

Test Reports

# PARADIGM

**MONITOR SERIES 7**  
SPEAKER SYSTEM **\$3,394**

BY DANIEL KUMIN

Just like  
before,  
but only  
more so.



**IT SEEMS LIKE** there have been Paradigm Monitor-series speakers roaming the earth since shortly after Rice and Kellogg patented the dynamic loudspeaker as we know it in 1924. (The original practical design was by Peter Jensen, co-founder of Magnavox, some years earlier.) And as the arrival of its “Series 7” might suggest, the Canadian maker’s Monitor family does in fact date back a couple of decades. Like the speakers that preceded them, Paradigm’s new Monitor models are benchmarks of performance/value quotient in the best Canadian-speaker tradition: rationally priced, excellent-performing, technically advanced designs that compete very effectively with some far more costly “high-end” designs.

So what has changed for Series 7? According to Paradigm, the answer is smaller, deeper, broader: The new models are smaller in size (and so more décor-friendly), yet thanks to redesigned waveguides and the adoption of aluminum bass/mid cones and tweeter domes, they offer improved low-frequency extension and smoother, wider off-axis response. In other words, just like before — but more so.

## SETUP

Unboxing and setting up any floor-standing tower-based system is a bit of a project; fortunately, the suite that Paradigm assembled is of modest size and quite manageable. Being a three-way design, the Monitor Center 3 is a bit taller and heftier than typical 3-driver centers, and so requires decent support and line-of-sight clearance below the video display, which my low stand provided. The Monitor Surround 3, which Paradigm calls “bi-directional” (they are bipolar), went on my usual high, side-wall shelves, and I placed Paradigm’s DSP-3200 subwoofer in the usual spot just behind and outside of the right-front tower.

The DSP-3200 is a nicely compact 12-incher, with all the usual facilities plus one extra: a USB port. This enables Anthem’s optional Perfect Bass Kit (\$299), a computer-driven sub-optimizer and room-correction equalizer kit that includes a very nice calibration mike, a mike stand, and Windows software. Connecting the sub to the computer (using the supplied USB cables) and running the entire procedure takes about 15 minutes all told, and will mitigate the two or three most egregious peak/dip errors imposed by the average room. (It did so in mine.)

As Paradigm’s “entry-level” full-size range, the China-made (like virtually all price-competing loudspeakers today) Series 7s are plainly but carefully finished: precisely machined, with nice vinyl exteriors, soft-touch-finished baffles, and carefully detailed grilles. Unpretentious they may be, but the new Monitors neither feel nor look “cheap.”

## PERFORMANCE

Beginning as always with full-range stereo music from the Monitor 9s alone, I was immediately impressed.



## VERDICT

**Paradigm raises the performance/value bar to a new level with its Monitor Series 7 speakers. Highly recommended.**

### DESIGN 9



### PERFORMANCE 10



### VALUE 10



### OVERALL 9.7



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These are extended, smooth, and accurate speakers — I began typing “unexpectedly so,” but that would be untrue.

What I heard was in fact not in the least surprising: vocal octaves that were impressively smooth, honest, and virtually free of any distinct colorations; top octaves that were evident and “easy,” without any “splash,” “tizz,” or extra sparkle, and bass that extended effortlessly to the lowest bass guitar notes (around 40 Hz) and even a bit further.

In short, as a full-range stereo reproducer, the Monitor 9s are very, very good. My only reservation was that their overall balance in my room was a bit warmer and a bit more bass-centric than I had expected. Pulling them out 4 feet or more from the wall helped this substantially, but the 9s still sounded a bit heavier in the 40- to 160-Hz range than I prefer.

Even so, on bass-rich but complex music like Paul Simon’s “Pigs, Sheep, and Wolves” (from 2000’s *You’re the One*), the Paradigms still sounded “quick,” detailed, and agile — even while producing playback levels that offered sternum-smacking kickdrum. (In fact, the Monitor 9s played ridiculously loud and clean in stereo. In a bigger room, like mine, serious power

## Key Features



### + Monitor 9 Tower (\$1,198/pair)

(2) 5.5-in cone woofers, 5.5-in aluminum-cone bass/mid-range, 1-in aluminum-dome tweeter; 40 x 10.5 x 6.9 in; 42 lb

### + Monitor Center 3 (\$599)

(2) 6.5-in cone woofers, 4.5-in aluminum-cone midrange, 1-in aluminum-dome tweeter; 7.9 x 11.75 x 21.1 in; 28.5 lb

### + Monitor Surround 3 (\$399 each)

(2) 5.5-in cone woofers, (2) 1-in aluminum-dome tweeters; 10.6 x 6.6 x 13 in; 14 lb

### + DSP-3200 subwoofer (\$799)

Vented enclosure; 12-in (nominal) cone woofer; 300-watt RMS (900 peak) amplifier; dual (mono) LFE line-level inputs; USB port (for PBK); variable sub level, cutoff frequency, and phase alignment controls; 18.25 x 14 x 19.5 in; 54 lb

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can be put to serious use without aural repercussions.)

Adding in the DSP-3200 sub, with a crossover of 70 Hz, mitigated the mild bass emphasis I had heard just about entirely — once I'd run the Perfect Bass Kit. A nice feature of Paradigm's software enables you to fine-tune the "target curve" crossover point, which I lowered a half-octave or so from the automatic finding (to 165 Hz), as a prophylactic anti-bloat measure.

A quick replay of the Simon track confirmed the efficacy of these measures: The slightly "thuddy" character of the big drum (some sort of African hand drum, I imagine) was gone, leaving a cleaner, "quicker," more pitch-discriminated timbre.

And the DSP-3200 did nothing to detract from the Series 7 system's musical abilities — though the Monitor 9s go deep enough strongly enough that its only really substantial contribution is the very bottom-most octave and a half, a rare visitor in most music. Nevertheless, combined together in a surround-music showcase such as Hanson's *Bold Island Suite* (from a Telarc SACD that's one of my go-to music surround demos), the bottom line was impressively close to perfect.

The Series 7's Center 3 proved as close a match to the Monitor 9s as you're likely to find. Tonal character of both male and female announcers was very similar, and the big center-channel unit promises the kind of dynamic abilities that true, reference-level cinema



**FARM FRESH** The Monitor 9 towers sounded detailed and agile on Paul Simon's *You're the One* track "Pigs, Sheep, and Wolves."

sound demands: both virtues that, with few exceptions, only bulkier, three-way centers like Paradigm's achieve. An equally important boon, also unique (or nearly so) to such three-way centers, was the Center 3's outstanding off-axis consistency. I had to move well beyond the prime listening/viewing spot to hear noticeable shifts in vocal colors.

Putting this all together on film sound proved profoundly satisfying. *Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith* is a true reference-quality Blu-ray. The battle scene spanning Chapters 3 to 5 or 6 — oh, hell, the whole damned movie — is thus a hoary chestnut of A/V demo rooms, but I can't dispute the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack's success in packing every sort of effect, plus a superbly recorded orchestral score — and some of the clunkiest dialogue ever written — into a 10-minute serving.

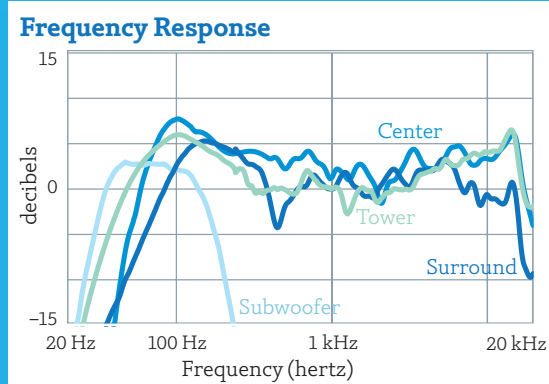
I deliberately sampled this sequence before running Perfect Bass, and it sounded big, clean, and dynamic, but weighted by a tablespoon of the dread "home theater boom" that plagues so many installations, including, depressingly, many high-end ones. Post-Perfect Bass this was gone, and the *Sith* sequence sounded reference-quality top to bottom. I've screened these scenes in Skywalker Sound's own 300-seat Stag Theater on a couple of occasions, and while I'm not saying that the Paradigm setup equaled the experience (not much could), the resemblance was sufficient to raise occasional goosebumps on even these thoroughly jaded forearms.

## BOTTOM LINE

Paradigm has remained in the loudspeaker performance/value forefront for decades, a position that's not going to change with the Monitor Series 7. Most people wouldn't consider a \$3,400 speaker system "cheap" by any definition, but we're not most people, and the Paradigm system reviewed here is ridiculously good for that figure. It delivers natural tonal balance, serious bass extension, impressively clean dynamic range and transient punch, and tight, stable imaging in generous, well-balanced measure, with cosmetics and fit'n'finish that will satisfy most and should offend none. Unhesitatingly recommended. **SV**

SIMON, MARY ELLEN MATTHEWS/PBS

## Test Bench



**TOWER** 47 Hz to 20 kHz  $\pm 4.6$  dB  
**CENTER** 62 Hz to 20 kHz  $\pm 4.8$  dB  
**SURROUND** 81 Hz to 16.3 kHz  $\pm 4.8$  dB  
**SUBWOOFER** 32 to 168 Hz  $\pm 3$  dB

Frequency-response measurements for all of the Monitor Series 7 speakers are pretty good, hindered mainly by treble peaks in the 14.5-kHz range that should be nearly inaudible. Off-axis response of all models is very good, and the Surround 3 has particularly good averaged treble response for a surround speaker. The PBK function allows the subwoofer to deliver exceptionally flat response. Bass output of the subwoofer is typical for its size and cost, averaging 118.9 dB for low bass (40-63 Hz) and 97.6 dB for ultra-low bass (20-31.5 Hz). The tower speaker delivers excellent bass for its size, averaging 115 dB for low bass and 87.4 dB for ultra-low bass.

— Brent Butterworth

Full Test Bench data at [soundandvisionmag.com/paradigm-monitor-series-7](http://soundandvisionmag.com/paradigm-monitor-series-7)

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