



MK Sound

150THX SPEAKER SYSTEM

Reviewed by DANIEL KUMIN

2010 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED



↓ **Happy Returns**

The name is different, but the speakers are basically the same. MK Sound's resurrection of the classic 150THX speaker system delivers control-room sound to those seeking precision, clarity, and detail in their movie and music presentation.



1 SS-150 Surround

MK Sound's Tripole surround speaker combines the diffuse presentation of a THX dipole with the pinpoint imaging of a direct radiator.

2 S-150 LCR

The performance of MK Sound's LCR was characterized by precise imaging during stereo listening and effortlessly intelligible, well-integrated dialogue with movies.



KEY FEATURES

+S-150THX LCR speaker (\$1,499 each): (2) 5¼-in cone woofers; (3) 1-in fabric-dome tweeters; 12½ x 12½ x 10½ in; 21 lb

+SS-150THX surround speaker (\$1,499/pair): 5¼-in cone woofer; 1-in fabric-dome tweeter; (2) 3½-in cone mid/tweeters (dipole); 10½ x 6½ x 8 in wide; 10¼ lb

+MX-350THX subwoofer (\$2,399): vented/push-pull enclosure; (2) 12-in (nominal) cone woofers; 400-watt B.A.S.H. amplifier; variable sub level, low-pass controls; phase, EQ, THX-low-pass, and LFE-fixed-level toggle switches; 23½ x 20 x 15¾ in; 56 lb

Price (as tested)
\$7,495

mksoundsystem.com

MK Sound, which until recently was M&K Sound (the ampersand is important to this tale, so keep an eye on it), has its genesis in late-1960s southern California, when high-end audio dealer — arguably the *first* high-end audio dealer — Jonas Miller partnered with audio-design wunderkind Ken Kreisel to begin making custom speakers. Within a couple of years, the firm was a going concern, and M&K soon innovated the very first consumer subwoofer-satellite system, thereby laying an important foundation block for the home theater/multichannel revolution still a decade-plus away.

The ampersand-less MK Sound, however, is a new entity: a Danish outfit sprung from the former European importer of the old brand, which purchased the intellectual property and other assets of M&K when it closed its doors in 2007. But the MK Sound 150THX system seen here is the new firm's reincarnation of a classic: The five-driver S-150THX left/center/right monitor and the SS-150THX "tripole" surround speaker have been used for monitoring in multichannel recording, mastering, and dubbing facilities as often as any other speakers. And despite their comparatively boxy, industrial look, they have long crossed over to the consumer world, particularly among serious home theater buffs unconcerned with swoopy cabinets or fine veneers. According to MK Sound, the current 150THX Series — which is now manufactured in China, like seemingly everything else today — is unchanged from the M&K originals except for some evolutionary tweeter enhancements, an upgraded cabinet structure, and improved finish quality.

» SETUP

Getting the MK Sound suite ready was a matter of simply unboxing and plunking onto stands. I suspected from previous experience that the S-150s would be fairly unforgiving of vertical alignment, and so I was at some pains to ensure that all three front monitors were carefully aimed toward seated-ear altitude. From a technical perspective, the system's use of three identical vertical-array front speakers is by far the best solution, since it offers the most consistent tonality across the "front stage" as well as the broadest center-channel listening-angle coverage. But it also means that a below-screen center-channel setup like mine winds up pretty low indeed, so I compensated by

up tilting the center S-150THX. (MK Sound provides no special tilting accessories, so I raided my decades-long accumulation of stick-on feet to make it so.)

The SS-150THX tripole surrounds went onto my usual high shelves flanking the listening position, for which they are ideally suited. (This tripole design combines a dual-face, dipolar-midrange speaker with a third, inward-firing face that's in phase with the speaker side that radiates toward the screen.) Both MK Sound models include simple but effective wall-mounting hardware. However, since the 12½-inch-deep S-150 isn't an on-wall design, I can't imagine it being very successful, either visually or acoustically, in that configuration.

MK Sound's bottom end, the MX-350THX, is a big, heavy, brute-force subwoofer — despite the fact that the "new" version boasts a lighter-weight (and higher-power) B.A.S.H. amp. But let's face it: Nothing the size (and weight!) of a small central-air compressor that houses dual, push-pull 12-inch drivers is likely to be svelte. Nonetheless, I successfully wrestled it into my well-established sub position, a little to the left of and behind the front-left speaker. Dialing it in proved quite unfussy to do (as should be the case when speakers and subs are designed together, and with the de facto standard 12-/24-dB-per-octave crossover slopes in mind) and yielded a tight, solidly integrated, massively able bottom end with minimal tweaking.

» PERFORMANCE

After several days of casual use and overnight mid-volume TV sound, I started out with full-range stereo music auditions and found the S-150THXs to sound much as I remembered: clean, tight, and free of either mid-range or top-octave colorations. They also displayed modest bass extension and a precise but not very deep stereo soundstage. (That said, aural memory is notorious, so you may take these recollections for what they're worth: nada.)

I quickly confirmed that the S-150s do indeed require careful setup. Without toe-in or up tilt, the sound was smooth, balanced, and midrange-accurate, but also a noticeable shade dull and dynamically polite. Careful aiming and tilting transformed things surprisingly, with material like the massed strings and percussive brass attacks of *Elgar's Symphony No. 1* (an HDtracks 96/24 download) now yielding a high-impact presentation: crisp, snappy, tightly imaged, and, given plenty of power,

