



USHER BE-718 DIAMOND DMD

SMALL SIZE,
BIG SOUND!

MICHEL LEROUX

Recently introduced to the Canadian market, Usher loudspeakers have been enthusiastically received due to their diverse product range, elegant design and superior build quality. Located in Taichung, Taiwan, a 35,000 km² island of 23 million inhabitants situated south-east of China, south of Japan and north of the Philippines, Usher Audio Technologies has been designing and building electronic equipment since 1972. While specializing in speaker systems, the company's portfolio includes the CD-7 CD player, the P-307A preamplifier, the R-1.5 power amplifier offering 150 watts into 8 ohms and 260 watts into 4 ohms, speaker stands, audio furniture and, of course, transducers from 1-18 inches in diameter. Distributed on five continents, the Usher speaker family consists of six series: Usher, V, X, Horn, 6 and Diamond Dancer. The smallest of the latter series, nicknamed the "Tiny Dancer", is the BE-718 Diamond DMD, the subject of this review.

CHARACTERISTICS

A two-way vented speaker, the BE-718 is equipped with a Diamond DMD 1.25 inch dome tweeter, the Usher 9980-20BEA, covered by a round metal grille. The bass/midrange driver is the Usher 8948A, consisting of a seven-inch carbon-fibre/paper cone and a hefty 2.3 pound magnet system. The driver is crossed over to the tweeter at 2006 Hz and vented through a horizontal rectangular slot located at the bottom of the front baffle. With a sensitivity of 87 dB, an impedance of 8 ohms, the speaker has a bandwidth of 42 Hz to 40 kHz at ± 3 dB and can be driven at up to 200 watts. Asymmetrically shaped to reduce internal standing waves, each speaker measures 24 x 19 x 18.9 inches (61 x 48.5 x 48 cm) and weighs 37.5 pounds (17.2 kg). Available in piano black finish, piano ivory, piano silver and Enzo red, the BE-718 is also available in piano black with birch panels solidly bolted to each side. If you look closely, you'll notice a thin layer of acoustic damping material between the side panels and the cabinet, for additional vibration reduction. The back panel bears two pairs of oversized gold plated terminals for single wiring, bi-wiring or bi-amplification. Relatively large for a two-way monitor, these speakers are solidly built and show masterful cabinet making throughout. The BE-718 Diamond DMD requires a 24 - 28 inch speaker stand to position the tweeter at ear height. Usher offers several models, but the RWS-708 stands give these speakers a unique look and greater stability due to the generous slab of marble attached to the base.

AUDIO AS SCIENCE...

Usher's approach to audio is scientific. For proof, one need look no further than their anechoic chamber considered as one of the best in the world, and their research and development work on transducers such as the Diamond DMD tweeter. Because of its extreme hardness, insulation ability, thermal conductivity and its propensity for rapid cooling, treated synthetic diamond (also called synthetic diamond) is gaining favour among certain manufacturers in the production of high-performance tweeter diaphragms. Synthetic diamond is produced using various physical and chemical techniques to replicate the structure of natural

diamonds. In the Usher Diamond DMD cone, layers of diamond and metal are laminated to allow high frequencies to be reproduced with unrivalled resolution and microdynamics. The Usher BE-718 was recently awarded a Class A recommendation from Stereophile magazine and a CES Innovation Award. The BE-718 is a great looking speaker and its shape surprisingly well thought-out for a two-way monitor. It is unusual to see a seven-inch mid/bass transducer in such a compact enclosure. Priced at \$3,600, here are speakers whose brand image reflects the best achievements in the two-way monitor category and that share many characteristics of much more expensive high-end brands and models.

SET UP

For the listening session, the BE-718s were mounted on 24 inch stands in a 9.3 x 15 x 14 foot room, separated 6.5 feet from each other and 14 inches from the front wall, slightly toed-in (10 degrees) towards the listening chair. The grilles were removed because of their hard raised borders and the speakers connected alternately to a YBA HCDDT amplifier (70 watts into 8 ohms) and a Roksan K2 integrated (125 watts into 8 ohms). Cabling was Bis Maestro, Nordost Red Dawn and Rev2. Usher recommends a minimum 60-hour break-in period and ideally 180 hours. Following the break-in stage, with the speakers well loosened up, the listening session began in CD mode with the album *Organ Grinder* featuring legendary organist Jimmy Smith accompanied by guitarist Kenny Burrell and Grady Tate on drums (Swing, Verve Master Edition remastered in 24 bit / 96kHz).

LISTENING

Speakers can be evaluated on many criteria, but for this reviewer, openness, definition of details and transparency are characteristics that along with stereo imaging, dynamics and natural timbre allow the listener to form a clear idea of sonic performance. The first notes and tempo (rhythm and speed of execution) that spring from the BE-718 Diamond DMD promise hours of listening pleasure. Jimmy Smith's technique on Hammond organ has never been so well rendered. The characteristic sound and timbre of the instrument are reproduced with a complete sense of rightness to the execution. At times, the sound of the musician's shoes working the bass pedals can be heard, and what bass! Low frequencies are clearly delineated and presented with an amazing impact yet at the same time accompanied by a remarkable amount of micro-information in the percussion. Nice work given that this type of instrument is generally very difficult to reproduce correctly.

Moving on to voices, the recent album *Duos Dubois* (Zone3 Musique) is a recording that clearly favours vocal timbres at the expense of a somewhat synthetic, rather than natural, orchestration. Claude Dubois' high register stands out clearly on each track in his duets with Quebecois and French artists, including Francis Cabrel. On the extract "Pas question d'aventure" the artist sings a little higher than usual and the BE-718 captured this aspect of the performance with absolute clarity. The duet "Si Dieu existe" with Celine Dion was a delight: the level of emotion

conveyed by the vocal acrobatics of performers in full possession of their voices supremely rendered by the BE-718 Diamond DMD without excessive sibilance, a common phenomenon where the sibilant consonants (S, F, and Z) are unnaturally exaggerated to the point of offending the ear. The Usher Diamond DMD tweeter portrayed the upper mid and high frequencies with an alluring mix of clarity and silkiness. Far from being incisive and clinical, the diamond dome, once well run-in, convincingly portrays the harmonic envelope of the vocal timbres on this album.

Changing registers, the CD *European Standards* (ACT Records) by the Norwegian jazz formation Jan Lundgren Trio is a pertinent choice to assess both the quality and depth of bass and the definition of details in this well recorded disc. The BE-718 Diamond DMD gave a first-class demonstration of just how good a piano, bass and drum trio can sound. The first track on the album "Germany" contains all the ingredients required to assess a speaker's qualities.



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Hooked up to the YBA2 HCDT power amplifier and at moderate volume, it was clear how the "Tiny Dancer" nickname came into being. The speakers are able to light up a space with a stereo image of exemplary clarity and depth that is a delight to hear; they prove once again how a well-sorted two-way design can deliver music fluidly with surprising vitality and solidity. Since the Ushers seemed comfortable at higher volumes, they were also hooked up to the Roksan Kandy K2 integrated amplifier reviewed in this issue with the K2 CD player.

CONCLUSION

Each addition of a component likely to improve the listening system served to reveal more of the Ushers' qualities. For example, adding the new Simaudio Moon 300D digital to analog converter to the CEC TL51X transport significantly highlighted the abilities of the BE-718 Diamond DMD in terms of instrumental timbre, resolution, and bass solidity and extension.

What is Usher's recipe for success in this speaker? Designed by Mr. Tsai Lien Shui at Usher according to the "Global Design" approach, the BE-718 Diamond DMD has been revised for the U.S. market by none other than the renowned designer Dr. Joseph D'Appolito, who focused his attention on the crossover network, equipping it with top-quality components such as Erse high-purity oxygen-free copper air-core inductors, Mills resistors, and capacitors by Erse and Sonicaps.

The BE-718s take you off the beaten path. Fed by a good power amplifier, their performance will meet the challenges of the best listening rooms and even more so if the room has been acoustically treated. Evaluated here in a stereo configuration, the BE-718 Diamond DMD will perform equally well in a multi-channel home theatre set up with the addition of a centre speaker of the BE-616 Diamond Series. The BE-718's seven-inch mid-bass driver provides a completely convincing level of bass in a standard sized room. Should you require more, Usher also has a line of subwoofers. Those interested in these speakers may also wish to listen to the more economical model the X-718. In an identical format but without the Diamond DMD tweeter and with a rear-facing vent, the X-718 is priced at \$1,600 per pair.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

- **Digital transport:** C.E.C. TL51X
- **Digital to analog converter:** Moon 300D
- **CD player:** Roksan Kandy K2 CD
- **Amplifier and preamplifier:** YBA2 HCDT & Roksan Kandy K2
- **Speakers:** Dynaudio Contour 1 & Harmony Audio
- **Cables:** Bis Audio (Maestro, PowerBis Maestro), Acoustic Technologies Classic, Tenor Digital, Nordost Red Dawn Rev2

Usher BE-718 Diamond DMD

Price: \$3600 per pair without stands

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