

“ ... BREAKS NEW GROUND

... very neutral ... highly resolved ...

enormous presence ...”

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“ ... very accomplished and successful ... comparable to systems costing several thousand dollars more ... enormous value ... I give high recommendations.”

by Manoj Motwani, M.D.

Paradigm speakers have a huge following, and I mean a HUGE following. It's not hard to see why, as they deliver an extremely high bang for the buck value quotient. They have an excellent dealer network, a very loyal customer base and very good customer service. But, most importantly, their product provides good performance and excellent value.

When Paradigm decided to flesh out its offerings by bringing out a new high end line, that was good news for the audiophile, and perhaps not so good news for other speaker manufacturers. The Signature line has been in gestation for some time, and now it's finally here, and in some ways marks a significant departure for Paradigm.

I elected to test the S8 tower speaker for the fronts; the C5, the larger of the two center channels; the S4, the larger of the two monitor speakers; and the Signature Servo subwoofer.

UNIQUE FEATURES

The first thing I must comment on is the finish on these speakers – it is phenomenal. The veneers are gorgeous, the lacquer application is top-notch, and the overall fit and finish has many mega-expensive speakers beat hands down. In fact, I was a little surprised to find out the S8's retail price. The driver array consists of a one-inch tweeter, a seven-inch midrange, and four 7-inch woofers.

The speakers are very, very well built, and everything on them feels substantial, including the grilles. With the pale yellow midrange driver and the bullet-shaped center cap, they have borrowed a page from B&W design, one that I especially like. With the sheer number

S8



of drivers facing you with the center channel and the S8s, it is much more interesting to leave the grilles off the speakers. It's not a subtle look, but it does suggest that you will be blown out of your chair when the system is turned on.

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The C5 center channel has a slightly different driver array than the S8, using a four-inch midrange driver and two 7-inch midbass drivers. Interesting. I was a bit curious as to why the same midrange drivers as in the main speakers were not used. The S4s are available with excellent stands and continue to use the same four-inch midrange driver as the center channel and an eight-inch woofer. Paradigm is one of the few speaker companies that manufacture all their own speaker drivers, so they obviously can design whatever drivers they feel will work best for a particular application.

The Servo subwoofer continues the tapered cabinet look, with a large 15-inch driver in the face of the unit. Few subwoofers look this good. The unit has a 1200-watt amplifier, but more importantly is a sealed enclosure unit for better bass accuracy. It is interesting to note that both Krell and Paradigm have chosen this route for their new subwoofers.

INSTALLATION/SETUP/EASE OF USE

The Signature speakers were tried with a few different pieces of equipment, including the new Anthem Statement D1

preamp/processor and P5 amplifier. They were set up in my office theatre, which consisted of the Simaudio Aurora amp, the Parasound C2 processor and a Simaudio Orbiter universal player. Cables used were AudioQuest Gibraltar and Python interconnects. The biwireable speakers have excellent binding posts. They were easy to set up, except for their heaviness. The best configuration for the S8s was slightly toed in toward the listener, and for the S4s to be placed behind the listener as rears.

"... very neutral and highly resolved sound ... clear, open top end ... excellent alive midrange ... top-notch bass response ..."

FINAL TAKE

After a sufficient period of break-in time, I started by listening to the S8s in two-channel mode alone using plain old CDs and some two-channel SACDs. Although I am quite familiar with the Paradigm sonic signature, the Signature series breaks new ground with a very neutral and highly resolved sound. Although Paradigm speakers have an enormous value quotient, they do have a tendency to have a somewhat forward midrange. While this makes for an exciting sonic signature, I personally prefer a more neutral speaker. The Signature speakers are much more suited to my tastes, as they have a fairly neutral midrange that is only slightly tilted forward, and a clear, open top end that was only slightly harsh when I used a regular CD with an inexpensive DVD player. When used with the better Simaudio player, that harshness disappeared, and the speakers were smoother, with an excellent, alive midrange, an open top end, and top-notch bass response.

Obviously, these speakers are sophisticated enough to let you know the quality of the upstream electronics. The bass response of the S8 is especially noteworthy, as it is tight, strong and fairly quick. It adds significant presence and depth to music, and makes you wonder if you really need a subwoofer for movies. The S8 creates a very good, open soundstage, and brings that feeling



C5

that you are in a live performance, as many excellent speakers are wont to do. This is a very important quality, as these speakers are exciting to listen to. They brought me great pleasure whether I was watching movies or listening to music, and that is an intangible that simply cannot be measured.

"... very good, open soundstage ... brings that feeling that you are in a live performance ... exciting to listen to ... bass response of the S8 is especially noteworthy ... tight, strong ... accurate and fast ... adds significant presence and depth to music..."

Moving on to movies, I discovered that the C5 center channel is an excellent anchor for the system, as it is clear and articulates voices well. I had some question if the center would be voiced differently due to its drivers; however, it seemed to integrate well. Although on its own, it did sound a bit different than the S8s and the S4s. That is something I have noticed about other center channel speakers and when played with the entire system is not noticeable.

"... the C5 center channel is an excellent anchor for the system ... clear and articulates voices well."

The S4 speaker is a very nice monitor indeed, and deserves to be considered as a choice on its own for smaller rooms or two channel applications. Although it certainly does not have the depth of the S8s, it still manages to acquit itself nicely in its response as a monitor. As a rear speaker, it was almost



S4

overkill for movie applications but came into its own in multi-channel high resolution audio, where high resolution signals allowed the speaker to strut its stuff.

The Servo subwoofer adds a significant amount of depth and bass to this system. As I mentioned, the S8 does a very good job of bass reproduction and adding the sub is hedonistic excess. It can easily shake the floor, and although not quite as tight and as accurate as some acoustic suspension subs that I have heard, it had enormous presence and added a considerable amount of weight to the whole system. This is an important point, as the S8 speakers have accurate and fast bass, and the system gains much in the movie reproduction arena with a sub that has weight, more so than if it was also fast and perhaps not as deep and powerful. This is not to say in any way that I did not like the Servo. I think it is an excellent sub. It is to show how much thought Paradigm has put into the integration of the different parts of this system to make a sub greater than the whole.

"... Servo subwoofer adds a significant amount of depth and bass ... can easily shake the floor ... enormous presence ... added a considerable amount of weight to the whole system ... an excellent sub."

This Signature speaker system, like the Anthem Statement D1 processor and P5 amplifier, is a very accomplished and



Signature Servo

successful introduction of higher end systems by Paradigm/Anthem and shows their development and engineering prowess. There is a significant amount of value to this system. Dollar-wise it is not a small amount of money, but the level of performance that you get is very comparable to systems costing several thousand dollars more, enough to get a nice Anthem Statement D1 processor thrown into the deal. Add to this consideration the fact that the aesthetics are top-notch, with wood finishes that are among the best I have seen on speakers, and you have a lot of reasons to love this system. The Paradigm Signature Series is a serious contender for your dollars – I give high recommendations.