

Paradigm Monitor 9, Series 7

High in Musical Value

Wayne Garcia

Now in its seventh generation, Paradigm's Monitor Series is one of the benchmarks for good-sounding, affordable speakers that, while perhaps not the last word in any one area, offer tremendous across-the-board performance, musical satisfaction, and value. Which, of course, are the very traits that have made this Canadian firm's designs such a success over the past quarter-plus century.

For instance, put on a full-range, well-recorded rock disc, such as Mobile Fidelity's SACD of Stevie Ray Vaughan's *The Sky Is Crying* (which I reviewed in Issue 220), and marvel at the relatively compact \$1198 Monitor 9s' impactful low-frequency response. It's not that this speaker goes spectacularly low—its spec'd response is a respectable 31Hz—but the choices made by Paradigm's design team, and improvements made over the V.6 model, create a feeling of bass—fast, tuneful, and reasonably weighty—that's nevertheless quite satisfying. While I imagine that home-theater users, or those into bass-heavy music might wish to add

a subwoofer (and Paradigm offers a range of these, too), the walloping drums in, say, "Little Wing," were just that, with good snap from the snare, and a nice recreation of size and power from tom and kick drums. You'll also hear how Paradigm's latest aluminum dome tweeter seems altogether more open, dynamically free, and less bright than past versions (though this takes some time, as the tweeters are initially a bit hard and edgy). Vaughan's Strat peals and shrieks as the late-great lets rip; yet it purrs sweetly, too, during quieter passages. Dynamic range is also impressive. Although the Monitor 9 may not be as fully nuanced as my reference



EQUIPMENT REVIEW - Paradigm Model 9, Series 7

Maggie 1.7s during the quiet opening movement of Schumann's *Märchenbilder* with Martha Argerich at the piano and Nobuko Imai playing viola [Phillips CD], the speaker steps out during the lively second movement. Again, though, the Monitor 9's designers did a fine job of letting this speaker fly pretty high, without overtaxing the relatively small drivers.

I'll outline the many changes Paradigm has made to the 7 Series, but one that deserves mention right away is that, although the company has put much effort into improving the sound and frequency extension of the current Model 9, it has done so while shrinking its profile by about 20%—only a quarter-inch in height but nearly an inch in width and nearly three in depth. On paper this may not seem like so much, but that sleeker frame makes the new Model 9 easier to place and somewhat less visually obtrusive, and I would think also results in more rigid cabinet construction. The major challenge to this smaller enclosure is bass performance. Especially since the low-frequency drivers have also lost some inches, from 6.5" to 5.5" in diameter. But improved technology seems to have bridged the performance gap. (In fact, the -2dB point has improved over the V.6 from 51Hz to 46Hz.)

I can't think of a speaker manufacturer—or perhaps one of any other component type—that doesn't boast of "trickle-down" technology. And indeed, Paradigm makes something of a big deal regarding technological tweaks and tricks it learned from its Reference line.

Starting with the enclosure, Series 7 upgrades include something Paradigm calls "the Roman Plinth," a sleekly-integrated base that increases stability for the new design's smaller footprint, as well as what the company calls its most rigid, low-noise Monitor Series cabinet yet, as well as a thicker (.75") front baffle. Paradigm has spiffed up the 7 Series' appearance, too. In addition to the more svelte profile, the honeycomb-patterned grilles are more acoustically transparent and attach via magnets. And with the grilles removed, no driver-mounting hardware is visible on the front baffles, which makes for a nicely refined presentation.

Derived from the Reference Series, driver upgrades include Paradigm's trademarked S-Pal technology—a satin-anodized

pure aluminum—for the 1" ferro-fluid-cooled dome tweeter, as well as the 5.5" bass/midrange driver. Paradigm says the high stiffness-to-mass ratio combined with internal damping results in lower resonance and distortion, and greater clarity and frequency extension.

The twin 5.5" bass drivers have also been designed for high rigidity; they're made of injection-molded polypropylene, which Paradigm feels also increases driver-to-driver consistency.

Paradigm claims bragging rights, too, at the 7 Series' price-points for its use of polypropylene film or bipolar electrolytic capacitors, air core and laminated core inductors, and the high-power resistors found in the crossover networks.

Needless to say, all of these swell upgrades wouldn't mean much unless they delivered the musical goods. And as I've already written, the Monitor 9 certainly does.

I gather that one fundamental aspect of the 9's sound has changed since my colleague Neil Gader reviewed the V.6 edition a few years back. Neil observed that that speaker presented a dark tonal balance. On a range of music—*Sinatra's Only The Lonely* [MoFi], Jeff Buckley *Live at Sin-é* [Columbia/Legacy], Eric Dolphy's *Out To Lunch* [Music Matters 45rpm reissue], the abovementioned Argerich disc—the Monitor 9 did a fine job with burnished brass, the lower registers of Sinatra's vocal, the darker character of Buckley's guitar, and so on, but in a way that, to my ears, was well balanced by the new version's greater openness and the tweeter's impressive airiness. Yes, it's still a tad dark, but I suspect much less so than the incarnation Neil reviewed. Neil also commented on the earlier model's somewhat vague imaging. In that regard, I'm not sure if much has changed. The speakers I reviewed were okay with their focus, more concert-hall-like than pinpoint. But then a stated goal of this design is broad dispersion throughout a room, which makes sense since these speakers are often sold in multichannel packages.

With large-scale symphonic works such as a Mahler piece from the San Francisco Symphony's cycle [SFS Media], the Monitor 9 creates a nice, if not ultra-layered feeling of the third dimension, with a good sense of air around instruments. I also found top-to-

bottom tonal coherence to be well managed, with just a touch of discontinuity transitioning from mid-to-highs.

Due to Paradigm's combination of engineering chops and musical sensitivity, none of these imperfections are glaring. Indeed, this is a cleverly balanced and involving design that ultimately lets the music do the talking. It reminds me of one of those terrific, affordable Barbera d'Albas from Italy that one enjoys without having to get cerebral. Good stuff, excellent value. **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Two-and-half-way, bass-reflex, floorstanding loudspeaker
Driver complement: Two 5.5" bass drivers, one 5.5" midrange, one 1" tweeter
Frequency response: 46Hz-22kHz +/-2dB
In-room sensitivity: 91dB
Nominal impedance: 8 ohms
Recommended amplifier power: 15-200W
Dimensions: 6.75" x 40" x 10.5"
Weight: 42 lbs. each
Price: \$1198 per pair

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT
 TW-Acoustic Raven One turntable; Tri-Planar Ultimate VII arm; Benz Gullwing and Transfiguration Phoenix moving-coil cartridges; Sutherland 20/20 and Simaudio Moon 310LP phonostages; Cary Audio Classic CD 303T SACD player and SLP 05 linestage preamplifier; Magnepan 1.7 loudspeakers, Tara Labs Zero interconnects, Omega speaker cables, The One power cords, and BP-10 Power Screen; Finite Elemente Spider equipment racks

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