senegalese music translates into an American milieu, you haven't heard N'Dour's cover of "The Rubberband Man."

It's not uncommon for some people who love sound to conflate product category with product quality. These are usually the folks who insist that all soundbars are bad because—well, they're soundbars. But like loudspeakers in general, bars can be good, bad, or in between. Phase Technology's Teatro TSB3.0 is the kind of soundbar that ennobles its product category with great performance and even, dare I say it, audiophile voicing. It rocked the Beatles and survived *The Hunger Games*—and if you're not willing to listen to it before you judge it, you probably hit like a vegetarian. ♦

Audio editor Mark Fleischmann is also the author of the annually updated book *Practical Home Theater* ([quietriverpress.com](http://quietriverpress.com)).



The Teatro behaves like three loud-speakers in a single enclosure.

● The TSB3.0 houses two Spatial Field Expander drivers, as well as a tweeter and two woofers for each channel.

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