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REVIEW

BY LORENZ RYCHNER



In April 2003 I began my review of the ADAM Audio S1-A by writing "It's no bigger than many other nearfield monitors, except for its price."

Ten years later, with the A77X, it's a case of "It's quite a bit bigger than other nearfield

all the way down to 38 Hz as true woofers should, one operates as a bass speaker going from 38 Hz to 400 Hz, while the other crosses over on the top of its range at 3 kHz. So the total monitor system is in fact a woofer, midrange, and X-ART tweeter."

soundfield. The thinking here is that the non-directional lows may as well be on the outside, whereas the woofers that extend up through the midrange, if placed on the inside, will project a more solid center image. All this presumes that you can set them up in the usual equilateral triangle (same distance from your ears to the speakers as from speaker to speaker).

With bass frequencies being the hardest to tame, even in carefully treated rooms, and with cabinet placement in the room relative to the listener's position being more important than any bass traps or such devices, extra care will need to be taken to get the most out of these cabinets. And then there is their weight and heft to consider— isolation from sympathetic vibrations will become a must (luckily there are tools to help with that— see the IsoAcoustics review on the facing page).

ADAM Audio A77X Powered Monitors

When is a 3-way monitor not precisely a 3-way monitor?

monitors, in size and perhaps also in price." Then again, you get a lot more than from other nearfields—quoting ADAM Audio, the A77X is "...perfectly suited for both near- and midfield monitoring." So—at this price, can it be all things to all studios?

Full frontal

Measuring 21" wide by 9.5" tall by 11" deep, and with two identical-looking 7" woofers that flank two portholes and a centered ribbon tweeter, this black cabinet looks imposing. The appearance is further accented by the four corners of the fascia that recede slightly, and by the green activity LED above the tweeter, between the level adjustment knob and the on/off switch.

Around back we find an RCA and an XLR input, the IEC power socket, and three controls for user adjustments: high shelf eq (> 5 kHz ± 6 dB), low shelf eq (< 300 Hz ± 6 dB), and tweeter gain (± 4 dB). Also in back: A label stating "Speaker A" or "Speaker B". Let's investigate, shall we?

The new math: 7 + 7 = 77

The two 7" woofers, the same as in the earlier single-woofer model A7X, are identical in construction, but not in function. As the company website states, "The 2 woofers are not fed the same frequency information. While both of the woofers go

So, in a somewhat unorthodox way, this is a 3-way system.

Each woofer is powered by its own 100 W (RMS) amp, while the tweeter has a 50 W (RMS) amp. It's that tried-and-proven X-ART (Accelerated Ribbon Technology) folded-ribbon tweeter that ADAM Audio features in its other models; it is based on a technology known as Heil Air-Motion Transformer (after Dr. Oskar Heil, 1908–1994, German electrical engineer and inventor). That principle uses pleated ribbons of very thin material that moves the air at extremely high velocity, squeezing and expanding the pleats, yielding accurate transients and smooth high-end sound.

Location, location, location

Where and how should you position these speakers? You can't tell the woofers apart by looking at them. ADAM Audio points out that old-school thinking has the tweeters on the outside, the woofers on the inside. But here we have two woofers, one really taking the place, in a way, of a subwoofer, except you can't tell which it is by looking at them.

ADAM Audio advocates "new-school" thinking—placing speaker A on the left, speaker B on the right, thereby moving the quasi-subwoofer to the outside of your



I placed the review units on individual stands and moved them repeatedly until I achieved a soundfield that satisfied me throughout the full range, top to bottom. I can't really imagine placing these cabinets on a traditional meter bridge, due to the reflections from the console surface—I had to remove equipment from in front of the cabs to eliminate the smear and wash, which was not the cabinets' fault, of course. For a permanent installation, I would have resorted to a custom arrangement, raising them up and angling them down, to take such reflections out of the equation and do the sonics justice.

If the right sound and balance can't be achieved in a given situation, the user adjustments on the back can help—a regular screwdriver suffices, but the small controls lack clicks and have to be eyeballed, which makes reliable matching a bit of a gamble.

The lowdown—oh what a high!

First impression—these guys are *loud*. Immediate second impression—the bass is intense. To break them in, I hooked the cabinets up to a CD/DVD player that lets me play DVD Audio and SACD in loop mode. I simply connected line out to RCA line in (no attenuator needed since the A77X has the volume knob on the front). I quickly had to adjust the levels downward, wishing the knob had more clicks or finer visual calibration for reliably accurate and matched adjustment.

Once I had the acceptable level of around 85 dB from both cabinets, I marveled at the bass extension. As it happened, the first track began with an acoustic bass playing an ostinato on a low F. Yes, it was *that* low! A quick A/B/C with two other monitors made it sound like adding and subtracting the lowest pipes on an organ—not all monitors have the A77X's low-end reach! No hype, no conflict among the parallel woofers, and definitely no need for an added “real” subwoofer here!

To check how the bass extends into the midrange and above I used our friend Jerome Gilmer's solo piano CD *Remember Well* (see our interview in the August 2013 issue); it amply proved that there is no smearing, no noticeable handing over of frequency ranges, no crossover points standing out. And when the only vocal on the disk came in, the subtleties of projection of Beth Avedis' gorgeous voice were astounding.

For stylistic contrast, *Gathering Around* by Steve Hufstetter's Big Band (high-res disc on AIX Records) and guitarist George Marinelli's recent *Believe* served to highlight the power of these cabinets. Some of my own material reinforced my early impression—the doubling up of woofers in the A77X doesn't overwhelm the ribbon tweeter, and transients are not compromised by the dual-woofer setup.

... all said and done

Is this too much monitor for a personal studio, especially with the two woofers paralleling each other to about 400 Hz? That was my first thought, and it didn't take long for that notion to go away. The A77X doesn't have to play loud to satisfy, but it can get very loud and still be pure and accurate.

I could see this take the place of the old-school soffited “mains” for room-filling playback when needed. In any case, if you afford yourself this monitor, I would recommend A/B-comparing your work constantly with a no-frills small box (Auratone, Radio Shack, etc.) to wean yourself off the luxurious tones and power of the A77X and remind yourself of the need for translation from the sublime to the... well, not so sublime. ➤

Price: \$1099 each (\$2198/pair) • **More from:** ADAM Audio, www.adam-audio.com



IsoAcoustics ISO-L8R430 Speaker Stand

When you suspect that your speaker cabinet transmits vibrations where there shouldn't be any interaction, or when your instrument amp coaxes the floorboards into unwanted acoustic participation, this nifty device might just be what you need. IsoAcoustics (www.isoacoustics.com) makes a number of models in sizes to suit varying monitors and cabinets. At 17" x 9", the ISO-L8R430 (\$109.99 each) is large enough to accommodate the ADAM Audio A77X, elevating the speakers by 5". It's also intended for isolating guitar and bass amps to improve their tone by decoupling them from the floor, whether on stage or in the studio.

It consists of a base unit and an upper frame on which you set the speakers. More to the point—the speaker sits on six top isolators

(four on smaller models) that rise up from the frame. The isolators themselves are hollow on the underside, and the user inserts 4"-long posts that connect to their respective holes in the isolator elements of the base plate. There is a rubbery, somewhat springy compound in those isolators that absorbs energy and reduces the transmission of vibrational energy to whatever surface the stand rests on.

As a bonus, the units come with small inserts of two different sizes that allow a slanting of the speakers or instrument amps, backward or forward, for better aim towards the listener, for example in situations where the tweeters can't be at ear level. That's it... simple and (to my ears) quite effective! —LzR