

Dynaudio AIR 20

Brad Watts blows out the cobwebs with these awe-inspiring monitors.

Back in issue 20 we took a look at Dynaudio's AIR 6 monitoring system. At the time only the smaller AIR 6 and AIR 15 systems were available so we set up a nifty 5.1 system using the AIR 6s. This time 'round I've received a single pair of the big brothers of the pack, the AIR 20's. These hefty three-way, front-ported boys did a fine job of clearing out the cobwebs in my studio.

Just to refrain from repeating myself, I'll politely point you in the direction of Issue 20 to read about why the AIR system is so clever. But don't close the mag yet, as I'll briefly recap.

All AIR monitors are connected via a proprietary networking system called TC Link. The master monitors receive signal which is then distributed via CAT5 cable to the remaining slave monitors. You can configure your system to be as simple or as sophisticated as you like – from a typical stereo system through to 5.3 or 6.1 surround rig. Meanwhile, you can fine-tune the configuration via the front panel controls of the master monitor or (in more depth) via the AirSoft software.

The rear of a master monitor exhibits an XLR input for AES/EBU digital, up to 192k sampling frequencies – very nice... direct connection from your digital outputs. XLR inputs for analogue audio are available (via 24-bit converters) but digital is the standard configuration.

Additional RJ45 ports allow you to connect the system to an AIR controller – a small and sturdy remote volume controller that simultaneously adjusts the output of all monitors in the system – in 0.1dB increments. This controller very tidily offers buttons for recalling four preset and three reference levels. Individual monitors can be solo'd and muted as well. Connecting the system to a Mac or PC via serial or USB gives more in-depth control. The AirSoft software allows you to choose factory and user presets. Another program, AIR PC-IP (PC only) lets you tune the monitors to a further degree with four-band equalisation and the ability to delay certain monitors – crucial for setting up anything for cinema.

Spec-wise the AIR 20s are nothing short of monstrous. The three-way design is powered via two 200W amplifiers with one being shared between the Esotec 28mm soft dome tweeter and the 145mm polypropylene midrange driver. The result is a very efficient 131dB at one metre (or 129dB at two metres). The crossovers are DSP-generated at 390Hz and 2,600Hz. The 240mm woofer utilises its own amplification circuit. Frequency response for the system is 31Hz through to 22kHz. The 35-litre cabinet is front-ported and tuned to 40Hz – guaranteed to muck up your hair. For extra orientation flexibility the AIR 20's front panel housing for the mid- and high-range drivers can be rotated for vertical or horizontal placement.

In listening tests the AIR 20s are commanding per-

formers. For starters, Dynaudio isn't in the habit of making substandard monitors, and once you combine that monitoring expertise with a direct digital signal path you're looking at extremely clean and precise reproduction. The removal of one whole A/D stage is one thing but Dynaudio's digital methodology really comes into its own in terms of the sheer simplicity and control over the signal path. Bottom end is ever-so tight and controlled while the tops are very, very clean. Initially I suspected the mid cabinet location of the porting may interfere with the midrange drivers, but my fears quickly vanished. Reproduction of live instrumentation was very believable – offering the impression that you're 'really there'. Then a quick move over to some 'electronica' instated some gorgeously trouser-flapping bottoms – all without the aid of any sub cabinets. Coincidentally, I was baby-sitting the AIR 20s during a low-key birthday soiree. I found myself regularly receiving comments on just how lovely these monitors sounded – from punters and audio aficionados alike. The AIR 20s are loud, and remain clear and detailed all the way through to their 131dB at one metre (peak). Not many monitors come close to this spec, including the AIR's competition such as ATC SCM 50s and Genelec 1038Bs.

I just can't fault the AIR 20s. Seldom do I find a monitor that simply sounds 'correct' straight out of the box. Their reproduction is nothing short of startling – a detailed imaging, clear and concise reproduction combined with the power to really let you know what's going on down below. Exceptional monitoring for those ready to afford it.



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Price

• Stereo pair: \$12,700 (digital input only); \$12,950 (digital & analogue inputs)

