

## B&W 684 Theatre System 5.1-channel speaker package



**A**s one of the world's largest loudspeaker manufacturers, Bowers & Wilkins has what can only be considered as a thoroughly expansive speaker range. The recent introduction of the comprehensive new 600 Series products presented the company with the opportunity to offer packages at various price points consisting of carefully-selected complementary models within the series.

### Equipment

The package consists of a pair of the 684 2.5-way floorstanders, the HTM62 centre channel, 686 surrounds and the ASW10 powered subwoofer. Finish options are Wengé, Cherry, Light Oak and Black Ash.

The 684 main left and right channels feature B&W's almost ubiquitous woven Kevlar material, in this case used in the 16.5cm (6.5-inch) mid and bass drivers. The 25mm aluminium tube-loaded tweeter is an all new 600 Series creation based on a simplified but updated version of the company's famous Nautilus design. Frequency response for the 684s is quoted as being  $\pm 3$ dB from 44Hz to 22kHz and impedance as being eight ohms with 90dB sensitivity. The bass range is reflex-loaded via the company's Flowport, a design that aids air flow and eliminates port chuffing.

The very important centre-channel duties are handled by the new HTM62 speaker which uses twin 13cm (five-inch) Kevlar drivers either side of the same aluminium tweeter. Here the frequency response is  $\pm 3$ dB from 55Hz to 22kHz. Impedance is eight ohms however efficiency here is rather modest, being 85dB.

The small stand-mount 686 speakers take over the rear surround role. They share the same 13cm woven Kevlar mid/bass driver as used in the centre channel speaker, and of course the same tweeter used throughout the range. Even the specifications are similar, based on a  $\pm 3$ dB from 55Hz to 22kHz frequency response, eight-ohm impedance but an even slightly lower efficiency of 84dB.

Finally, to the ASW10 subwoofer. This is a solidly-built sealed sub with a 10-inch long-throw paper/Kevlar driver and 200W of built-in ICEpower amplification. The sub

is quoted as dipping down to a low of 27Hz at -3dB. What's more, B&W has included a clever three-way switch that allows a reasonable level of room matching by contouring the lowest frequencies. Position 'A' extends the bass to its maximum to -6dB at 20Hz, and then to -6dB at 25Hz and 30Hz respectively for positions 'B' and 'C'. A further two-position EQ switch provides some more room tuning capabilities, as it customises the bass output for corner placement or free space. The ASW10 is well-featured too, having line-level and speaker-level inputs (with separate volume controls), low-pass filter frequency and bypass, auto turn on/off, phase switch, EQ switch, and a 12V trigger input. The whole package is beautifully assembled and finished. These are quality speakers bearing the trademarks of a giant's manufacturing efficiencies.


### Performance

The 684 speaker system presents a crisp and highly-detailed sound. The Nautilus-derived tweeter, in this application, is a sweet and extended transducer, making dialogue and delicate soundtrack nuances highly intelligible and discernable. In our time with the 684 system, we never experienced any form of harshness or treble imbalance, no matter how complex the soundtrack. Bullet cartridges emptying and swords clashing had a metallic clang that uncannily, and somewhat scarily, resembled reality.

The five speakers are able to create a seamless soundscape that is high, wide, deep and all-enveloping. This soundfield cohesion and timbral consistency really makes a strong case for same-brand packages rather than mixing and matching speakers from different

manufacturers. And the ASW10 subwoofer is a cracker. By diligently using the various EQ and customisation settings we were able to mate the sub to our listening room in a way that did not excite any room modes or incur extraneous resonances. This allowed the sub to perform as it was designed to; it provided a shockingly-powerful bass experience that suited all manner of action blockbusters. But it was also subtle by not making itself intrusive when the soundtrack did not call for it. The ASW10's superb bass performance also makes it a bit of an all-rounder, as it performed with a tight, punchy and detailed bass on plain ol' stereo music listening.

### Conclusion

The B&W 684 theatre package is a well-made, aesthetically-pleasing and superb-sounding system that can really bring your favourite movies to life — and it loves music as well. 

#### B&W 684 THEATRE SYSTEM

Price: **\$4696**

Warranty: **Five years speakers, 2 years sub**



- Quality componentry and fit and finish
- Superb sound quality
- Powerful-sounding subwoofer



- Best in a medium to large room

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