

“This speaker system has few rivals

...**VERY IMPRESSIVE.**”

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by Dominique Poupart

Many developments have taken place at Paradigm lately. We have seen the revision of most of their existing speakers, mainly those of the popular se Series. We are now witnessing the birth of an entirely new family, the Studio Series which, in fact, marks the genesis of a new, separate division under the name of Paradigm® Reference. The Studio/60 is one of its new models.

The Reference division features speakers for all requirements. Naturally, it includes the Studio Series, but also two bipolar models, as well as speakers for Home Theater. The Studio range consists of four models, from the smaller 2-way Studio/20 to the 3-way, 4-driver Studio/100. In between these two models are the Studio/60 and the Studio/80 – stand-alone, 2-1/2-way speakers (details explained further on). It should be noted that Paradigm is one of the few speaker manufacturers to use only their own components; cabinets, drivers and cross-overs are all designed and manufactured in-house before final assembly. A major

The New Studio/60
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

part of the budget is therefore allotted to research. Without a doubt, Paradigm takes a very serious approach to their design and manufacturing processes.

APPEARANCE

The Studio/60 is an elegant little tower with a depth considerably greater than its width. Entirely black, it stands on four gold-plated feet which conceal the isolation spikes and features a black-ash laminate finish. (Other attractive finishes are also available; a cherry or rosenut wood finish will increase the price somewhat, but it should be noted that the quality of the veneering is excellent.) A major portion of the front surface of the speaker is covered by the grill, which is rounded at the base and affixed with the new Reference logo. This oval-shaped logo



features a stylized “P” over the inscription “Reference” and is done in gilded lettering over a black background. Some more color, however, is hidden behind the grill where the yellow cone of the bass/midrange driver immediately catches the eye. (It brings to mind B&W speakers with their well-known Kevlar® cones.) The majority of the speaker’s front baffle is covered with a solid gray laminate. The drive units are slightly protruded, with their chassis resembling the center of an anti-diffraction frame. These chassis have the same thickness as that of the grill (not less than 10 mm/1/2 inch for the bass/midrange driver), allowing the drivers to be used to their full potential when the grill is in place. The tweeter face is equipped with six small arms, linked at the center and forming an acoustic lens (phase plug). This lens enhances the dispersion characteristics of the tweeter and also protects against the danger of accidentally inserting anything into the dome. A large, flared port with a diameter of 78 mm/3-1/4 inches is located beneath the bottom woofer. The high-quality, “5-way” input terminals are on the rear of the speaker, close to the bottom and allow the speaker to be bi-wired or bi-amped. The speakers weigh 21 kg (46.3 lb) each with the assembly and finish leaving no doubt as to their build quality.

DESIGN

The Studio/60 uses three drivers, but it is neither a 2-way nor a true 3-way speaker. Both woofers are linked parallel to the same source, but the bottom one rolls off electro-acoustically at 400 Hz. The speaker has two sections which are connected to the port. Bass drivers are therefore controlled by part of the enclosure in a “bass reflex” configuration, with only the upper bass/midrange driver providing midrange output. Thus, both drivers operate from 400 Hz down. As for the upper bass/midrange driver, it covers a large part of the spectrum, as it begins at about 50 Hz and stops at the crossover cut-off frequency of 1.5 kHz. This concept is called a 2-1/2-way. The third-order crossover uses quality components: high-power ceramic resistors, film-type

capacitors and air and steel-core inductors. It should be noted that 3/4” high-density panels are used for all walls and braces, and all internal walls are covered with ultra-fine, high-loft polyfibre – a sound absorbing material.

“Bass reproduction was rich and its presence was remarkable. The overall reproduction of sound was particularly clear ...”

The chassis and dome of the tweeter is made of aluminum and uses ferro fluid to dampen and cool the driver. The bass/midrange driver, any resemblance mentioned before notwithstanding, is totally different from its English counterpart. The cone is made of a mica-loaded polymer and the inverted half-roll suspension is made of synthetic butyl. The chassis itself is equipped with a unique cooling fin system. The bass-only driver is identical to its neighbor except for the cone and dust-cap, which is made of mineral-filled polypropylene and slightly more tapered. These two woofers have a non-standard diameter of 150 mm/6 inches. According to the manufacturer, the Studio/60 speakers have a rated nominal impedance of 6 ohms, minimum of 4 ohms. The sensitivity is rated at 87 dB/1 W/1 m and maximum input power is 150 watts. The frequency response ranges from 42 Hz to 22 kHz, +/-2 dB.

LISTENING

From the very first listen, the Studio/60 impressed us with its imaging which was large and very deep and also well served by its transparency. Listening to Mozart’s Piano Concertos No. 17 and No. 24, we were stunned by the sonic ambience provided by this speaker. When listening to vocal jazz, the Studio/60 brought us right into the action – these speakers do not leave much space between the listener and the musicians. The sonic image began directly in front of the speakers and continued on far behind them. Cassandra

Wilson’s voice appeared right in front of us, very close up with all its texture and emotion.

Bass reproduction was rich and its presence was remarkable. The overall reproduction of sound was particularly clear which, under some circumstances, could sometimes become less pleasing, e.g., when listening to a soprano voice, the high notes could sometimes seem slightly acute. This did not occur excessively, just at times. There was nothing to criticize about the midrange, which was very detailed, neutral and transparent. On Diana Krall’s recording *All For You*, the piano, as well as the sound of the individual keys was reproduced with good realism. The lower midrange scale was rich and full which provided some warmth overall. The timbre of acoustic guitars was excellent – every chord was heard with precision throughout the lower frequencies and brilliant higher range.

“... very detailed, neutral and transparent. ... timbre of acoustic guitars was excellent ... This speaker system really made recordings come alive.”

Dynamics were not lacking in the Studio/60 either. This speaker system really made recordings come alive. In the title piece of Ani DiFranco’s *Dilate*, the guitar’s fortissimo had a quivering quality, as major dynamic spans were fully rendered. Bass produced by this Paradigm model was most interesting. Lower frequencies were reproduced with incredible stability and great precision. They were also very solid and fast. At times they could show some slight hardness, but what punch! And at high volume, the bass speaks directly to the heart while the speakers still remained civilized – very impressive. To obtain this exceptional robustness at low frequencies in an even larger room, it might be wise to consider one of the larger models in the series, such as the Studio/80.

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High frequencies were not overly soft and were remarkable for their staccatos and precision. Like everything else with this speaker system, cymbals were very clear, almost luminous, a characteristic which gives these instruments their true metallic timbre. Fine texture was well reproduced throughout the spectrum allowing us to hear every detail. Another interesting aspect of these speakers was their ability to perform well even at very low volumes. Imaging and low-frequency balance did not change, whether playing them at the level of a whisper or at that of a teenage party.

“... cymbals were very clear, almost luminous ... Fine texture was well reproduced throughout the spectrum ... particularly impressive imaging ...”

CONCLUSION

The Paradigm Reference Studio/60 is a speaker system which offers excellent quality at an affordable price. It has a neutral character with very robust bass and particularly impressive imaging for its class. Its overall qualities far outweigh any minor shortcomings, which could be summed up as a slight lack of warmth in the higher frequencies. Sound is vibrant and does not suffer from any major colorations. This speaker system has few rivals; it performs in the league of speakers costing twice as much. The Studio/60 is a system that will definitely please many listeners.