

“ ...THEY'RE

MONSTER!”

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“With the brawn of a bouncer and the nimbleness of a ballerina, integration of drivers and adaptability of various musical expressions was excellent ... ”

by Gerald J. Walsh

R-U-NUTS! Although I was actually a tad more polite to our editor when he phoned proposing that I review these 87-pound each monoliths that were to tower menacingly almost halfway to my ceiling, still, I know I generated most of the enthusiasm of the alewife clean-up patrol along the shores of Lake Michigan during a pungent July.

If there's such an animal as Reviewer Acceptance Factor (RAP) the prospect of entertaining these beefeaters from the Great White North didn't exactly "peg my meter."

The arrival of these Paradigm puppies on a rumbling freight truck did little to dissuade my trepidation, although the sunny white and red shipping cartons did more to generate that "it's a wonderful day in the neighborhood" feeling than the typical "brown box" of most.

Those cartons were certainly sturdy and heavy enough, but a lack of more protec-

The New Studio/100

(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

tive packing inside resulted in a minor gouge to the side of one cabinet, when the carton wall evidently received a puncture somewhere in transit. OK for me as a reviewer investing only my time, but not great news if it happened to a new owner.

Given speakers of such significant size and price, it might be an innovative touch for Paradigm to wrap each one in a sheet of acoustical foam, which the audiophile could then straighten out and use as a practical room treatment. If Paradigm doesn't cotton up to the free foam scheme, I'm sure some esoteric speaker company will. ...

Set-up was no snap, but then anyone well-to-do enough to lay down this much for sheer entertainment ought to have some aggravation in his or her life!



Handling and positioning these transducers should be viewed as either a buddy project or a body project. That is, either give a beer and get help or be philosophical about it all, and figure that some of what you spent on the purchase will be saved by skipping athletic club membership if you can take care of these Studio's "solo."

The otherwise quite thorough tri-fold bilingual instruction sheet gives nary a clue what to do with the gold-colored brass discs and spikes provided. After a little sweating and a little more swearing, I decided that the best approach for rigging the disc foot and spike combo was with the bottom of the speaker up, and a pair of pliers handy.

The spikes were threaded into the machined sockets with their sharply pointed ends exposed. Then, if you elect to choose the disc foot option only, you thread the spikes far enough into the cabinet that the brass disc foot will engage to the threaded spike firmly, but without the sharp potentially carpet-tearing point exposed beyond the bottom of the foot.

Striking the balance of threading the spike into the cabinet receptacle in such a way that there's enough spike left to hold the heavy brass foot, but not so much so as to extend past the foot, is something of an art which you will appreciate once you give it a whirl yourself.

Before leaving the subject of the owner's manual, I'd like to interject a couple of observations: First, if you get in trouble by mis-wiring the speakers or underpowering same, then hold Paradigm blameless! Probably on the control panels at NASA in Houston there are more warnings, and also at the nerve centers of nuclear power stations, but otherwise yours truly would be hard-pressed to tell you where you'd find more cautions than in the text of this manual.

And now, from the "tis a puzzlement" department, odd that the instructions make reference to receivers and tone controls. This is an advanced "reference" lineup from these folks, and one would imagine the great majority of users will

thus partner with separates, and, separates usually don't have tone controls!

"Side-to-side soundstaging was first rate, wide but with no centerfill 'holes.' ... outrageous image depth, halfway back into the next county."

Then there's the print size used in their manual. Granted, I applaud thrift, as Editor Gene will attest, but the effort to maximize information resulted in micro print for these instructions, and since many of us investing at this level will be "old geezers" in our thirties and forties, doesn't Paradigm realize our eyes might not be up to the task anymore?

If you decide on these speakers and want to consult the owner 5 sheet, either buy a magnifier or start wolfing down carrots!

The Paradigm Reference Studio/100s are the crowning jewel of this series, itself the king of Paradigm's "speaker hill." They are available in your choice of three shades of laminate; a premium doesn't change the sound a whit but gives you the dubious pleasure of plundering forests and making furniture polish companies happy. It's known as real wood veneer. The flavors are light cherry, black ash and rosenut, with my review product supplied as the latter.

In average to bright room light, this rosenut is almost cherry red, which at first grated on me a bit, but the graining was handsome (although not perfectly matched from speaker to speaker) and a little time and room dust seemed to tame down the hue anyway.

A rather average black-cloth grille extends four-fifths of the way down, with a small oval name badge at its rounded bottom. The cabinet is plain in exterior appearance save for the nice finish on all sides and a slight lip around the edges of the cabinet, front and back, presumably to slightly enhance cabinet strength.

The quite stark Amish- or Shaker-like minimalism of external appearance extends to the finished speaker back, with no features other than a simple recessed plastic plate housing two pair of gold-plated binding posts (for bi-amp or bi-wire) of workmanlike quality. Immediately under the posts is the tag with serial number.

"Rapping on the sides of these SOLID cabinets only wasted my time; they were as 'dead' as the literature would have you believe."

Outside each shipping carton appears a label indicating not only the serial number of the speaker it contains but also a specified serial number of the intended mate, which points to above average care in quality control and acoustic pair plotting and matching. Paradigm designs and manufacturers all drivers in-house.

The Studio/100 boasts four drivers, these being a pair of 8-inch polypropylene woofers, plumbing the depths to 25 Hz (DIN), a 6-1/2-inch mica-polymer cone midrange unit, and a 1-inch pure aluminum dome tweeter, with typical extension on-axis to 22 kHz, ± 2 dB.

The flared acoustic port is located below the center-aligned drivers. The speakers are not mirror-imaged.

The 87-pound heft cited early on in my review suggests robust cabinet construction, including thick MDF walls and full-perimeter horizontal and vertical bracing, for a comprehensive physical integrity Paradigm calls "Cascade Enclosures."

Rapping on the sides of these SOLID cabinets only wasted my time; they were as "dead" as the literature would have you believe.

Rated power handling is a span almost as wide as the Golden Gate Bridge, 15-350 watts.

The Studios were received brand-new from factory stock. As such, many reviewers prefer a “break-in” technique of “ears off,” using white noise or the repeated play of a CD to do the job.

However, if time allows, I think that listening through the “break-in” period can be fascinating, much like a father or mother might proudly watch a gawky adolescent evolve through trial, error and the clock on the wall into poised adulthood.

“... the Studio/100s were possessed of the sonic versatility to integrate into the surroundings without overwhelming them.”

After only a few songs, the illusion was that these Paradigms “sped up” amazingly, accelerating and excelling with an engaging well-paced musicality, and the first hint of the authoritative bass reach to blossom later.

My real hesitation beyond hernia in trying these was an unfounded concern that, at 45 x 10-1/4 x 16-1/2 inches, they would simply overpower, overwhelm my room, of approximately 12 x 15 feet with an eight-foot ceiling.

Yet the reality was surprising and delightful, as the Studio/100s were possessed of the sonic versatility to integrate into the surroundings without overwhelming them. If I dreaded a “huff, puff, blow the walls down acoustic tornado” it just didn’t materialize.

With the brawn of a bouncer and the nimbleness of a ballerina, integration of drivers and adaptability of various musical expressions was excellent, with no one portion of frequency calling attention to itself.

Side-to-side soundstaging was first rate, wide but with no centerfill “holes.” Perhaps owing partly to the 15-plus inch depth of the enclosures, these things

seemed to have an outrageous image depth, halfway back into the next county.

But sonic “bells and whistles” will only lead the parade for so long, unless the nature of the sound is as close as possible to natural.

Many stereo scribes have written of the indispensable need to “tune one’s ears” via attending live musical performances, and I won’t argue with that.

Nevertheless, orchestras won’t fit into most living rooms, and a “command performance” by your favorite band would likely be a prohibitively expensive proposition.

Therefore, wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could strip at least one layer away from the artificial artifacts of electronic sound reproduction, to have in our immediate listening environment as a calibration tool an “instrument” of challenge for our stereo systems.

Now, we could strum a guitar or play a piano, but such active participation in creating live music would distract us from concentrating on the comparative process.

My own home-brewed answer is to have one or two good quality mechanical clocks (not quartz ones) in the listening area, at about the same distance from the listening position as the speakers. These clocks should chime on a bell or chime rods, ideally Westminster or other repeatable quarter-hour melodies, so their sound is long and frequent enough to allow comparison.

Further, the audio program source, logically, must contain musical information of a natural, acoustic, non-synthesized type and be adjusted to a competitive volume for the clocks.

The simple theory here is that a mechanical, tuneful chiming clock has no electric or electronic processing, thus being one crucial step closer to the characteristics of a musical instrument, yet at home.

Switch enough clocks with enough speakers and you will soon realize the results can vary markedly.

I dub the phenomenon of a speaker having the ability to emulate more intrinsic sounds of nature “electronic self-transcendence” and in most instances the Paradigms aced this exercise!

I suppose everything has to have some downside, and if I were forced to “pick a nit” with these loudspeakers, it would center on their sound being somewhat more diffused or “ethereal” than any other pair to pass through my listening room.

This impression may be attributable to the supreme soundstage and image they “float,” and I’m not entirely sure it should be labeled a fault, so much as an acquired taste.

Paradigm has been on a fast track since its 1982 co-founding by Jerry Vandermarel and Scott Bagby, in Toronto. Then, speaker boxes were used as office dividers.

Today, the same company boasts a 33,000-cubic-foot in-house anechoic chamber and exports a varied line of loudspeakers to some 35 countries. These speakers under test justify that growth.

I tamed my demons and had some great fun listening in the bargain. However, my R.A.F. having been overcome, for many Wife Acceptance Factor (W.A.F.) still be an issue.

As much and as admirably as these Studio/100s can become “phantoms” with the “opera” or anything else you throw at them, and “disappear” in the all-important aural dimension, they won’t elude the vacuum cleaner, and moreover, your Chihuahua, your ten-year-old kid (maybe even that oak tree in the front yard) might look smaller than ever before.

So, unless you’re on your way to divorce court anyway, I’d suggest taking a gander at the junior models in this series starting

with the bookshelf style Studio/20, particularly if your intended listening room is any smaller than mine.

That said, I'll hate to see this duo "pack their bags" for the trip back to Canada. These King Kongs can sure sing songs, and in the best sense of the word, they're "MONSTER!"

"These King Kongs can sure sing songs, and in the best sense of the word, they're 'MONSTER!' "

MUSIC USED: CITING THE CDs

- Charles Fambrough, *Keeper of the Spirit*, AudioQuest Music AQ 1033
- Emmylou Harris, *Duets*, Reprise 9 25791-2
- Kristy Hendley, *Kristy Hendley*, Ransom CD60000
- Jean Hewson, *Early Spring*, Pigeon Inlet PIPCD 7328
- Kathy Mattea, *A Collection of Hits*, Mercury 842 330 2