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The High End

BY TOM JUNG

Over the past few years powered speakers have made huge inroads into pro audio and one thing that is fairly common among them is the mediocre to down-right awful amplifiers they use. With today's chips, a cheap amplifier can be built with a lower cost than what it takes to build a decent passive crossover.

Active speakers can have significant advantages over their passive cousins but way too often the bean counters have the final say on design approach and dictate the use of inexpensive parts that are ultimately used in production. Because of this phenomenon higher quality monitoring usually consists of a really good passive speaker and a great standalone power amplifier that compliments the speaker it is driving.

No sooner did I find what I consider to be the "perfect power amplifier" for the standard passive SLS S8R ribbon monitor and the engineers at SLS come up with a powered version shooting my theory all-to-hell. Called the PS8R (P for powered) **this new monitor has in my opinion the highest quality onboard power amplifier that I have ever heard.**

THE CHAMP AMP

The Evenstar Sigma Delta amplifier design is from the ground up using a dedicated 1-bit modulator feeding a switch mode MOSFET output stage. The front end of this amplifier is very similar to a Direct Stream Digital A/D converter with its 1-bit modulator at the heart of the design.

The PS8R amplifier can deliver 270 watts RMS all day long to the woofer and 50 watts all day RMS to the ribbon with musical peaks that can more than double these numbers. I should mention that the **SLS five-inch ribbon is so efficient and easy to drive that 50 watts is more than enough to part your hair.**

Active or Passive SLS Ribbon Monitors: A Matter of Taste



A toroid based linear power supply provides separate filter banks and regulation for the woofer and tweeter amplifiers optimizing rail voltages for each with woofer amp rails approaching 160 volts! A well-designed power supply is where so many self-powered speakers fall way short resulting in compromised overall system performance.

The PS8R differs from the passive S8R in that it has a front port and is about an inch and a half deeper to accommodate the onboard power amplifier. A brushed aluminum front chassis houses the eight-inch woofer and five-inch ribbon tweeter along with a set of four LEDs. The blue LED indicates power status, wherein a bright blue

indicates the speaker is fully active and a dim blue indicates a standby state. The yellow LED indicates the amplifier is 3 dB below clipping while the orange LED indicates the low frequency limiter is active and the red LED indicates the protection circuit is active.

The back panel is straight ahead with a single XLR balanced input connector, unbalanced can be had by shorting pin 3 to ground. A detented level control can handle inputs ranging from -10 and up. The PS8R is equipped with a push button activated 80 Hz second order high-pass filter for use with a subwoofer. This filter integrates about as well as I have heard with the SLS PSS12 subwoofer that has a variable low-pass filter that is adjustable from 50 Hz to 100Hz. A low frequency limiter, also push button activated is designed to protect the woofer from over excursion. This is nice in a recording set up when that big door closes sending out a very low frequency wavefront heard by countless open microphones while monitoring at high levels. This limiter helps keep the woofer in the enclosure and does not seem to get in the way of the music. Nice touch.

AC power is supplied through a standard IEC connector while a rocker switch controls power on/off. The back panel runs just slightly warm drawing only 20 watts at idle while this amp design is about 90 percent efficient.

LISTENING IN

My listening set up consists of a Meitner Modified Philips SACD 1000 transport opti-

cally connected to an EMM Labs DAC8 Mk IV converter feeding an EMM Labs Switchman driving three PS8Rs (LCR). For sometime now my music reference is a jazz trio 6.0 (sixth channel is center surround) SACD by Warren Bernhard, Peter Erskine and Jay Anderson entitled *Amelia's Song*. This recording was made using only one microphone for each of the six channels, mic preamps direct to an EMM Labs A/D converter - no console, no EQ or processing. In my 40+ years of making records this is as close as I have come to capturing a live performance but it can only be realized with a hi-resolution playback system and this set up

is such a system.

Jay Anderson's acoustic bass sounds as if he was right in front of you coming out of the center speaker with incredible low-end control and bass extension without any additional boominess whatsoever. You hear detail such as the skin on Jay's finger as it leaves the string to let the note resonate. Peter Erskine's cymbals are simply the best I have ever heard live and what comes out of the left speaker is as close to live as I have ever heard. Warren Bernhard's piano, a great nine-foot Steinway, coming out of the right speaker sounds just like it does when you stand in front of it in the studio, full, rich and that unmistakable

Steinway harmonic character.

By now you should be able to realize that I am totally impressed with the SLS PS8Rs and feel comfortable saying they are the finest powered monitors I have heard to date.

When compared to the S8R passive monitors driven by the new Bel Canto e.One Series amplifiers (to be reviewed in a future *PAR*) I can only say that you couldn't go wrong with either, it's a matter of taste

The PS8R has a MSRP of \$1,570 each, which is a real bargain for this kind of performance.

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