

# Orienteering

*Usher's Compass points to a huge sound from a big speaker that's full of Far Eastern promise*

**PRODUCT** Usher Compass CP-6381

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £2,400 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 35x127x65cm

◉ Weight: 58.5kg ◉ Three-way design ◉ Backward tilted time-aligned drive units ◉ 25mm fabric dome tweeter ◉ 125mm midrange driver ◉ 215mm bass driver ◉ Sensitivity/impedance: 92dB/8 ohms (nom)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01443 231458 🌐 www.usheraudio.com

Usher might well be a new name to most readers, but this Taiwanese company started over thirty years ago, although it only started looking towards international markets in 2001. Usher has brought in legendary speaker engineer Joe d'Appolito to act as its acoustic design consultant, and imbue the brand with extra credibility.

Although Usher makes a full range of components, loudspeakers are the main stock in trade, and the Compass series is just one of several ranges in the portfolio. For all its very considerable bulk and mass, this CP-6381 is not the top model among the Compasses, and looks exceptional material value for money at £2,400 per pair.

The enclosure alone is a large and massive affair, weighing some 45kg even before the 13.5kg base and mass-loading ballast are added. It's tall, deep, and wide enough to accommodate a good size bass driver, yet it doesn't follow the regular rectilinear shape. Though the front, back, top and base are all rectangular, the sides form parallelograms, so that both the front and back panels are tilted backwards quite dramatically, an arrangement which should help to time-align the drivers.

The enclosure proper is attractively finished in a high-gloss 'piano black' lacquer – seven coats are used, silver or white are alternative options – and all the edges are softened by heavy post-forming. Internal bracing is also used, and two large, thick panels of solid beech are bolted in place to reinforce the top third of each side. Two small optional grilles just cover up the drive units.

The whole thing is mounted on a substantial crackle-finish cast metal plinth

with an enormous stability footprint, and this sits on large, attractive if rather pretentious brass spikes. Sadly, there's no lock-nut provision for added rigidity. The very bottom of the enclosure consists of a separate six-litre compartment for adding ballast.

This is a full three-way design, with nominal crossover points at 323Hz and 2.6kHz. The bass is supplied from a large rear-ported enclosure, driven by a 215mm driver with 155mm paper cone, the latter being deliberately very coarsely textured to help break up standing waves. The midrange driver has a 125mm paper cone and 170mm frame, and is set high up near the top of the cabinet, a little above head height, in its own smaller rear-ported section of the enclosure. The 25mm fabric dome tweeter is set higher still, so that half of this unit protrudes above the top surface, protected by a little semicircular hardwood mounting nacelle. Twin terminal pairs allow optional bi-wiring or bi-amping.

## SOUND QUALITY

The specification claims just 87dB alongside an eight-ohm load, which seems unduly cautious. Using our usual far-field in-room averaged technique, the sensitivity registers a much higher 92dB, which is particularly impressive in view of the eight-ohm load it presents to the amp, and a fine bass extension that records -1dB at 20Hz under in-room conditions.

Indeed, the low bass is perhaps too strong, in part because the port is tuned to deliver its maximum output at 29Hz, but the overall balance is very well ordered above that point, with just a slight lack of output in the region around the lower crossover, and slight

unevenness and excess in the upper midband. The treble is very smooth, if a shade stronger than average.

The 6381 has a punchy, lively and dramatic sound, and its massive bass weight brings considerable scale to the proceedings. It might not be the last word in smooth sophistication, but it does drive the music along with plenty of enthusiasm, while also staying largely free from unwanted bass boom or thump for a big design.

Paper cone drivers have a certain character that doesn't lead to the tidiest or most controlled sound around, but they do also offer a fine sense of immediacy, with vigorous dynamics and good communication skills. Voices sound open, speech has fine expression and intelligibility, and even the applause accompanying radio broadcasts sounded very convincing. Stereo images are precisely defined and focused, free from boxiness and develop good depth perspectives, and this was particularly noticeable with orchestral material.

By chance, the Usher followed a pair of B&W 802Ds into the listening room, and despite their very different physical appearances and engineering, the overall in-room tonal balances of the two models turned out to have a lot in common. And, although the big B&W has obvious advantages in smoothness and sweetness, the Usher still did a remarkably good job considering it costs less than a third of the price of the 802D.

Judged by these high standards, the 6381's top end is a shade obvious, and even sometimes coarse in texture, while the midband shows some nasality and hollowness, with slight 'cupped hands' coloration. The bass might be on the cool side too, but it's also notably agile and authoritative. Adding the supplied ballast further tightened up the bass end, reducing cabinet coloration and 'thickening' effects.

Speaker design is all about compromise and balance; while 'cleaning' up the bass region is a mostly positive move, it does also leave the mid and top sounding a shade more exposed. But, such balances are to be expected when you successfully build so bold a speaker statement at this kind of price. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

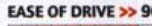


## VERDICT

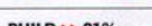
**SOUND >> 89%**



**EASE OF DRIVE >> 90%**



**BUILD >> 91%**



**VALUE >> 87%**



### PRO

Fine material value for money. Sound has massive weight, fine balance, wide dynamic range, strong imaging and impressive midband articulation.

### CON

Very bulky, backswept tilt can look strange. Mid and treble have some nasal, hollow colorations, and could sound sweeter and more discreet.

### CONCLUSION

If the sheer bulk is acceptable, this speaker offers a fine all-round performance at a relatively modest price, considering the finish and engineering. It could sound cleaner and sweeter, but is fundamentally involving and informative.

**HI-FI CHOICE** OVERALL SCORE >> **88%**