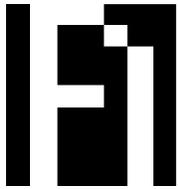


“A BEST BUY”

Reprinted with permission from



“... an acoustically crisp, credibly realistic, and untiringly musical performance.”

by Andrew Keen

I've just returned from an audio tour of Hong Kong and Taiwan where the high-end industry is in the doldrums. Everything's too damn expensive is the word out of the Orient. And the same is pretty much true in the United States where the inflated prices of much high-end audio are driving mainstream music lovers into spending their disposable income on other luxury items. Youngsters simply don't have the cash for expensive separates; whilst pragmatic music lovers see their money more sensibly invested in live concert tickets or compact discs.

With this funk in mind, should the Paradigm Studio/20 bookshelf speakers be considered prohibitively expensive? For some Fi readers, of course, these kind of bucks are spare change to be blown on speaker stands or interconnects. But for many people – real world people with jobs and families and non hi fi hobbies – \$650 is a lot of money to invest in diminutive boxes without any striking aesthetic appeal.

So what does one get for the money? A two-driver, two-way conventional box

The New Studio/20
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

design, the Studio/20's are the entry level product in Paradigm's Reference Speaker System range which also includes the three floor-standing Studio/60's, Studio/ 80's and Studio/100's. Distinguished by both high-frequency and bass/midrange drive units designed and manufactured in Canada by Paradigm themselves, the Reference Speaker Systems all use "Cascade" enclosures and phase-coherent crossovers in order to provide neutral sound. There's certainly a lot of high technology packed into these miniatures – especially since they contain the same fruits of Paradigm's extensive research and development as the big brother Reference models.

Paradigm's goal for their Reference Speaker System series was the construction of loudspeakers with vanishing levels of coloration, high timbral accuracy, accurate and spacious imaging, substantial bass articulation, exceptional pace and, last but not least, high resolution of dynamic contrasts. With the partial



exception of bass articulation, the Studio/20's were impressive in all these areas. Take timbral accuracy for example. On Rykodisc's brilliant new recording of traditional Flamenco music, *Flamenco de Triano de Almaden, Escudero & Ramos* (Tradition TCD 1041), the Paradigm speakers did an excellent job communicating the throaty muscularity of Mario Escudero's and Carlos Ramos' guitar playing. The mournful timbre of Nino de Almaden's singing was hauntingly portrayed, too. Nor did the Studio/20's miss the Iberian clack of Anita Ramos' glorious castanets. The whole musical landscape had a realism (i.e.: a lack of coloration) to it which I found most impressive.

"The whole musical landscape had a realism (i.e.: a lack of coloration) ... almost too good to be true to it which I found most impressive."

The Studio/20's were pacey too. On Rykodisc's illuminating new recording, *The Passion of Pakistan* by Iqbal Jogi & Patty (Tradition TCD 1045), the loudspeakers communicated the Sufi ragas with a vitality that did justice to the energy of this explosive musical mix. The loudspeakers presented an impressive resolution of the ragas' inner details, especially the dancing, darting interplay between the Iqbal Jogi's bansuri (the seven fingered double-fluted pipe of a Pakistani snake charmer) and the other musical instruments in the troupe. Unlike so many inexpensive loudspeakers, the Studio/20's never spat out the music in unsavory gobs of acoustic mush. I could always trace the shape of Iqbal Jogi's (literally: "a sorcerer of good fortune") ecstatic dance. Rykodisc's Sufi mysticism made concrete musical sense.

There are all sorts of crude jokes one might make about audiophiles who lust after bass response. For real bass freaks, of course, the Studio/20's aren't going to be satisfactory. Officially the loudspeakers go down to 40 Hz which seemed to be a fairly truthful figure. Obviously, they

really aren't room-shakers and wouldn't be my first choice for any kind of home theater set-up. On Rykodisc's *Lost Africa* by Sonar Senghor and his Troupe (Tradition TCD 1044), for example, the African drums did sound slightly lost.

"The Paradigm speakers did an excellent job communicating the throaty muscularity of Mario Escudero's and Carlos Ramos' guitar playing. The mournful timbre of Nino de Almaden's singing was hauntingly portrayed, too. Nor did the Studio/20's miss the Iberian clack of Anita Ramos' glorious castanets."

To add a shot of bass, Paradigm does make a powered subwoofer, the Servo-15, in their Reference range, but it is expensive to match with the monitors.

"The Studio/20's were pacey too ... the loudspeakers communicated the Sufi ragas with a vitality that did justice to the energy of this explosive musical mix."

Bass response apart, the Studio/20's are a best buy. Whether I hooked up these speakers with budget integrated amplifiers like the Musical Fidelity A220 or with my reference DPA 500S monoblock power amplifier and Audible Illusions Modulus preamplifier, the result was always an acoustically crisp, credibly realistic, and untiringly musical performance. These loudspeakers will introduce many new ears to the world of high quality audio reproduction. It's a real credit to the honest folk at Paradigm that they are selling such sophisticated technology at such an affordable price.

"... an impressive resolution of the ragas' inner details ... unlike so many inexpensive loudspeakers, the Studio/20's never spat out the music in unsavory gobs of acoustic mush."