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Home Cinema In A Box

Magic Box

Rob Gillam - Tuesday, 23 May 2006

Zvox probably is not a name you have seen before but, once Aussies have sampled this magic box, word about it should spread like wildfire.

We've seen all-in-one audio solutions before, but how can a single box performing everything from amplification to signal processing, through to speaking, do it well? By their nature, these often big-noting (Apple Hi-Fi springs to mind) solutions are compromised and fall well short of the mark set by component systems. Whilst the Zvox 315 is never going to beat a full component and separate speaker system, for the money (\$499) it does a pretty good job of imitating one.

The 315 is made in China which had us wondering about its built quality as we unwrapped it. We were however pleasantly surprised at its appearance, weight and finish. It's a subdued charcoal colour, sports big rubber feet and a pleasantly reassuring weighty feel. It's backed by a 12 month warranty.

Simplicity itself

Setting up the 315 is, essentially, as simple as finding somewhere to put it (it's roughly average audio component size), connecting one or two sources and adjusting levels.

Whilst compatible with many different sources such as [MP3 players](#) and computers, we connected it to a bedroom [TV](#) via a microphone minijack, which allowed control of sources via the [TV's](#) factory remote (which can also be achieved by disabling the TV's audio function and connecting via RCA outputs).

Little box, big sound

One of Zvox's claims is that it delivers big sound from a small package. We can't disagree. The propeller-heads behind the 315's design, Tom Hannaer and Winslow Burhoe, are widely experienced in the audio industry and have slipped some clever features into what at first glance seems to be a fairly simple device. Paul Sumner of Ausparx, Zvox's Australasian distributor, was so taken with the 315's musicality when encountering it overseas, he started a company just to bring it down under.

Reality check

Let's be honest, the 315's 13 cm woofer driven with 20 watts won't huff and puff any houses down, but in tandem with three 8 cm full-range drivers, hopping along with 10 watts each, combines to present some surprisingly authoritative beef. Zvox puts this down to its Infinite Compliance technology, which has the left and right speakers in airtight enclosures that are connected via an acoustic tube that combines low-frequency pressures. It says these pressures are cancelled out by each other and eliminate acoustic stiffness in the suspension,

The sound stage is surprisingly wide for a 43 cm unit. Zvox compares the sound with that of speakers located metres apart. Zvox says it pulls this magic trick with its PhaseCue technology, which mixes in-phase signals with out-of-phase signals. We could definitely place sound emitting from locations a few feet away from the physical speaker location.

More audio trickery comes in the form of its Virtual Surround Sound that is particularly effective when operating in conjunction with processing such as Virtual Dolby Surround Sound. Surround sound effects are, along with staging, controlled via the PhaseCue level knob at the unit's rear.

Nice bum

The 315's rear sports three level controls: master volume, sub level and the aforementioned PhaseCue. There are two 3.5mm inputs. Input 2 doubles as an output, so you can run an outboard active subwoofer, should you wish.

When tinkering we found, despite its fairly modest power ratings, there was plenty of master volume level left to fool with should it be needed in future, but with it set at under half way our room's volume was sufficiently matched. We also treated bass and PhaseCue levels gingerly – especially as PhaseCue automatically adds brightness as well as its spatial effects.

A nice touch is that the 315 auto-senses power to the source device and switches on with the source activation. It powers off automatically after three minutes when no source is detected.

The verdict

The Zvox 315 is a convenient and clever one-box solution that provides a generous amount of sound quality for its asking price. There will be plenty of plug-and-play fans who'll find a good home for one.

See www.zvox.com.au

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