

NIGEL PALMER
*opens his ears to
 the possibilities of
 these three-way
 PMC monitors.*

Another loudspeaker review: this is a busy professional audio sector at the moment, something which I find very healthy. After all, bearing in mind that speakers are traditionally the weakest link in an audio chain it's no wonder that manufacturers are moving forward with new materials and design techniques, a development complementing advances in studio acoustics. Having already covered products at the smaller end of PMC's range for this magazine and as a result becoming an owner of a pair of the active AML1s, I was looking forward to examining a middle-roster monitor, the IB2S.

Overview

This is a three-way loudspeaker, tri-ampable if required, with an 'activated' version including amplifier also available. Measuring 740 x 330 x 465mm (HxWxD) it was supplied for review as a passive pair with 840mm frame stands and a Bryston 14B SST amplifier. The Bryston can produce 600 watts per channel, though each IB2 may be driven by anything above 120 watts apiece. As with the centre channel variant, the IB2-C, and like all PMC monitors this is a transmission-line design with a cleverly



PMC IB2S

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folded and damped low-frequency horn inside the cabinet fed from the back of the bass driver. Transmission lines can be tricky to do well, but when properly implemented offer a substantially extended bottom end as in this case where a 2.4m line contributes to a usable frequency response from 25Hz to 25kHz.

PMC's midfield predecessor the IB1S has been available for some years now, still a successful member of the lineup, and the company's Peter Thomas had been considering using their own 75mm midrange fabric domed driver from the larger MB2 in the IB1S, but the idea had been shelved. Then JVC Studios in Tokyo said that although they liked the MB2, room size constraints wouldn't allow a monitor that large to be installed there; size-wise the IB1S was more appropriate, but JVC requested the extra transparency of the MB2 and a new product was born. Since then the guys at PMC tell me they don't usually get their IB2S demo units back, and a growing list of high-end users is testimony to considerable interest at this size and price point.

In Use

A separate driver to cover the middle area of the audible spectrum has much to recommend it, trading off increased complexity of design and construction against a potentially smoother response in this most critical area, so out came my trusty collection of reference recordings to put this and other aspects to the test. Having installed the monitors in a medium-to-large room (and later in a smaller space with similar results) I let the amplifier warm up for an hour or so and started listening. With their wide dispersion the speakers seemed very forgiving of placement and acoustics, though as a general rule it's a good idea to have them at least half a metre from the nearest wall. One of the first things I played was Gula Gula by Jan Garbarek, an instrumental featuring soprano saxophone across pretty

much the entire dynamic range of the instrument and very well captured in the recording. Past auditioning tells me that the piece makes midrange reproduction anomalies stick out like a sore thumb and sound screaming or dull, but there was no trace of that here, just the natural excitement of the performance itself. This presentation was about the best I've heard on any loudspeaker and indicated that the 380Hz and 3.8kHz crossover frequencies were carefully chosen and that the drivers work well together. In addition to the mid unit already mentioned the drivers are an unusual home grown 250mm carbon fibre and Nomex job for bass, already tried and tested in the IB1S, high frequencies being taken care of by a 27mm soft dome tweeter.

It was interesting to note a family resemblance between the IB2S, the AML1, and also PMC's tiny DB1, voicing being surprisingly similar across the range considering size and design differences. In a number of respects IB2s come across like AML1s writ large, with characteristics such as a bass response where swept tones go down to their lowest with minimal lumps and bumps and the way they don't attempt to reproduce bass that isn't there as some lesser speakers do. Another similarity is the slightly forward

voicing in the mid/top area, and for me this is no impediment but promotes the 'sonic microscope' aspect any true monitor should have. To quote one example, Glenn Meadows' Steely Dan remasters played magnificently on this system within the constraints of the original recordings, and I was able to truly appreciate not only Glenn's work but that of everyone else involved — the IB2's grip on music is outstanding with a transparency to the midrange the like of which I've rarely heard elsewhere and anything untoward showed up quite effortlessly, making correction in a recording, mixing or mastering context easier than it otherwise might be.

Conclusion

Having lived with the PMC IB2 over a period of time and listened to many different types of material on it I've found it to be outstanding under all operational conditions. In a suitably sized room this monitor is certainly worthy of serious consideration against its numerous rivals for any audio task — although not exactly cheap, in my opinion it still represents very good value for money. Frankly, the only significant problem with it that I can see is that I don't own a set. □

INFORMATION

- £ **IB2S passive (black) £4450.00 per pair; IB2S-C centre channel £2225.00 each; STD-IB1-33 frame stands £610.00 per pair.**
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