



Adam Audio's A7 near-field studio monitors provide audio post engineers with a versatile, budget-friendly tool for the execution of mixes that translate well to a wide variety of environments.



tute engineer must take these playback conditions into consideration while constructing a mix.

Quality monitors are some of the most important pieces of gear in your studio. If you have \$4,000 to \$5,000 to spend on a pair of monitors (or more if you offer 5.1 mixing services to your clients), you have many excellent options. Fortunately, those working on more restricted budgets are now able to purchase some outstanding products as well. This month, we'll look at Adam Audio's A7 near-field monitors with a couple of key questions in mind: How good are the A7s? Will they help you construct the best mixes you're capable of producing?

I first heard Adam monitors a few years ago when I visited my friend Jim Chapdelaine in Connecticut. An all-around threat as guitar player, composer, producer, and engineer, Chapdelaine's mastering jobs are widely praised as first-class. Chapdelaine had just purchased a couple of Adam S3As when I visited him. Prior to that, he had relied mainly on a pair of Mackie HR824 monitors for mid-field monitoring—the same ones I use in my studio.

I was stunned by the sound of the Adam monitors. The clarity they produced throughout the frequency range was remarkably consistent, with no bumps or dropoffs anywhere in the spectrum. Their price, however, kept me and many other budget-conscious mixers from considering any Adam monitors. Costing slightly less than a grand a pair, how much of the Adam

Adam Audio A7

Near-field studio monitors deliver consistent sound for budget-friendly mixing.

REVIEWER: GARY ESKOW

Audio post engineers face several critical issues each time they mix sound for picture. If the work is going to be broadcast on local or national television, a mixer has to make sure that the audio track will translate effectively on all systems—from the tiniest mono speaker to a full-blown 5.1 surround setup. Corporate projects are often viewed (and listened to) in less-than-ideal acoustic environments, and the as-

sound do the A7 monitors deliver? As it turns out, plenty.

The A7s are only 7in. wide and 11in. high, but their relatively expansive depth (13in.), combined with a bass portal design, yields a remarkable low end for speakers of this size. This design leaves an opening that lets low frequencies exit a speaker without getting squashed. Low frequencies are longer than higher frequencies by their very nature (picture the relative length of bass and treble tubes on a pipe organ), and they do make their way out of the A7 monitors forcefully: When I pumped up the synth bass on a mix I was working on, I thought I'd turned on a fan! More than the mere presence of the firm

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bass, I was impressed by its detail, and how naturally the low end merged with midrange and upper frequencies. Most people who praise the complete Adam line speak about the clarity of the sound and the absence of coloration. That's what attracted me to the higher-priced speakers when I first heard them, and I was amazed to hear the same natural sound playing through the A7s. I listened to a number of pop and classical recordings, and I was impressed with the way these monitors handled all kinds of material.

The rear panel of the A7 houses balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) inputs. Purists may not be thrilled with the presence of RCA rather than 1/4in. inputs, but anyone seriously vexed by it will use the balanced ins, so I wasn't too concerned. There are also three equalization controls—shelve filters at 150Hz and 6kHz and a voltage control for the tweeter—but unless you're working in an extremely inaccurate environment, you'll probably never touch them.

On the Adam website (www.adam-audio.com) you'll find a description of the Accelerated Ribbon Technology (ART) process that goes into the tweeter design of Adam speakers. It's painfully technical, so I'd recommend that you spare yourself the exercise. (The A7 has exactly the same tweeter as the S3A, by the way.) Essentially, this design is a modification of a system that was developed in 1972 that uses ribbons folded like an accordion. When high-frequency material reaches them, these ribbons move back and forth, pushing four times more air than normal tweeters do in the process. There must be something to the concept, because the high end on the A7 is absolutely gorgeous, with none of the shrillness that makes mixing on some monitors extremely fatiguing.

The A7 monitors are self-powered. The 50W they push is more than sufficient if you set yourself up in the sweet spot (where your head forms the third point of an equal-sided triangle and the speakers define the other two), but there is a limitation. I like to check my mixes by moving around the room and listening to them from different angles, and at distances

up to about 18ft. My Mackie HR824s are powerful enough to let me do this, but the stereo image presented by the A7s melted away once I moved just a few paces outside the sweet spot.

Remember, though, that these are near-field monitors, meant to be used in close proximity.

We've covered the highs and lows, but the mid-frequency response of the A7 is perhaps what impressed me most. Cellos in their mid to upper ranges sang naturally, and this often hard-to-glue range was reproduced with wonderful clarity on everything I listened to. Michael Bolton's live version of "Go the Distance," from the animated film *Hercules*, is a great technical achievement. I'm not sure what grand piano was

used, but the A7s reproduced the block chords beautifully—much better, in fact, than did the Mackie HR824s.

Every audio post engineer must put together a studio that allows him or her to build a reputation based on the execution of mixes that translate well to a wide variety of environments. Ten or 15 years ago, recording studios routinely had three sets of monitors—a huge, soffit-mounted pair intended to blow clients' socks off and make them feel their second-rate songs were authored by a higher power, and a second, bookshelf set used mainly to replicate middle-to-good home speakers. And then there were the ubiquitous Aurotones, those tiny, tinny speakers that reproduced the sound you'd find emanating from a typical automobile speaker. Given that all TV audio speakers were junk, audio post engineers had little to do besides make sure that the bass level wouldn't blow them out.

All that's changed. Sophisticated automobile playback systems are the rule, and relatively high-quality home surround sound systems are quite affordable today. That makes the job of the audio post engineer more critical than ever. How many sets of monitors do you require? That's up to you to decide, of course. But if you believe that first-class near-field monitors are a must, you owe it to yourself to check out Adam Audio's A7 monitors. Pound for pound and dollar for dollar, they are at the top of my list. □

bottomline

Company: Adam Audio

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www.adam-audio.com

Product: A7

Assets: Versatile monitors produce firm bass, gorgeous high end, and an impressive midrange.

Caveats: Stereo image presented by the self-powered near-field monitors melts away a few paces outside the sweet spot, the presence of RCA rather than 1/4in. inputs may not thrill purists.

Demographic: Budget-conscious audio post engineers.

PRICE: \$999 PER PAIR