"I was impressed … a distinct pleasure … HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!"

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"… well-designed … engineered for easy installation … will surprise you with the quality of sound reproduction …"

by Ross Jones

I've always enjoyed listening to music outdoors, whether working in the garden, grilling on the BBQ, or just having a beer with friends. However, the logistics of getting the music into the backyard was a hassle: dragging a pair of bookshelf speakers on extra-long cable runs through the screen door, then finding a place to set them where they are out of the way but can still be heard.

The better solution, though one which many of us never seem to bother with (this reviewer included), is to install a set of high-quality outdoor speakers. So, when I was offered the chance to set up and review Paradigm's Stylus 370 speakers, I jumped at the chance.

THE DESIGN

The Stylus Series speakers, intended for outdoor use, are sealed-box designs made of mineral-filled reinforced enclosures and shaped more like wedges than traditional rectangular speakers.

The drivers consist of a 1″ (25 mm) titanium dome tweeter covered by what Paradigm calls "controlled WaveGuide faceplates," said to deliver extended high frequency response, and a 6-1/2″ (165 mm) mineral-filled polypropylene midrange/woofer cone with an oversized magnet structure. The speakers contain gold-plated binding posts recessed on the back panel, stainless steel and brass hardware, and aluminum grilles and brackets. The 370's can be mounted either horizontally or vertically using the supplied adjustable U-bracket, which allows for 155° of adjustment.

Paradigm advertises the 370's as "weather/water/UV-resistant" so I followed the instructions on their website to "feel free to install them outside and leave them there." I have a feeling the custom install companies are going to love these speakers, because they look indestructible.

SET-UP

Installing a set of outdoor speakers was actually quite simple, much to my surprise, since I am not a do-it-yourself kind of guy around the house. The three basic elements are connecting to a receiver/amplifier that is capable of supporting a second set of speakers (designated as "B" or Zone 2), running the speaker wire from the receiver up to the installation location (such as under a roof soffit), and finally mounting the speakers. Unless you happen to have a well-stocked workshop, a quick trip to the local

hardware store for outdoor speaker cable and mounting hardware will be necessary.

The first step required nothing more than attaching speaker cable to the Zone 2 outputs of my Integra DTR 7.6 receiver. The Integra is designed for an independent second zone operation, and has a set of speaker binding posts dedicated for that purpose. The second part of the operation, running the speaker cable to the location, involved following the path already trodden by my friendly satellite installer. I used 16-gauge direct-burial speaker cable specifically designed for outdoors/in-ground installation, since I live in a part of northern California that gets plenty of rain. The speaker wires followed the same track as the satellite cabling through a small hole in the siding (making sure to re-seal the opening), then up the siding and under the soffit, using small mounting clamps that I hammered into the siding to anchor the speaker wires.

The final step involves attaching the supplied U-bracket mounting plate to the surface of your location. Paradigm does not supply the actual mounting hardware, since it doesn't know whether your installation will be into wood siding, stucco, drywall, etc. Because I was installing the mounting clamp directly into wood siding, nothing more than outdoor wood screws were required. The U-clamp allows the speaker to be adjusted along its axis, so you can choose to mount the speakers either horizontally or vertically. Once the U-clamp is secured to the location, connect the speaker wires to the multi-way binding posts, then unscrew the large caps on both ends of the clamp, slide the speaker into place, and replace the caps. Loosening the caps slightly allows for the speakers to adjust side-to-side, or in my case, up and down, to ensure that the speakers were pointed down at my patio.

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The entire operation took about half a day, and most of that time was spent making sure that the outdoor cable runs were hidden as much as possible. Installing the U-clamps and speakers was actually the shortest part of the process. Now it was time to crack open a beer and conduct some proper listening tests.

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THE SOUND

The Paradigms are specifically designed for outdoor use, which means that they create a very wide soundstage. Because of the physical characteristics of my back patio, I ended up installing the Paradigms farther apart than the 1/2 – 3/4 of listening space-width recommended by the manufacturer. Nonetheless, I could sit (or stand) just about anywhere on the patio and still hear sound coming from each speaker. I had to almost stand directly underneath one of the speakers before the stereo image disappeared.

I was pleasantly surprised by the detail reproduced by the Paradigms. Before Phil Collins started doing soundtracks to Disney films, he was the virtuosic drummer for the progressive band Genesis. Listening to the opening cut from their mid-career album *A Trick of The Tail*, called "Dance on a Volcano", I could follow Collins' tom-tom rolls as they panned across the soundstage. Similarly impressive was the Paradigms' ability to project beyond the patio (luckily I don't have to worry about the neighbors in back), as the sound quality held up even as I standing a good 50 feet beyond the patio.

Regular readers of this magazine will understand that one very important factor in sound reproduction is the listening space. Attempting to recreate high-quality music in an outdoor environment is particularly challenging, due to a lack of exterior boundaries and control over ambient noise conditions such as wind, helicopter overflights, or neighboring lawnmowers. Thus, I was not focused on attempting to make fine distinctions in textures or timbre during my listening period. Nonetheless, I was impressed by the lack of any excessive boominess or harshness in the Paradigms, two things I might have expected to hear in outdoor speakers. To the contrary, it was a distinct pleasure to find myself taking in the small details of recordings while standing over a Weber grill, watching the kids throw a ball around the yard, and not worry about tripping over speaker wires running from the back door.

CONCLUSION

To those readers who, like me, had not gotten around to creating an outdoor listening environment, Paradigm has taken away your excuses. The 370's are well-designed and engineered for easy installation, and will surprise you with the quality of sound reproduction capable in outdoor speaker enclosures. Highly recommended!

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