

“ ... the Monitor 11's are true
AUDIO SUPERSTARS. ”

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“If there's a better value in speakers, I haven't heard it. They're smooth as glass, have awesome high-end performance, and rock deep in bass frequencies.”

by Mike McGann

Monitor 11

It's not usually my style to start a holy war. Okay, at least not in audio circles; my rants about HDTV resolution in the past notwithstanding.

Up until 18 months or so ago, I stood with the likes of THX and numerous speaker manufacturers in defense of bipole and dipole rear surround speakers. I won't argue the merits (and there are some, clearly) of a new generation of bipole mains coming on the market this year. Gradually, as I began listening to 5.1-channel music, my faith in non-direct radiating rear surrounds began to wane. More frequently, the home theater benefits of more diffuse rear sound were outweighed by the need for firmer placement of the rear channels on music tracks.

The advent of DVD-Audio has made this belief even more rock solid. I decided, though, to put those beliefs to the test with a new Paradigm speaker system. I chose the hellacious Monitor (not to be

confused with the British manufacturer of the same name) 11s for the fronts with four, 6-1/2-inch drivers each, the CC-370 center channel, the PW-2200 subwoofer and the ADP-370 bipole/dipole rear surrounds.

The Monitor 11 mains quickly announce that they are about power, much like a muscle car with side exhaust pipes. Three 6-1/2-inch drivers crank out bass, in fact, solidly below 30 hertz—excellent performance for any speaker and a main reason why they integrate so easily with the PW-2200 subwoofer. The 6-1/2-inch mid-range driver is shared throughout the system, as is the titanium tweeter. While it might be tempting to drop the sub's crossover down to 50 or 60 hertz with the performance of the Monitors, keep in mind the rest of the



system runs out of bass oomph at about 70 hertz. I found setting the crossover between 80 and 90 hertz sounded best.

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The CC-370 center uses a pretty typical arrangement of two mid-range drivers flanking the tweeter. The ADP-370 surrounds have opposite-facing 6-1/2-inch mid-range drivers and 1-inch tweeters. Designed for wall mounting, they can be placed on either a side wall in a 5.1 installation or rear or back in a 7.1 installation.

“In terms of stereo performance, I was blown away. Imaging was deep and wide.”

As is the norm, I started out my listening tests in stereo mode, first with a Parasound AVC-1800 and matching HCA-855A five-channel amp for everything but DVD-Audio testing. I used the Onkyo TX-DS989 receiver for DVD-Audio and 6.1 soundtracks, since it's the lone receiver I have with five-channel inputs and 6.1 capability. Due to an odd issue with Onkyo's prototype software, it doesn't



CC-370

play well with stereo, a problem I've confirmed doesn't exist in production models. The Parasound amp is slightly warmer than the one in the Onkyo, but the over performance differences were fairly minimal.

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In terms of stereo performance, I was blown away. Imaging was deep and wide. Listening to Michael Penn, I resigned the vocals were so deeply placed at center on the opening track, *I Don't Try*, that I found myself checking the center speaker to make sure no sound was coming from it. Even better, numerous cuts from Mark Knopfler's *Sailing To Philadelphia* were absolutely stunning. *What It Is* exuded power, but bass response remained tight and Knopfler's vocals were rich and true. On *Silvertown Blues*, his vocals didn't drown out Glenn Tilbrook of Squeeze on a nice duet. Despite all this kick-butt bass and mid-range, the tweeters never sounded strained or brittle. On Queen's *A Day At The Races*, Freddie Mercury's vocals on *Somebody To Love* stayed smooth and clear all the way up to the top, something I've rarely heard from any speaker. A selection of Vivaldi was smooth and clean, with no brittle notes at the high end.

Moving on to DVD-based music, I had some mixed results. My normal standbys, such as Peter Frampton's *Live From Detroit* and Roy Orbison's *Black & White Nights*, sounded good, with clear vocals, as long as the mix didn't put too much of a strain on the rear surrounds. Steely Dan's *Two Against Nature*, which makes much more use of the rear channels for vocals, sounded unbalanced, with the instruments or vocals in the rear sounding too diffuse.

When I switched to movies though, these issues disappeared and the

ADP-370s really shined. Phaser shots from *Star Trek: First Contact* sounded like they were lancing over my right shoulder during the Borg battle scene. Dialogue never became muddy, whether I was watching *Terminator 2* or *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*.

“... the ADP-370s really shined. ... Phaser shots from “Star Trek: First Contact” sounded like they were lancing over my right shoulder ... Dialogue never became muddy ... excellent as film soundtrack rear surrounds, far better than any direct-radiating rear surrounds ...”

My enthusiasm drained when I switched to the Onkyo and my burgeoning collection of DVD-Audio discs. Emerson Lake & Palmer's *Brain Salad Surgery* probably sounded best, since it's the DVD-A title that probably uses the rears for the least in terms of vocals and instruments, rather opting to widen the front soundstage. But even on this disc, the circular pan at the end of *Karn Evil 9's* third movement got very muddy when it spun to the back.

Worse was The Doors' *LA Woman*, where the storm effects in *Riders On The Storm* lacked the crispness and punch I've heard on other speaker systems.

I can't really fault Paradigm, though. The ADP-370s perform exactly the way they were designed to and are excellent as film soundtrack rear surrounds, far better than any direct-radiating rear surrounds, which are often too specific to reproduce the proper diffuse sounds intended. But using them for DVD-Audio is kind of like going off-roading in an MGB, far from an ideal experience.

Which brings us to the middle of the holy war. Dipole/bipole or direct-radiating surrounds? Increasingly, I'm not sure it's an either/or situation, but rather an "and."

"The killer PW-2200 is smooth, fast, clear and clean, making great use of a whopping 250 watts of power."

Playing around a bit, I used a pair of Monitor Audio Silver 3i speakers (which, I know aren't timber matched to the Paradigms, but they were the closest among the speakers I had at my lab) as side surrounds and moved the ADP-370s to the rear wall, although I needed to split them farther apart than the dipoles I had been using in order to get optimal performance.

Listening to 6.1 soundtracks, like *The Haunting*, I found a good balance after tinkering a bit with the position of the side speakers. With the same setup, and using the side speakers as the rear channels in DVD-A, performance was noticeably better. I can only imagine how much better a 7.1 system this would be with a pair of Paradigm Monitor 3s added as side surrounds.

Admittedly, I kind of mourned the fact that I had to break down and install a second set of rear speakers when I started reviewing 6.1 and 7.1 systems, thinking that 5.1 should be enough for most people. I no longer feel that way. I'm now convinced that it makes a great deal of sense to set up an audiophile room with four surrounds, mixing direct radiating

and dipole/bipole, using the strengths of each kind of speaker for its best purpose. Trying to force either type of speaker to serve both masters at once is like making a margarita in a food processor.

As such, I readily endorse Paradigm's speakers. But do yourself a favor and pony up for the extra two speakers. With a pair of Monitor 3s added to the mix, I'd be willing to bet that you'd have nothing short of an amazing system, one that sounds far better than systems costing twice as much.

"... these are amazing speakers. You can't go wrong buying them ... Once I pack them up and send them back, I'm certainly going to miss them. You shouldn't."

As is, the Monitor 11s are true audio superstars. If there's a better value in speakers, I haven't heard it. They're smooth as glass, have awesome high-end performance, and rock deep in bass frequencies. The killer subwoofer is smooth, fast, clear and clean, making great use of a whopping 250 watts of power.

Make no mistake, regardless of whatever concerns I have about bipoles, these are amazing speakers. You can't go wrong buying them, although, again, buy seven plus a sub, and you'll be thankful.

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PW-2200



ADP-370