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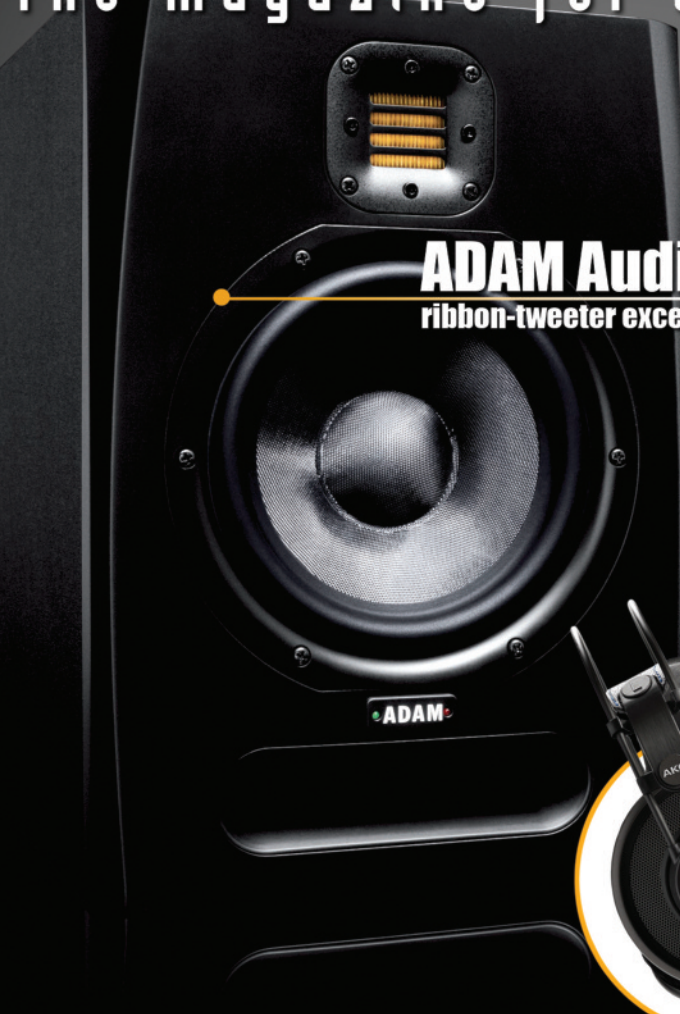
The magazine for the recording musician

Monitors Make The Mix

ADAM Audio F5 and F7
ribbon-tweeter excellence for the masses

How To Get The Best Sound Into Your Ears

- know how monitors work in your room
- choose the right speakers & headphones



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VOL. TWENTY SIX
NUMBER FOUR



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BY LORENZ RYCHNER



ADAM Audio is based in Berlin, Germany. The company makes loudspeakers for a variety of markets, from home to installed audio to multimedia systems, and a number of its products are squarely aimed at the control rooms of audio production facilities large and small. Over the last ten years we have reviewed a number of these monitors, from the fairly pricey S-1A to more affordable models like the A3X, ANF-10, A5, and A7.

Now comes a new pair of monitors, looking identical except for their size, the self-powered F5 and F7. These models are to be released early in 2013 and are aimed at the budget recordist while promising the special sound of which ADAM is justly proud. An optional subwoofer (not reviewed here) will also be released, the SubF, designed to enhance both the F5 and F7 speakers.

The boxes

Here's what the F5 and F7 have in common: Both are black, with a broad porthole in front below the woofer that sits in the middle of the fascia, below the tweeter that we'll examine in a moment. Below the woofer is the ADAM logo, next to an LED that lights green when a signal is present, dim red when in power-saving standby mode, and bright red in a rare case when overheating should occur (it would take insane output levels that would fry your ears long before the speakers...). An auto-sensing circuit activates the speakers within seconds from standby mode as soon as a signal is applied.

On the back both models have an RCA input and an XLR/TRS combo input (connecting the RCA mutes the combo), a volume knob ranging from $-\infty$ (silence) to +6 dB, a 3-position high-shelf eq toggle (flat or ± 6 dB above 5 kHz), a 3-position low-shelf eq toggle (flat or ± 6 dB below 300 Hz), a 2-way toggle switch for flat or highpass at 80 Hz (for use with the subwoofer), a voltage selector and power switch and a standard IEC 3-prong AC socket. These boxes are not magnetically shielded.

Here's how the F5 and F7 differ: The F5 weighs 15 lbs. and measures 11.5" x 7.5" x 9". Its woofer has a 5" diameter, its stated frequency response (no deviation plot given) is 52 Hz–50 kHz, and it has two 25 W power amplifiers. The F7 weighs 19.8 lbs. and measures 12.6" x 9" x 10.5". Its woofer has a 7" diameter, its stated frequency response (no deviation plot

ADAM Audio

given) is 44 Hz–50 kHz, and it has two power amps, 60 W for the woofer and 40 W for the tweeter. The crossover frequency isn't supplied by ADAM Audio for either speaker.

About that tweeter

Both models, the F5 and F7, share the same tweeter. Behind the squarish waveguide with rounded edges sits the item that makes all the difference according to ADAM Audio—not the usual circular tweeter but a newly designed version of ADAM Audio's proprietary Accelerating Ribbon Technology (ART). This is ADAM Audio's adaptation of a technology first developed by physicist Oskar Heil, who found that a set of pleated ribbons could do a fine job as a high-frequency transducer. He called it the Air Motion Transformer, AMT for short. Rather than performing the push/pull in/out motion of a conventional speaker element, the pleated ribbon assembly with its folds acts more like the human voicebox.

ADAM Audio offers technical details and diagrams at www.adam-audio.com/en/technology/x-art. If you wish to see an animation of this type of membrane in action, go to the website of a Swiss company that also continues in Dr. Heil's footsteps, found at www.precide.ch/eng/eheil/eheidetails.htm.

Positioning

The unusual tweeter technology has no bearing on how you should set up these boxes. They are nearfield monitors (a term coined and trademarked by Ed Long about four decades ago), and the usual guidelines apply: Set them up in an equilateral triangle, meaning that the tweeter-to-tweeter

distance is equal to the tweeter-to-ear distance, that distance being somewhere between 3 and no more than 5 feet. Any further and you'll hear too little direct sound from the speakers and too many room reflections. With the tweeters at ear level you'll have the best chance at hearing precise imaging and critical detail.

The owner's manual (18 pages in English, 18 pages in German) states that it is okay to lay the speakers on their sides, as long as there is symmetry in the way you set them up—either both tweeters on the outside or both tweeters on the inside. That would be indicated if you have a console with a meter bridge, where upright positioning would raise the tweeters too far above your ear level. I tried both the F5 and F7 every which way, and I achieved much better precision with the tweeters on the inside than on the outside when laying on their side. But my best results came from upright positioning, on speaker stands at least 5 feet from the nearest wall. Which brings us to the crux of the matter—the sound.

Listening

As I mentioned, I didn't have the sub to review. Does that mean I was missing bass? Not in the least. In fact, even the smaller F5 produced *serious* bass, not enhanced by either the eq on the back of the box, or by any other bass boost, nor wall or corner

mentioned, the Diana Krall album (where she sings, plays the grand piano, and is backed by a full-on big band) and Ray Brown's, showed up enough material for critical listening to tell me that there is balance in the F5 and F7. The upper highs—cymbals, solo violin, triangle and such—speak clearly, without undue harshness.

Listening to a variety of other source material revealed that the overall tonality is on the bright side, a statement that goes for both the F5 and the F7. But they are not identical in sound.

Different strokes

I set the two pairs up side by side, with the F7s flanking the F5s, and I rigged the signal flow so I could switch instantly between them. The difference between the two models was a bit starker than I would have expected, especially in the tweeter, and since they are supposed to share that tweeter, I'm at a loss as to why I heard what I heard.

When switching between speakers while a straight-ahead jazz drummer was riding cymbals, the cymbals sounded more ping-y and less swish-y on the F5s, and it was not a matter of (shorter) envelope decay, it was strictly a tonal matter. On the F7s it sounded as if the overheads had been a couple of feet higher, giving a broader sound than that from the F5s. Neither presentation was objectionable,

F5 and F7 Monitors

The ribbon-tweeter revolution reaches a new audience with these affordable speakers

reinforcement—with the boxes standing out in the open the bass was plentiful. Bassist/producer Marcus Miller's "Infatuation" (from the CD *Tales*) has a huge low end, and what I heard from both the F5 and the F7 was appropriately huge.

That track is not the most subtle down low, with more girth than luster. So I continued listening with tracks featuring bassists like studio ace Robert Hurst, with the Clayton/Hamilton Jazz Orchestra on Diana Krall's *From This Moment On*, recorded by Al Schmitt, and Ray Brown's "Some Of My Best Friends Are Piano Players". It turns out that the bass you can get from the F5 and F7 includes the subtleties that only an upright bass in the hands of a master can deliver. The F7 has deeper bass, as you'd expect, but the F5 is not shy down low!

But did that serious bass projection leave room for midrange quality? It's one thing to have a big low end, but if it obliterates the rest of the spectrum, all is for naught. I'm happy to report that the vocal range and the entire range of the piano are not suffering from being impacted by the impressive bass production. Both CDs

but crosschecking on other playback systems at hand told me that the F5s were pushing the highs more than did the F7s.

As should be expected, the smaller F5s give a narrower sound field, and as soon as I switched from the F7s to the F5s the stage not only narrowed but the overall impression of the music was more forward, tighter, in my face. That's what speaker size will do. At times I preferred this forward character from the F5s, as it can help to highlight certain details. But then again, the broader sound field from the F7s makes for better overall balance.

Given these differences, I recommend listening carefully to both models and deciding which best fits your studio and gives the sound that works best for your music production style. Regardless of which you choose, both models can do good service in your studio—and with a friendly price tag we're not used to seeing on speakers bearing the ADAM name. 🎧

Prices: F5, \$499/pair; F7, \$799/pair

More from: ADAM Audio,
www.adam-audio.com

IsoAcoustics ISO•L8R200 Speaker Stand

In our April 2012 issue we reviewed the ISO•L8R155 stands from IsoAcoustics (www.isoacoustics.com), and now we can report that we've evaluated the new ISO•L8R200 (\$179.99/pair; \$149.99 street) that had been announced at AES 2012. These speaker stands enhance the listening experience by decoupling the cabinets from the surface on which they are placed. This can make a considerable difference depending on just what and where that surface is. This larger model is named after the approximate size in millimeters, 200 mm being the rough equivalent to the width of 7.8", while the length is 10".



The unit is made up of six components: A lower platform that stands on four rubber feet, an upper rectangular frame that carries the speaker cabinet, and the connecting four vertical tubes, one in each corner. The user can choose a shorter 4" or taller 8" set of tubes. The isolation is provided by friction-fit rubberized sleeves in the corners of the platform and the upper frame where the tubes fit snugly but with minimal transmission of vibrations.

In difficult positioning situations even this choice of stand height may not bring the tweeters to the user's ear level. For such cases, if the speakers need to be tilted towards the listening position, a set of inserts are available to allow for different angles.

As with the 155, these stands can provide a marked difference in bass response and overall speaker tone, especially if the speakers are sitting on a resonant surface like a tabletop. If you have heavy, isolated speaker stands they can still improve your sound, but in smaller studios where furniture is catch as catch can, they can be a lifesaver.—LzR

