

# Handson

## Klipsch Three Wireless Music System

By Bob Ankosko

### Retro Elegance

PRICE \$400

**I'M NOT** GONNA LIE. WHEN I FIRST saw a press photo of the Three, I was immediately taken with its elegant retro styling—the wraparound grille, the walnut top...those copper control knobs. *I wanted one.*

Evoking what Klipsch calls the “mid-century” design legacy of its late founder Paul W. Klipsch, the Three boasts impeccably finished walnut panels, a knit grille, and a copper strip with two knobs—one for volume, the other for source selection—plus something you don't expect to see on modern gear: a toggle switch. Positively retro. Behind the classic façade is a stereo pair of 2.25-inch drivers that flank a 5.25-inch woofer. Klipsch has also incorporated two 5.25-inch passive radiators—one on each end of the enclosure—to boost bass output.

The Three may look retro, but it's anything but. When you're not streaming over Wi-Fi (with hi-res support up to 192-kHz/24-bit) or Bluetooth (with upgraded sound via aptX if your source supports it), you can

#### AT A GLANCE

**+** Plus

- Impeccable fit and finish
- Streaming via Wi-Fi and Bluetooth
- Excellent sound
- Solid bass
- Remote control

**-** Minus

- App could be more intuitive
- Wish there was a display window

use its RCA, minijack, or USB Audio (Type B) inputs to hook up a CD player, iPod, PC...or turntable. In keeping with the vintage vibe, you can transform those RCA jacks into a phono input via a back-panel switch that activates the built-in preamp. There's also a screw terminal for the turntable's ground wire.

One of five LEDs on the control panel will turn bright white to let you

know which source is selected. Not that you're going to be hovering over the speaker to see which LED is lit: Everything is controlled through the Klipsch Stream app, which uses the DTS Play-Fi platform to stream internet radio and a number of services, including Amazon Music, iHeart Radio, Napster, Pandora, SiriusXM, Spotify Connect (Premium subscription only), and Tidal, which supports 16-bit lossless streaming with a HiFi subscription. You can also stream music from your personal library as long as your PC (or server) and the app are connected to the same Wi-Fi network.

The beauty of the Play-Fi platform is that it supports lossless audio and makes it easy to set up a whole-house music system by mixing and matching wireless products from more than 20 brands. The Three is one of six Play-Fi models Klipsch offers.

#### A Time to Stream

I was stoked when two Klipsch boxes arrived on my front porch—having two speakers would allow me to check out the app's multiroom chops. Wasting no time, I unboxed the speakers and set one up in my living room and one in my basement office. Would these retro beauties perform as elegantly as they looked?

#### RATING

**Klipsch Three Wireless Music System**

Performance ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Build Quality ★★★★★

Value ★★★★★



Without consulting the sparse, multilingual owner's manual (hey, I'm male), I downloaded the Klipsch Stream app on my phone and followed the prompts. In a matter of minutes, both speakers and the app were connected to my Wi-Fi network. Piece of cake. For added flexibility, I also installed the app on my iPad.

The app does everything it needs to but is pretty basic. Surprisingly, it doesn't include song titles when you're streaming Internet Radio. With two speakers, I was able to create a group with one source feeding one or both speakers and control volume in unison or independently. Or, I could play a different source on each speaker. I ran through a variety of machinations—streaming Bluetooth to one speaker, while listening to Tidal on the other, and so on. Klipsch says you can create up to four independent zones with one source feeding up to 16 speakers and have up to eight people with different devices streaming different songs to different speakers at the same time. *Now that's a party.*

I auditioned a wide variety of music from different sources over a few weeks, mostly with the app set to Critical Listening Mode, which “creates a pure, unaltered digital audio path to any single Play-Fi speaker for the best possible sound quality.” I liked what I heard and noticed a distinct improvement in sound quality after a few days of use, which I attributed to speaker break-in.

The Three can play surprisingly loud and puts out plenty of bass. It had no trouble filling my 13 x 25-foot living room, but with bass-heavy pop tracks, I had to throttle back the volume to avoid distortion. With some music, the treble was a bit sizzly and the bottom end a little boomy, but that was the exception,

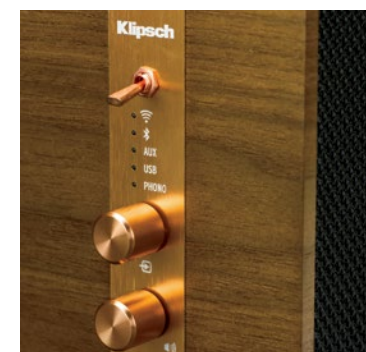
#### THE VERDICT

The Three melds retro style with modern sound in a beautifully crafted tabletop stereo.

not the rule. Overall, my experience was positive, and the more I listened, the more I liked the Three.

As just one of many examples, I was impressed by how clean, full, and detailed Suzanne Vega's 1987 hit “Luka” (*Solitude Standing*) sounded on one of my favorite internet stations, Radio Swiss Pop. The Three conveyed the breathy quality of Vega's vocals with just the right amount of ambience. While the song was playing, I switched to Tidal (HiFi version) and searched for “Luka” so I could compare the sound, which turned out to be noticeably brighter on Tidal—maybe too bright.

Streaming a series of 192/24 wav files from my music library was perhaps the most revealing—from the ambience of a live jazz performance to the delicate sound of a children's choir. Remarkable for a speaker of this size. Klipsch has created a beautifully crafted tabletop stereo that does an excellent job of melding retro style with modern sound. I think Paul W. Klipsch would approve.



#### SPECS

**Drivers:** 2.25 in full-range driver (2), 5.25 in woofer (1), 5.25 in passive radiator (2)  
**Enclosure:** Sealed • **Amplifier:** 60 watts continuous @ <1% THD • **Inputs:** Analog stereo (phono or line-level), analog RCA, 3.5mm aux, USB audio, USB service, ground terminal; wireless via Wi-Fi, Bluetooth • **Dimensions (WxHxD, inches):** 13.7 x 7 x 8 • **Weight (Pounds):** 10.3

#### PERFECT FOCUS

## Signals

KEN C. POHLMANN

### 3D TV Is Dead



It's official. 3D TV, once heralded as The Future, is now officially only to be referred to in the past tense. Please adjust your vocabulary accordingly. This news is not surprising. In fact, you are probably only surprised in that you assumed 3D's demise had occurred years ago. When's the last time you watched a 3D Blu-ray? Well, there you go.

Last year, two major manufacturers still supported 3D TV. This year, they do not; LG and Sony pulled the plugs on their 3D TVs. Samsung, the world's largest TV manufacturer, saw the writing on the wall a year ago and abandoned 3D, as did Vizio, Sharp, Panasonic, and others. No major TV manufacturer makes a 3D TV anymore. It's over.

The brief rise of 3D TV can be attributed to the 2009 movie, *Avatar*. Wildly popular in movie theaters, particularly in 3D form, it convinced other movie-makers to shoot in 3D. Broadcasters optimistically launched their own 3D channels. All this convinced TV manufacturers to embrace 3D TV. This was not a good decision.

Why did 3D TV fail? Ah, let me count the ways. For starters, watching 3D in movie theaters wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Although the “jumping out at you” effect was initially amusing, it wore thin after a while. Add in all the picture quality downsides to 3D, and you get a very mixed bag of pros and cons.

More important, TV makers failed to see that watching TV at home is very different from watching content in a movie theater. In a theater, you don't mind sitting in a fixed and upright position, looking forward at a screen at a certain angle, and not socializing with other people or generally messing around. You watch the movie for two hours, then the lights go up and you resume normal activity.

But at home, none of those constraints apply. You want to slouch on the futon, lie down, put your head on a



pillow, get a weird viewing angle that happens to be comfortable, check your phone, get a snack, socialize, and so on. And you can't easily do any of those things while wearing 3D glasses. The novelty of seeing a 3D program just wasn't worth the hassle. Too many people bought a 3D TV, watched a few movies in 3D, showing their friends how it worked, then never bothered to watch 3D again. So-called “glassless 3D” never really materialized. After a peak in 2012, sales dropped year after year.

When a format fails, X number of people get left in the lurch. Next time something new comes along, they remember getting burned and decide to wait and see. So this type of failure is never good for business. But if there is any sunny side to the 3D debacle, it is this: At least 3D discs are still watchable, and 3D TVs can still be viewed in 2D. Bottom line: Consumers paid extra for a feature that has fallen out of favor. So, it could have been worse.

#### Why did 3D TV fail? Let me count the ways.

Now that new 3D TVs aren't being made anymore, the spigot on 3D content will slowly be closed. Time and technology have passed 3D by; acronyms such as OLED, HDR, and 4K/UHD now drive sales. 3D is stigmatized to the extent that manufacturers apparently don't even have faith in a potential 3D 4K OLED TV. Ironically, those technical improvements let content look terrific, in a way that's far more realistic than the supposed realism of 3D.

Speaking of realism, it is also ironic that 3D is leaving just as virtual reality is coming. If you thought people looked goofy wearing 3D glasses, just you wait.

