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THE ENTRY LEVEL by STEPHEN MEJIAS

Definitive Technology Studio Monitor 45 loudspeaker

The DefTech StudioMonitor 45 measures a very room- and back-friendly 11¹¹/₁₆" (297mm) high by 6³/₄" (172mm) wide by 11¹¹/₁₆" (296mm) deep, but these dimensions are attractive for reasons other than simple, efficient transport and placement. I noticed right away that something about the speaker just looked *right*. Paul DiComo, DefTech's senior vice president of marketing and product development, explained that while the number and size of drivers used in any DefTech design will largely dictate that speaker's height and width, the company nevertheless aims for Fibonacci, or golden-ratio, dimensions. According to DiComo, these efforts help minimize standing-wave and "organ-pipe" resonances inside the speaker's cabinet.

The SM 45 has a 1" aluminum-dome tweeter and a 5.25" mid/woofer, the latter utilizing DefTech's patented Balanced Double Surround System (BDSS), in which the driver's cone is supported at both its inner and outer edges, for longer excursion. The large, unusual-looking knob at the center of the mid/woofer is DefTech's new Linear Response Waveguide. This is designed to create wide dispersion and a smooth frequency response off axis, so that you don't have to be strapped into a narrow "sweet spot" to enjoy good sound—great for listening (and dance) parties.

I was also immediately impressed by the SM 45's solid feel. Knocking on a side panel resulted in a hollow tone that was slight and well controlled—not quite the dull thud you expect from more expensive speakers, but satisfying nonetheless. The SM 45's contoured, high-gloss baffle and tapered side panels are said to minimize diffraction, while internal MDF cross-bracing increases rigidity. (For more on diffraction and how the shape of a speaker's cabinet can influence its frequency response, check out Keith Howard's excellent essay "Cutting Corners," at www.stereophile.com/reference/704cutting.)

While unpacking the SM 45s was indeed painless, each speaker weighs a surprisingly hefty 12 lbs—significantly more than my 8.8-lb PSB Alpha B1s, but still 155 lbs lighter than some other speakers around here.

The SM 45's overall fit and finish were outstanding. My review samples seemed to have been roughed up during shipment—the outer box was dented and punctured—but there were no signs of damage to the speakers themselves. I was even more impressed by the fact that I could find no signs of manufacturing defects. Though the SM 45 was designed by a team of DefTech engineers in the US and Canada, it's made in China. Paul DiComo explained that careful steps are taken to ensure reliable, high-quality manufacture: DefTech's handpicked vendors are subjected to a lengthy validation process that includes factory inspections, financial vetting, and reference checks. According to DiComo, the vendors selected are given detailed mechanical drawings for every part of a design, and are required to execute those designs precisely as specified. An extensive quality-assurance program follows every step of production, first abroad and later at home, to ensure that the specifications have been met and the speakers are ready to ship to dealers.

The rear of the SM 45 is dominated by a large, flared bass vent and, in a recess, a single pair of five-way binding posts of a high quality typically found in much more expensive designs. Somewhat unfortunately, the speaker is available in only one finish: a modest wood-grain black matte. But, really, the SM 45's high-gloss black baffle would look garish against any other finish. As it is, the speaker seems to quietly and gracefully disappear into itself. The SM 45's frequency range is listed as 35Hz–30kHz, its nominal impedance as 8 ohms, and its sensitivity as a relatively high 90dB.

BECAUSE HIGH-END DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN HIGH-PRICED

THIS ISSUE: SM relaxes with Definitive Technology's StudioMonitor 45 minimonitors.



The SM 45 uses a contoured front baffle and tapered side panels to minimize diffraction.

Listening to music

I listened to music using my Rega P3-24 turntable, NAD C 515BEE CD player, Parasound Zphono•USB phono preamplifier, NAD C 316BEE integrated amplifier, and Kimber Kable 8VS speaker cables and PBJ interconnects—a pretty rad system, if I do say so myself. The DefTech StudioMonitor 45s were secured with small globs of Blu-Tack to 24"-tall Target stands, while the components rested on my Polycrystal equipment rack. Source components and amplifiers were plugged into a Furutech e-TP60 power conditioner, itself plugged into a Furutech GTX wall receptacle via an AudioQuest NRG-X3 power cord.

It took some time to get a handle on the SM 45's sound. After a couple weeks of casual listening I found its performance still uninspiring, but soon grew to appreciate its gentle, subtle touch. Far from being a "flavor bomb," the SM 45 didn't stand out in any way at all, but simply sat there, making music. Indeed, the SM 45 was very easy to take for granted, easy to ignore. It was, in a

sense, the *quietest* loudspeaker I've ever heard, and "disappeared" in my room as has no other speaker, allowing music to simply bloom throughout my room, to surround and surprise me. It's impossible to say whether the SM 45's sound changed significantly over time or if I grew better accustomed to what it was doing, but everything snapped into focus—literally and figuratively—during direct comparisons with the Polk RTi A3 (\$399.95/pair; reviewed last month; also see JA's "Follow-Up elsewhere in this issue).

Nench Cherry and Norwegian free-jazz trio, The Thing, offer a languid version of Ornette Coleman's wonderful "What Reason Could I Give" on their surprising collaboration, *The Cherry Thing* (CD, Smalltown Supersound STS229). While the DefTechs couldn't match the Polks' weighty bass and more powerful kick-drum blasts, the smaller speakers produced a more tightly rendered overall picture, with sharply focused,

three-dimensional images set within an impressively wide soundstage. At 3:40 into the song, Cherry, saxophonist Mats Gustafsson, and drummer Paal Nilssen-Love make way for Ingebrigt Håker Flaten's lengthy bass solo. Through the Polks, this solo was something of a mess—loose, incoherent, lacking purpose. The DefTechs presented the same minute of music with greater articulation, clarity, and precision, allowing the notes to cohere and the melody to prevail—an absolutely lovely thing.

I'd been most impressed by the Polks' way with rock music, so I returned to "Road Dog," from Dope Body's excellent *Natural History* (CD, Drag City DC513). Again I was surprised: While the Polks produced the bigger, more aggressive overall sound, they couldn't match the DefTechs' transient articulation, inner detail, and delicate touch. Through the SM 45s, the guitar rakes of the song's opening moments sounded more nuanced and natural: I could more easily hear—in fact, more easily *see*—a guitar pick hitting individual guitar strings. While the Polks threw those rakes into my room with impressive force, they also made them sound more like simple white noise.

But don't get the wrong idea: The little DefTechs' touch may have been subtle and delicate, but they weren't wusses. They could rock. Compared to my PSB Alpha B1s (\$299/pair), the SM 45s offered a similarly well-balanced overall sound, but with more precise imaging, a wider soundstage, and cleaner,

deeper bass. Most important to me was the DefTech's ability to reproduce louder, more complex passages of music with no hint of strain or compression. When I turned up the volume during "Road Dog," the PSBs tended to sound slightly stressed out and overmatched—they wheezed a bit. (Not really.)

Special Music

It's funny how even the smallest, seemingly accidental events can alter our ideas and shape the way we view our worlds. One night toward the end of the review period, I casually selected one of the many neglected discs that litter my orange couch: Mouse on Mars' recently released *Parastrophics* (CD, Monkeytown MTR 022CD), an album that hadn't impressed me at all the first few times I'd heard it. *There's nothing special about this music*, I'd thought. Well, about three seconds into listening to *Parastrophics* through the Definitive Technology StudioMonitor 45s, my jaw dropped, my eyes went wide, and I was forced to give myself three slaps in the face: *What the hell was wrong with me?* The SM 45s' well-controlled lows, impressive dynamics, and stable stereo imaging worked together to reveal intoxicating levels of detail and texture I'd previously missed—another reminder to spend more time enjoying the things closest to me. My apologies to Mouse on Mars. My thanks to Definitive Technology. ■

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ANY CLOD CAN HAVE THE FACTS;
HAVING OPINIONS IS AN ART

MANUFACTURERS' COMMENTS

THIS ISSUE: Manley, Definitive Technology, Halide, and Polk respond to our reviews, and Ortofon warns of gray-market dangers.

Definitive Technology StudioMonitor 45

Editor:

This month's "The Entry Level" column was a joy to read. Beyond the extremely laudatory comments about the Definitive Technology StudioMonitor 45 loudspeaker (which delighted us to no end), Stephen Mejias's passion for music and affordable high-quality audio came through loud and clear. I was disappointed, though, to learn that young Jersey City women apparently do not throw themselves at testosterone-oozing

men. Dang.

I want to thank Stephen for having the patience to let the speakers settle in before drawing conclusions about their performance. Speakers that at first seemed "uninspiring" proved, in the long run, to be neutral and accurate. When designing modestly priced speakers, the temptation is always there to design in some excitement—a little bass bump here, a tad of sizzle there, with a liberal dose of presence to help the speaker jump off the store shelf or hop into a reviewer's lap.

Kudos to Stephen for recognizing the beauty of a more subtle approach.

I am very proud of my engineering team, who squarely hit the design target of a loudspeaker that lets the music do the talking—a speaker that brings the listener years of nonfatiguing musical truth instead of hyped-up sound that ultimately disappoints.

*Paul DiComo, Senior VP of Marketing & Product Development
Definitive Technology*