

Bard Audio BardOne

Innovative wireless audio system with a traditional pedigree

Simple but highly effective: that's James Vesey's verdict on one of the easiest ways to spread music round the home

Look around recent consumer electronics shows and the big news – aside from the ever-bigger screens and the tumbling price of DVD players – has been distributed music. That old science-fiction idea of music in any room at the touch of a button has developed into a mainstream audio concept. Now most companies have either a network music server or a way of integrating the audio system with music stored on computer, for example in Onkyo's NetTunes system.

Wireless networking is playing its part in this revolution, removing the need to run cables around the house. The same wireless network that links computers to a broadband router can allow those on the network to access music stored on those computers, and a variety of units can be connected to the audio system to access that music. Apple has further simplified the concept with its AirPort Express system, allowing music stored on computer to be played out to a remote location, while the Yamaha MusicCAST is a stand-alone music system with server and client units having integral wireless connection components.

Even the smaller specialist audio companies are discovering the appetite for music shared between devices: as we reported

last month, Creek is demonstrating a prototype music sender with the intention of using this at the heart of a wireless speaker system. And Creek isn't alone...

Sonneteer is one of the smaller British audio companies, whose latest venture is the founding of a sub-brand, Bard Audio, dedicated to audiophile wireless transmission systems. The £330 BardOne is a line-level device designed to go between source and amplification, or connect to the tape loop of an amplifier to feed music to another system elsewhere in the house. It comprises the disc-shaped BardOne Tx transmitter and Rx receiver, but there are variations on the theme. The BardUSB is a small device the shape of one of those USB computer memory devices, able to transmit music stored on a computer to the Bard receiver. With a BardOne Rx receiver it costs £240; additional receivers are £170. If you don't have another system elsewhere in the house but still want to access your music remotely, the BardThree combines a receiver and a 25-watt-per-channel stereo amplifier with volume control. As with the Rx unit, multiple BardThrees can be used with a single Tx transmitter or BardUSB to feed music into several locations.

All the devices operate on the 2.4GHz band and can support up to eight stereo digital transmission channels, the units allowing the selection of the channel to be

Here's looking at you: phono cables make the connections



sent or received. That should avoid any problems should your neighbours buy into the Bard concept too, but also allows two or more systems to be run in the same location. What the system lacks is any control feedback between the remote receiver and the sending device – what you hear is what's playing at the transmitter end – but Bard Audio points out that this allows the full bandwidth of the transmission system to be used for audio, for the best possible sound.

Performance


Setting up the BardOne system is hardly tricky: conventional phono cables link the transmitter and receiver to source and destination components respectively, while plug-top transformers provide the power. The unit twists apart to reveal dip-switches to set the channel to be used. Bard Audio also supplied the little BardUSB transmitter, which slotted into the USB socket on my computer and self-installed in moments. It's powered from the computer, and has a push-button on the side to control channel selection.

The transmission system has a range of 20-40m in line of sight, with the front of the BardOne unit giving the best reception, and however hard I tried to wrongfoot the devices around the house, the signal just kept on coming. I used both my main audio system components and my laptop computer as sources, feeding the signal to a second system in the dining room, a Tivoli table radio in the kitchen and even another system upstairs, and while the sound from the computer wasn't as good as that from CD and radio sources, that was more to do with the quality of the PC's player rather than any failing of the USB unit.

Beyond that, all I can report is that the Bard units work entirely transparently. There is



no detectable delay between the source and the destination – apparently it's actually about 1 millisecond – and the quality is excellent, with no obvious audible effect on the sound. It really is as simple as that.

Indeed, if you suffer from mains hum with some sources – which is not uncommon in an age when devices containing video circuitry get fed into amplifiers – this is an obvious way of avoiding it, not to mention a very simple way of getting your sound where you want it. The Bard Audio system is recommended without hesitation. 

BARD AUDIO BARDONE SYSTEM

Type Wireless audio transmitter/receiver
Price £330 (BardOne Tx/Rx)
Tx inputs stereo audio, 9V DC
Rx outputs stereo audio, 9VDC
Transmission frequency 2400-2483.5MHz
Channels 8, min 7MHz channel spacing
Accessories supplied Power supplies, phono cables
Made by Bard Audio, FTM Marketing, PO Box 163c, Esher, Surrey KT10 0YH
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The signal keeps coming, no matter how you try to wrongfoot the devices