"… exceptional value for the money … RICH SONIC DETAILS for not-so-rich enthusiasts!"

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"… passionate … dynamic … open and clear … extraordinary levels of sonic detail … quick transient response … deep soundstages — notably three-dimensional … very tightly defined and deeply extended … pinpoint definition."

by Gary Altunian

For more than 25 years the Canadian firm Paradigm has leveraged its extensive research and product testing capabilities to build high-quality speaker systems that deliver exceptional value for money. Many of Paradigm's speakers sell in mid- and upper-price brackets, but the company's new Mini Monitor speaker system represents an effort to reach music and movie-enthusiasts who want good sound at a budget price. And the little Mini Monitor system really delivers the goods, so that when paired with a good receiver, it offers an affordable and attractive alternative to prepackaged-home-theater-in-a-box systems.

SOUND-IN-THE-ROUND

Sound-in-the-Round identified several specific qualities that made the system enjoyable and satisfying to hear.

First, the front Mini Monitor speakers reproduce extraordinary levels of sonic detail. On the guitar heard in Oregon's "Rewind" (*Beyond Words*, Chesky Records), for example, the monitors proved so revealing that I initially perceived the subtle sound of fingers on the guitar strings to be a recording anomaly (or perhaps even a defect in the speakers). But after listening to the same passage several times, it became evident that the Paradigm monitors were simply resolving greater detail than most speakers their size and price do, and without any edginess or sizzle in the upper ranges. The wealth of small details I hear also gave an indication of the speaker's quick transient response. The natural timbre of the acoustic guitar with all of its rich, resonant characteristics made the recording sound live.

Mini Monitor

Another distinguishing feature of the system was its ability to produce good, deep soundstages, as on "Quiet Nights" from the David Hazeltine Trio's *The Jobim Songbook in New York* [Chesky records, SACD], where the width of the stage extended behind the horizontal boundaries of the speakers. In fact, the Mini Monitors produced a notably three-dimensional soundstage that made it easy to visualize the recording venue (St. Peter's Episcopal Church in NYC).

"If the bass isn't right, nothing sounds good" is one of my audio axioms, and the Paradigm subwoofer did not disappoint. It produced very tightly defined and deeply extended bass on "La Llave" from the eponymous album by Xiomara [Chesky Records]. On the same disc, the signer's passionate, dynamic voice sounded open and clear on "PorTi", with every rolling "R" reproduced with pinpoint definition.

CC-290

ADP-190

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Finally, the system sounded well balanced with multichannel music sources. I listened carefully to Andrew Cook's cello (one of my favorite instruments) in the Bach's *Suite No.1* [DVDE-Audio Sample, AIX Records}, and noted how its deep, resonant timbre enveloped the room on this lovely multichannel DVD-Audio recording.

"The wealth of small details — gave an indication of the speaker's quick transient response … natural timbre … rich, resonant characteristics … made the recording sound live."

SOUND-ROUND

On movies, I was struck by the Mini Monitor system's dialog clarity and smooth surround sound imaging. In *Blood Diamond*, for example, characters speak with various English accents that can be difficult to understand, but through the CC-290 centre channel speaker those conversations became easy to follow. Similarly, sound effects panned from left-to-right across the screen sounded smooth and seamless thanks to excellent tonal matching between the three front speakers. In movies where surround channel information was extremely subtle, the ADP-190 surrounds sounded so self-effacing that I almost wondered if they were in play. But where surround effects were more pronounced, as on Roy Orbinson's "Only the Lonely" form the *Black and White Nights* concert DVD, the contribution of ADP-190's became apparent. Although I personally prefer direct rather than bipolar surround speakers for multichannel music, I felt the ADP-190's created a full, enveloping and diffuse surround sound field, as intended.

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BOTTOM LINE

I have reviewed many Paradigm in-wall and in-room speakers in the past, and also own a pair of Paradigm Reference Studio 100 towers, which serve as my reference. What impressed me was the fact that the affordable Mini Monitor system managed to embody so many of the signature characteristics of its more expensive siblings. The Mini Monitor package reviewed here would make a fine platform upon which to base a cost-effective surround sound system. *PB*

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Factoid

Paradigm uses its 36,000 cubic foot anechoic chamber to test new designs and products.

Insider Tip

Place the main and center channel speakers at ear height when seated for the best balance of sound.

Thumbs Up

- Excellent detail and soundstaging from the Monitors.
- Subwoofer offers tight, well-defined bass with good extension.

Thumbs Down

- Large centre channel speaker may provide difficult to place.