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June 2004

Studio Monitors

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PAR Speaker Evaluations!

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- Klein and Hummel 0300D
- Focus Audio FS-68
- Lipiniski Sound L-707
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Studio

BY BOB KATZ

There's a new player at the manufacturer's table and his name is Lipinski. I met Andrew Lipinski over 20 years ago at an AES Convention and he struck me as an excellent, uncompromising recording engineer who modifies all his equipment to perfectionists' standards. After a time he concluded that he would never find ready-made equipment on the market that would satisfy a discerning engineer's ear — so this led, naturally, to the formation of Lipinski Sound.

FEATURES

This is one box that doesn't act like a box. Built in Europe to perfectionist standards, it is an attractive, no-frills cherry-colored enclosure of 1-inch thick MDF with tough internal bracing that yields no audible resonances nor box coloration. Components are all chosen for lowest distortion and maximum damping factor, including wooden core foil inductors whose resistance is less than half that of the wire-wound type, and biwirable very heavy-duty gold-plated brass

Fast Facts

Applications:

Studio, post production

Key Features:

Two-way; twin 7-inch glass fiber woofers; 1-inch Neodymium Ring Radiator Tweeter; 1-inch MDF cabinet

Price:

\$4,495 per pair

Contact:

Lipinski Sound at 301-229-4360,
www.lipinkisound.com.

Lipinski Sound L-707 Monitor

binding posts that can take either bananas or up to 2 AWG wire. Lipinski even includes a bonus with every loudspeaker: a complementary protective carrying case which facilitates remote recording sessions; there are no flimsy cardboard packing boxes.

Two 7-inch glass fiber midwoofers surround a 1-inch Neodymium Ring Radiator Tweeter in a vertical MTM configuration, 23-5/8 inches H x 9-7/16 inches W x 12-7/16 inches D. Use this speaker with its grille, which is designed to reduce diffraction and coloration. Conservatively-rated frequency response (anechoic) is 56 Hz - 20 kHz \pm 1 dB, and I feel they exceed that claim, to my ears flat down to around 50 and able to reproduce organ pedal notes if not with authority, at least audibly and cleanly. Consider it a full-range speaker that can be enhanced by a subwoofer at the lowest octaves. Sensitivity is rated at 90 dB at 1W/1m, and this must be an anechoic measurement, as the speaker produces as much SPL in my room with the same drive as my previous mastering loudspeakers, 93 dB-rated Reference 3As. It's a nice surprise to find the sealed box Lipinskis as sensitive as a ported model.

The tweeter is rated capable of withstanding 1000 watts on momentary peaks, a welcome relief for the guy who accidentally presses the wrong solo button! Playing master tapes, I found well-recorded snare drums to snap at lifelike levels; I have rarely heard such transient response from a loudspeaker. Despite their high sensitivity, these 4 ohm speakers proved to be a difficult load for my aging Hafler 9500 amplifier, which produced peak



distortion at certain frequencies. So I had to search for another amp (and another check-book!). I tested a Bryston 3B, a Bel Canto eVo 4 and a BAT 250. These three amps were more than adequate mates, with the Bel Canto having the sweetest, nicest midrange and highs but a rather light bottom end. The saving grace arrived in the form of a Pass Labs Model X250, a 100-pound, 250-watt Class A brute. The Pass drove the Lipinskis to their full potential, with great purity of tone and more bass authority than any other amplifier I have heard in this room. At idle the Pass pulls a hefty 270 watts from the wall and transfers that directly to the heat sinks so now we can honestly say, "We're cooking!"

IN USE

It's not a coincidence that these speakers resemble the highly-respected Dunlavys, for they were Andrew Lipinski's inspiration.

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Studio

Quite a challenge, to set a goal of “better than Dunlavy.” Actually, I never thought there’s much wrong with a Dunlavy, I’d never kick it out of bed. But I have to say after auditioning (and buying) the 707s that I’d invite them into my bed anytime and I expect a long-term, seductive relationship!

Just like a woman, after the initial attraction, it took a period of adjustment to make the 707 fit into my audio lifestyle. I had been listening at about 8-foot distance from the tweeters in an 18-foot long room, and I had to expand this to nine feet to allow the speakers to be further apart from one another and avoid a slight bass resonance due to interspeaker coupling. At 9-foot distance from the listener, they produce a superb soundstage and depth. Use them full-range, as they only miss the bottom octave and a pinch; or supplement with a

own recordings that I have played many times. On one of my own Chesky recordings, I discovered that Kenny Rankin moves closer to the microphone on a specific verse, which was “below the radar” on all previous listens over 12 years’ time! This must be due to the speaker’s superior response to dynamic changes. I noticed for the first time noise-gating and mic muting on Laurie Anderson’s “Big Red Tightrope.” I heard the comb filter bounce from the Plexiglas vocal booth in my Chesky recording of Livingston Taylor, “Isn’t She Lovely.” I heard the fake ambience around each of the multiple mics in multimiked recordings that had previously sounded “okay” to me, but now I could pick out all of their flaws. Again and again, new inner details revealed themselves. Yet this loudspeaker’s uncanny ability to separate a recording into its

league as that of the best loudspeakers I’ve ever heard, including Egglestons, Wilson Watt/Puppys and Dunlavy SC-5s.

We mastering engineers don’t change loudspeakers (or girlfriends, for that matter) at the drop of a hat; I had been using the Reference 3As with continuous success for over eight years. Before I changed, Lipinski had to prove to me I would hear more in my masters, that my equalization and processing work would go even easier, and I would produce masters that translate even better to the outside world. The L-707s delivered this and more — it is very easy to hear minute changes in dynamics processors and equalizers. I am enjoying my work even more and finding new delight in listening to liver-sounding music than ever before.

This speaker is a beauty for demanding stereo, 5.1, mixing or mastering. A remarkable achievement, for a company’s first product. We just have to assume Andrew Lipinski has been refining loudspeakers in his secret laboratory for the last 20 or so years, rejecting prototype after prototype until the speaker performed to his exacting specifications... then and only then letting his baby face the world. Certainly better for the world.

Founder of Digital Domain mastering studio in Orlando, Bob Katz has been a recording and mastering engineer for over 30 years, mastered three Grammy-winning and other Grammy-nominated albums. Inventor of the K-System of metering and monitoring, and the patent-pending K-Stereo and K-Surround processes, he has written an acclaimed book, “Mastering Audio: The Art And the Science,” available on Focal Press.



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“The 707’s sound is in the same league as that of the best loudspeakers I’ve ever heard, including Egglestons, Wilson Watt/Puppys and Dunlavy SC-5s.”

subwoofer for the ultimate sound. I had to modify the low-pass crossover slope of my Genesis-brand subwoofers to four-pole because the original two-pole filter yielded too much 100 Hz energy. This took a week of circuit design and modification; I cross them over around 58 Hz.

My new-found friend produces world-class sound, the proverbial “hair-raising shiver of excitement.” Some loudspeakers create a fake transient response by instituting a rising high end, but this is not the case with the 707s, which have a very natural tonality. They sound extremely tight, clean, dynamic, and open. The ability to reveal previously-unheard details in a recording is often the sign of a good loudspeaker. (*provided it’s not due to exaggerated frequency response peaks, which is not the case with the 707s).

It may sound like a cliché, but I have rediscovered all my best recordings, and even begun to notice surprising new details in my

parts never spoiled my listening experience, just increased my sense of wonder at how much more I can hear, when this jaded listener thought I had heard everything!

Warning: If your ancillary equipment is not first rate, these speakers will reveal any defect in your system, room acoustics or program material, the same as with any top-notch loudspeakers. Make sure they are solidly mounted on sand or lead-shot-filled stands; the stands should not rock one iota. Likewise, if your studio walls are flimsy sheetrock, or if the floors vibrate, they act as diaphragmatic absorbers and you will lose bass response. With patience, carefully place the speakers in their optimum position for a wide, even soundstage with a solid center, and make sure your ears are at tweeter height (very important for the tonal balance and phase coherency). You will then be rewarded with the best sound you have ever heard, at a price far below any of the real competition. The 707’s sound is in the same