



Usher BE-10 tower speaker

The BE-10's beryllium tweeter and midrange make it an audiophile's dream come true.

Steve Guttenberg

08/24/2007

Pretty much everything about Usher Audio Technology's BE-10 screams "audiophile speaker." It's big, it's beautiful, and it sounds so good you don't even have to be an audiophile to appreciate it. Maybe the "audiophile" tag sounds a tad elitist, but anyone who occasionally gives their undivided attention to the sound of music—meaning they don't read, talk, or otherwise multitask as they listen—could be considered an audiophile. In any case, the BE-10 sounds too good to be ignored, and if that makes it an audiophile speaker, so be it.

The BE-10's curved cabinet helps stiffen the cabinet to minimize extraneous vibration, and also helps eliminate unwanted resonances (or standing waves) inside the speaker. *(Click image to enlarge)*



True, most of the better audiophile speakers have always been extraordinarily costly, and over the last decade or so, high-end speaker prices have gone through the roof. Luckily for us, Usher is bucking that trend. Not that I could tell by looking or listening; I had pegged the BE-10 at double its retail price before I knew the MSRP. It's the brand's penultimate model; Usher offers a wide range of speakers as well as highly affordable stereo and home theater components.

Based in Taiwan, the 30-year-old enterprise proudly manufactures its own [beryllium](#)-ceramic tweeter *and* midrange drivers. Beryllium tweeters are fairly common, but you can probably count on one hand the speaker companies that offer beryllium midrange drivers—and the BE-10's concave 5-inch dome is a doozy. Beryllium is employed for its remarkable stiffness-to-weight ratio, which is said to produce dramatically lower distortion than conventional materials. The advanced design's payoff can be heard in the BE-10's startling resolution. Listen to the way the speaker's 1.25-inch beryllium tweeter clarifies details in the sound. A perfect example is when a drummer puts aside his sticks and uses brushes on his snare drum. A lot of otherwise very good speakers render brushes' sound as an undifferentiated swishing noise, but over the BE-10 brushes really do sound like metal wires gently circling the drum head. Cymbals' brassy shimmer is also more realistic than I am used to hearing. And an 11-inch woofer provides the speaker's high-definition bass response. Those not-so-subtle differences make all the difference in the way we perceive music. Once you get used to the BE-10's *Über* detail, other speakers will sound veiled and just less interesting.

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The BE-10 was designed by Usher's Tsai Lien-Shui. [Dr. Joseph D'Appolito](#) serves as Usher's technical consultant, providing guidance in crossover design. (D'Appolito created the popular midrange/tweeter/midrange vertical array now used by dozens of manufacturers, and he is now head of engineering for [Snell Acoustics](#).) Rigorous quality control procedures ensure individual drivers and stereo pairs of speakers are matched to exceedingly close tolerances. The BE-10's precise sound attests to that fact.



The BE-10's front baffle cradles a 1.25-inch beryllium tweeter, a 5-inch beryllium dome midrange, and an 11-inch woofer. (*Click image to enlarge*)

Audiophiles with a hankering for plus-size beauties will probably get a little weak in the knees at their first encounter with the curvaceously shapely BE-10. The 4-foot-tall speaker is weighty enough to require a team of two people to unpack, and besides, you won't want to accidentally mar the speakers' exquisitely crafted birch or walnut veneers. Maybe it's just me, but I think the 8.5-by-3-inch brushed metal nameplate, mounted on the lower edge of the gleaming black front baffle, seems out of place. The plaque is a nice enough hunk of metal, but methinks it belongs on the rear panel or hidden behind a grille. Unfortunately, Usher doesn't supply a grille with the BE-10; the drivers and the metal plate are exposed for all to see.

I move the speakers to and fro, and learn that repositioning by even a fraction of an inch makes an audible difference in their stereo imaging. Bass oomph is best with the BE-10s slightly closer together than most speakers in my room (just a bit under 7 feet apart is ideal). They also need to be placed 2 or more feet away from the wall behind them before the sound totally locks in. Your dealer/installer will probably need a little time to get the sound just right, but the BE-10s deserve the extra coddling.

Audiophile speakers supposedly reveal everything about the quality of the components and the wires used in the system. To test this theory, I swap out my Tributaries Silver wires for my Cardas Golden Reference cables and the differences are not subtle (the Tribs make the BE-10s sound too lean, the Cardas are just right). Next I replace my trusty [Ayre C-5xe](#) universal disc player with the new Nagra CDC CD player, and oh boy, the BE-10 instantly communicates the differences between the two fine players (the Nagra's bass is firmer, and soundstage depth is extended a few feet in every direction). The speaker's vivid character can be a little unrelenting on some recordings, so I find myself playing mostly my best-sounding music.

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The BE-10's ability to illuminate the deepest recesses of a recording's soundstage with a nearly holographic presence is evident on Jimi Hendrix's *Band of Gypsies* live CD. I know this music well, but the BE-10 somehow brings out new subtleties. I can now hear the band's sound filling and reverberating around the old Fillmore East theater, and though I have played this music countless times over the years, the speakers are giving me goose bumps. The BE-10's character—and yes, every speaker has one—is of extraordinary resolution of detail, but at the same time, the sound is very relaxed and gentle. Nothing is forced, but somehow the BE-10 reveals secrets. The sound from deep bass to upper treble has a consistency of tone and character that is rare, even in high-end speakers. Big as it is, the BE-10 wasn't born to boogie; it feels a little uptight on dance music, and it wouldn't be my first choice for rock'n'roll.

The back panel of the BE-10 boasts fantastically sturdy and elaborate speaker-cable binding posts. *(Click image to enlarge)*

The BE-10's talents really come to the fore with classical music. Its sense of immense scale, swooning strings, and airy percussion will delight audiophiles, but it's my guess the sound is so compelling that even non-audiophiles will be seduced. As I said, it's simply too good to be ignored. The Usher BE-10 represents a rare convergence of sensuous form, no-compromise engineering, and transcendent sound quality. Bravo!

