

Start ME UP

Four on The Floor

Paradigm Monitor 9 Loudspeaker

Neil Gader

Getting started in the high end means making some tough decisions. And they don't come any tougher than choosing between a compact and a floorstanding speaker in the \$1k range. There was a day when the trade-offs and pitfalls were well known. What a compact lacked in output and extension it more than made up for in transparency and imaging. Floorstanders, on the other hand, owned the bottom octaves and dynamics, and created a more realistic soundstage. While some of these generalizations still hold true, Paradigm speakers of Canada has obviously been burning the midnight oil to close the gap. Not a company to be constantly tooting its own horn Paradigm simply understands the obsessive R&D necessary to transform the low key into high octane.

Paradigm's Monitor Series is the breadbasket of its basic lineup (Paradigm also has an upscale Reference line), offering a trio of two-way compacts, three floorstanders, three center channels, and a pair of ADP surround/rear speakers. The \$949-per-pair Monitor 9 is its midsize floorstander—a 2.5-way, four-driver, bass-reflex design. Cabinet construction is a sturdy .75" MDF with a vibration-repelling 1"-thick elevated front baffle. The twin bass drivers run in parallel and crossover at 500Hz. The eye-catching, low-mass, injection-molded, co-polymer midbass driver runs full range up to 1.9kHz where it passes the baton to the high-efficiency titanium ferro-fluid-cooled tweeter. A pair of large ports of the quasi-third-order resistive variety reside in the rear panel. Terrifically sensitive at 96dB, the Monitor 9 welcomes tube or transistor amps from 15W to 200W. A dual set of binding posts allows the bi-wiring option.

While there is no dearth of zippy two-way compacts in this price range, the Monitor 9 will make you think twice before falling for the allure of these small-room specialists. (See Steven Stone's review of the Paradigm Mini Monitor V.6 in Issue 190.) The big reason: None will approximate the weight and majesty of the Monitor 9's bass response



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and SPL output. Its bass doesn't quite enter subwoofer territory, but the way it plows into the upper-30Hz range transforms a symphony orchestra into a completely different (and more realistic) animal. Plucked bass viols, bassoons, and percussion really churn up some major air. You can feel the orchestra gather itself and come to life from the bottom up on the Tchaikovsky and Korngold Violin Concertos [DG]. The opening bars of Shelby Lynne's "Just A Little Lovin'" reveal a standup bass whose presence fans out warmly into the listening room. Its character is deep and rich but not overly precise and some will wish for some added definition in this region.

The sonic personality of the Paradigm Monitor 9 leans to the darker side of the spectrum. Its midrange tends to be full-bodied with good pitch control but with a general softness and roundedness. There's a slight recession in the upper mids that pleasantly lays the presentation back somewhat, with an edge of spotlighting in the treble. On top the tweeter is a bit dry, and some localization could be heard from the transient attack of reed instruments or in a slight nasality as Anne-Sophie Mutter bows her violin's lower strings aggressively. Its overall balance means there are some mild subtractions and tonal deviations, but taken as a whole no critical sonic flaw really pushes the Monitor 9 off the rails. There's an engaging excitement factor that to my mind makes up for its minor glitches. It summons up the raw interplay

during the fiery Chris Thile/Edgar Meyer duet "Give Us Peace" [Sony]. The speed and attack from the mandolin and bass were electrifying, even as I recognized a heightened mid-treble emphasis that slightly exaggerated the snap of Thile's flat-pick. Likewise when Meyer takes up the bow there's a bit of extra sheen on top as if the bow is trying to shed excess rosin.

In terms of imaging the Monitor 9 doesn't hold each instrument or vocalist in a vise-like grip. Fact is, the Monitor 9 is not the last word in holographic transparency—images are slightly shaded, leading edges not outlined crisply. Yet the sense of musicality is all there, without artifice. I think this trade-off is a wise choice. I'd much rather have broader soundstage information, dimensionality, and heightened emotional impact than the often over-hyped minutiae. And this the Monitor 9 does with relish. At least some of the credit must go to inter-driver coherence, not always a certainty with four drivers per side. For the most part, the Monitor 9 speaker truly sings with one voice.

The Paradigm Monitor 9 is a value-fortified speaker of the old school. It relies on balance, wideband frequency response, dynamics, and high output—credentials that never go out of style. Does it sweat the little things like a compact? More than you might expect actually. It proves once again that if you're after a full-range high-octane musical experience there really is no substitute for "four-on-the-floor." **TAS**

SPECS & PRICING

Drivers: 1" tweeter, 6.5" mid, (2) 6.5" woofers
Frequency Response: 51Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 96dB
Impedance: 8 ohms
Dimensions: 40.25" x 7.5" x 13.25"
Weight: 44 lbs.
Price: \$949/pr.

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT
Sota Cosmos Series III turntable; SME V pick-up arm; Ortofon 2M Black, Benz Glider Wood cartridge; Esoteric X-05, Sony DVP-9000ES; Muse Model 200, ATC SIA-150; Tara Labs Omega, Synergistic Tesla Apex, Nordost Baldur, Kimber Kable BiFocal XL; Synergistic Tesla, Wireworld Silver Electra & Kimber Palladian power cords; Synergistic Tesla Power Cell; Sound Fusion Turntable stand