

## Paradigm Studio 20v3

**Paradigm Studio 20 v3. \$1499**

April 2005

A lot of affordable gear from the North America seems long on living-room presence and short on high fidelity sound. Sub-US\$1500 transducers I've heard here and Stateside have left me with the impression of boxes keen to overstate whatever musical case they are presenting. However, Canadian manufacturer, Paradigm, have built a strong reputation beyond North America. Consequently, when this assignment came my way, I decided to shrug off my prejudices and let these little guys strut their stuff.

The little 20s are the junior members of Paradigm's second-tier Studio range, which includes floorstanders, centre, and surround speakers. These represent the third generation of the Studio line, appropriately subtitled 'v3'. A two-way stand-mount, reflex-loaded via a front firing port, the 20s are too big to

live on a shelf, as their 381 x 210 x 323mm dimensions give them a volume of 15 litres and a weight of about 9kg apiece. Build quality rates as good rather than great, but I

had no fear that something might drop off during a workout with The Prodigy. Not off the speakers, anyway.

### Boxing clever

So, set up on a pair of Sound Creations stands, the Studio 20s look rather good. Their wood-a-like vinyl veneer is inoffensive enough (the review samples were in cherry; you can also get black ash, rosenut, and sycamore), but from your listening seat it still looks like vinyl. Dominated by the plastic driver moldings, the front baffle is finished in black, as is the top of the speaker, which also features a power-bulge. When you take the grills off you see that this sculpting accommodates the tweeter surround, which protrudes above the front panel's top edge.

Paradigm recommends grills-on for listening, which I found odd, because they made rather a dent in the sound

quality. However, they had the virtue of keeping the front baffle hidden from sight, which nearly compensated for the sonic degradation. The aesthetic problems are threefold. First, the baffle is overwhelmed by the plastic fixtures into which the drivers are set; second, the colour of the 178mm mica-polymer mid/bass cone verges dangerously on green; and third, the big chrome-finished phase-plug at the centre of the mid/bass would be more at home on the hubcap of a 1958 Chevy Impala. Do your listening in a darkened room, or leave those grills on.

Round the back, things settle down a bit. There are bi-wire binding posts of high quality, with nicely made bridges for those who shun the evils of twin runs of speaker cable. The badge set into the rear panel discreetly avoids giving away any technical specs, such as sensitivity (87dB/W/m), impedance (8 Ohms), crossover frequency (a low 2kHz) and maximum power handling (100W long-term).

### Sounding out

The Paradigm Studio 20s are, in short, refined and enjoyable speakers. You wouldn't know this listening to them fresh out of the box, as they're all over the place. Things improve over a week or two of solid use, and one day you find yourself looking forward to hearing them play your favorites.

Even before they break-in, the 20s reveal a strong sense of rhythm and a nice snappy way with transients. The aluminium tweeter is quick to settle down and proves itself to be free of fizz and splash, and particularly adept at metallic percussion.

The midrange-driver distinguished itself by just getting on with its job, never stepping out of line until the volume knob on my Plinius swung around to 12 o'clock and the stress began to tell. Better than their performance at the noisy end of the scale was their ability to engage even at low late-night levels. Dynamism and detail remained intact to an impressive degree. Interestingly, while voices were convincing, the midrange excelled with instrumentation, like horns and piano.

Placement for best effect was a bit of a mission. It took a good few hours to



pinpoint a position that delivered a flat bass response, and imaging improved with a bit of toe-in toward the listening position. Once this was sorted, the 20s impressed with their soundstaging abilities, throwing with good focus between and ahead of the speaker plane.

Standmounts often surprise with the bass they produce - they may not wobble your love-handles with serious low-end, but the Paradigms proved again that a well-sorted small box can do tuneful and quick like many floorstanders can't. Quantity, down to about 50Hz, was beyond reproach. My sub was missed from time to time, but not nearly so often as expected.

### Conclusion

All in all this is a compact speaker that earns its keep with a well balanced and articulate sound - not perhaps the prettiest box on the market, but definitely capable of holding its own in this well-contested price band. Once run-in, these are speakers that you'll be happy to live with for years, and I'd wager they'd see you through an upgrade or two of source and amp before retirement—*Brent Burmester*

*the Paradigms proved again that a well-sorted small box can do tuneful and quick like many floorstanders can't*