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MONITOR 11 CC-370 ADP-370 PW-2200

Paradigm

EXCEPTIONAL ...

... very crisp ...

terrific natural presence ...

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"I liked Paradigm's System 8. Its complement of 22 drivers will fill any listening room or home theater with loads of excellent sound." Monitor 11

by Ken C. Pohlmann

ife is short. Why shouldn't you treat yourself to a porterhouse and a bottle of merlot now and then? And why not enjoy decent speakers, too? In a world of surround sound speaker systems priced around \$1,000, it's easy to forget that there's a parallel universe populated by people who spend a little more money and get a lot better sound. When the Paradigm System 8 arrived on my doorstep, its weight alone (249 pounds total) told me that I was about to smash the \$1k barrier and enter that other world.

The System 8 comprises a pair of Monitor 11 tower-style speakers for the front left/right channels, a CC-370 for the center, a pair of ADP-370 surrounds, and a PW-2200 subwoofer. The speakers are relatively plain looking, with standard-issue black cloth grilles and woodgrain-vinyl-clad particleboard cabinets. Don't get me wrong—they're not ugly by any stretch, just plain. And that can be a *good* thing, assuming that the expense saved by foregoing doodads



like titanium speaker spikes and lustrous real-wood veneers was put into something that might affect performance. I'm not the kind of guy who wants to drink a \$70 merlot if the bottle it comes in costs \$50 to make.

"... bass response was – tight and punchy, with enough low-end extension for most classical music ..."

The slim Monitor 11 is not only a threeway design but has—count 'em!—three woofers. The center speaker's trapezoidal cabinet helps to aim it at the listening position from atop a TV. The ADP-370 surround is a dipole radiator—the grille cloth on its "front" is a dummy. Two of the top edges of the PW-2200 subwoofer are attractively beveled. Its front-firing 12-inch plastic cone is vented on the rear by what is perhaps the largest-diameter port I have ever seen (5 inches across).

Installation posed no technical challenges, just muscular ones. I first dropped the cabinets into approximately correct positions, placing the center speaker on top of my TV and the surrounds on



speaker stands; when I was done, all the tweeters were at or near my seated ear level. Then I wired everything up, connecting my receiver's amplifier outputs to the five main speakers and its line-level LFE (low-frequency-effects) output to the sub. I set the receiver's bass management for a "large" front L/R pair and "small" speakers elsewhere.

Wiring completed, I powered up and started tweaking. The first thing I noticed was that the Monitor 11 casts a pretty fierce flux field (it's not magnetically shielded, though shielding is available as an option). To avoid visual distortion on my direct-view TV, I had to move each tower about 6 feet away from the screen. The resulting 15-foot spread was a little wide for my room's layout, but acceptable.

"The Paradigm system did a superb job reproducing the music ... timbre-matched speakers all around, so no matter where instruments are placed in the mix, they sound connected acoustically to instruments in other channels."

I spent some quality time adjusting the subwoofer's position, level, phase, and cut-off frequency. By now I have a pretty good idea of the optimal sub location in my listening room (along the front wall, between the screen and left front speaker), but I moved the Paradigm sub a wee bit to improve the bass at the listening position. In the end, a cutoff frequency of about 70 Hz gave me the best possible blend between the sub and the main speakers. That's lower than usual for my room, but understandable considering that the Monitor 11 is a fairly large tower speaker that can play pretty low.

I started my critical listening with just the Monitor 11's and the Georg Solti/Chicago Symphony Orchestra recording of the Beethoven Ninth Symphony (London). I know this great recording well—it was made at the University of Illinois campus in May 1972 when I was a student there, and I snuck in for the sessions. If I heard anything bad, I would mercilessly nail the speakers, but the Monitor 11's sounded excellent, highly transparent and with tight, stable imaging. Based on experience, I expected the titanium tweeters to be too bright, but I was delighted by their sound, which was very crisp but not harsh. They provided a terrific natural presence and avoided the "blat" of cheap tweeters. The bass response was also quite good tight and punchy, with enough low-end extension for most classical music (everything except pipe organ).

"Dipole surrounds are fantastic for movies. ... Soundscapes were convincingly conveyed ... appropriately immersive ... realistic ..."

To audition the full ensemble, I turned to the multichannel DVD-Audio version of Buena Vista Social Club (World Circuit/ Nonesuch, reviewed in the April Sound & Vision). This lively recording features some of the greatest Cuban musicians ever, playing tunes that get your body moving. More important, the disc is a textbook example of how to make a surround mix work. The Paradigm system did a superb job reproducing the music because it follows the cardinal rule of multichannel playback: timbre-matched speakers all around, so no matter where instruments are placed in the mix, they sound connected acoustically to instruments in the other channels. Without that, you're a dead duck.

I was especially happy with the interplay between the Monitor 11's low end and the PW-2200's upper end. Many of these songs have harmonically complex stringbass lines reinforced by percussion, and a lame "one-note" woofer would have murdered them. The PW-2200 proved to be musical, handling the low end with clarity and cleanly handing off the upper frequencies to the Monitor 11's. Sometimes you can get away with tiny satellites and a big subwoofer, but this Paradigm ensemble makes a good argument that it's better

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to have decent bass response in your main speakers, too, or at least the front left/right pair.

"... certainly up to any evening at the movies, with its dipole surrounds particularly adept at enveloping you in the action, and it won't disappoint you for more critical music listening."

I was a bit less enthusiastic about the ADP-370 surrounds. They are fantastic speakers, but they're dipoles-terrific for creating ambience, not as good at surround imaging. That's no problem with movies, and sometimes not even with multichannel music (particularly classical music), but some of the Buena Vista tunes would have benefited from more precise surround imaging. For example, in some songs the backup vocals are placed in all four "corners" of the soundstage. They sounded fine, but the imaging in the front and back was completely different, which I doubt is what the mixing engineer intended. I'd have preferred direct-firing surrounds in this case. Of course, Paradigm offers a variety of non-dipole speakers to choose from. For example, a pair of Monitor 5s in back would completely erase my complaint.

To test the system's cinema prowess, I turned to *Lost Souls*, a moody morality play starring Winona Ryder. This installment of devil-baiting isn't nearly as much fun as a romp with the Antichrist could be, but it's still entertaining. Helping things considerably is the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack (the DVD also has a DTS version), which surrounds you in nearly non-stop sonic tension.



CC-370

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In Chapter 3, Ryder and company perform an exorcism on mental patient John Diehl, who clearly needs one. The scene contains a flashback to Ryder's own exorcism. Quite literally, all hell breaks loose, with ungodly shrieks, demonic voices, and thoroughly modern music crashing in from all around. Fire sprinklers let go, and the water is as drenching as the sonic assault.

Chapter 4 changes gears, switching to a courtroom scene, and the soundtrack calms down several notches. Dialogue is placed solely in the center channel, smothered by reverberation that is also delayed and directed to the surrounds. Meanwhile, the front L/R channels carry a clutter of ambient room sounds like papers shuffling and people coughing. Both of these soundscapes were convincingly conveyed by the Paradigm speakers. The initial assault was appropriately immersive, even room-shaking when the sub kicked in. The courtroom dialogue, was clearly intelligible despite the reverberation, and the surrounds supplied realistic room ambience.

I've visited some distressing restrooms, but none can compare with Ryder's experience in the john in Chapter 7. Water swirling down a drain is depicted as a maelstrom of watery horror, and sounds swirl all around us as God knows what shoots from the toilets and flows across the tiled floor. Property values plummet as plaster walls crack and the lights go dark, then Diehl reappears and presses a knifepoint toward Ryder's eye. "The PW-2200 had Herculean deep-bass output, with an outstandingly extended, smooth and flat power response, producing 109 dB SPL ±0.5 dB between 32 and 62 Hz."

Dark, horrible sound effects and orchestral climaxes erupt from all channels. The System 8 handled all this quite nicely, even when I tempted intervention from the church across the street by cranking up my volume to nearly full blast. It achieved the goal of every playback system: after a while, I forgot about listening to the speakers and was simply drawn into the action.

"... the Monitor 11's sounded excellent, highly transparent and with tight, stable imaging."

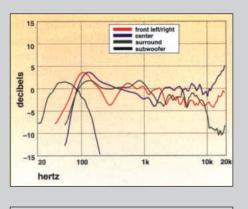


I liked Paradigm's System 8. Its complement of 22 drivers will fill any listening room or home theater with loads of excellent sound. It's certainly up to any evening at the movies, with its dipole surrounds particularly adept at enveloping you in the action, and it won't disappoint you for more critical music listening. The Monitor 11 is a serious speaker in its own right, used alone as a stereo pair. This is not the cheapest speaker system in the world, but it does deliver exceptional sonic value. You might wonder if you should spend this much for speakers. The answer is easy: if you like them and can afford it, sure! Life is too short for bad speakers.

"Life is too short for bad speakers."



ADP-370



IN THE LAB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 2 meters) front left/right 61 Hz to 20 kHz ±4.0 dB center74 Hz to 20 kHz ±4.8 dB surround74 Hz to 10 kHz ± 3.6 dB subwoofer 28 Hz to 117 Hz ±2.4 dB

Measurements are weighted to reflect how sound arrives at a listener's ears with normal speaker placement. The Monitor 11 had a downward-tilted overall spectral balance, with a 3 dB elevation at 100 Hz followed by the 300-Hz floor-bounce notch common to tower-style speakers and culminating with a noticeable tweeter peak just below 20 kHz. Off-axis response was remarkably uniform, and it had unusually good low-frequency output.

The CC-370's curve has the same basic shape as the Monitor 11's. It had excellent response directly on-axis, but by 22.5° off-axis a large notch developed between

1 and 2 kHz. Low-frequency output was quite good. The ADP-370 also had very good low-frequency output, especially for a surround speaker. The speaker comes in mirror-image left/right pairs with different crossover settings for their respective forward- and rearward-radiating sides. In my measurements, either speaker had 3 dB greater high-frequency output on its forward-radiating side than in rearward direction (±3 dB between 2 and 10 kHz and approximately 6 dB more above 10 kHz).

Bass limits for the PW-2200 subwoofer were measured with it in the optimal corner of a 7,500-cubic foot room. In a smaller room, users can expect 2 to 3 Hz deeper extension and up to 3 dB higher sound-pressure level (SPL). The PW-2200 had Herculean deep-bass output, with an outstandingly extended, smooth and flat power response, producing 109 dB SPL ± 0.5 dB between 32 and 62 Hz.

- Tom Nousaine