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HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review

PMC prophecy5: the future of speakers is looking good

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PMC prophecy5 speakers

On a wet afternoon in December PMC invited members of the audio press to the one of the less charming parts of Wimbledon, however once inside what appeared to be a warehouse we discovered a state of the art mastering and mixing studios. Wired Masters specialises in making what might generally be termed dance music sound better and they use PMC monitors for their work, large PMC monitors in heavily damped booths where apparently all room acoustics are removed to leave the sound from the speakers alone. Not particularly nice places to enjoy music but very revealing ones that let the engineers hear precisely what's going on. It was here that PMC launched its prophecy range of four stereo speakers and a centre channel. We got to hear the standmount prophecy1 in the same room as PMC's huge BB5 XBD active monitors and were impressed to hear a very similar tonal balance from both.

The main aim with the prophecy range is to improve on the twenty5i models in both sonic and aesthetic senses without increasing cost, a tall order really given how successful that range has been. While the twenty5i models evolved from the twenty and then twenty5 models with backward sloping cabinets the prophecy range is distinguished by even slimmer baffles on cast aluminium plinths that form an integral part of the transmission line principle that all PMCs use. Olly Thomas explained that the new range was designed to "sound big, real and vivid" thanks in part to the new Laminair X tech that you see in the metal plinths.

Laminair is what PMC calls its turbulence reducing system, this consists of vanes at the end of the transmission line which were first seen in the twenty5 series models, in those and subsequent models the Laminair vent was a plastic fitting that plugged into the front of the cabinets. For prophecy PMC have developed a substantial aluminium extrusion that forms the

entire base of the cabinet providing not only superior air flow control but also a substantial mass. Whereas the floorstanding models in the twenty5i range required outriggers for stability the prophecy models have a low enough centre of gravity to make such things unnecessary. This creates a sleeker looking speaker albeit drops the isolation system that PMC incorporated in the previous plinths.

The prophecy5 is the smallest floorstander in the range and replaces the popular 23 model of yore, it has a compact 6.5 by 10.2inch (16.5 by 26cm) footprint and stands just under three feet tall, it's the sort of speaker that most people could accommodate without too much trouble. Prophecy5 combines a 27mm soft dome tweeter with a 125mm mid/bass driver that has extra



long throw. This is a totally new drive unit developed for the prophecy range that has a long voice coil that is always within the magnetic field of the motor system. This allows for greater power handling, lower distortion and a more even frequency response. The cone is made out of mineral filled polypropylene which was found to be the best match to the new transmission line and vent on these speakers. All of the prophecy models feature the same driver in either mid/bass or bass only roles.

One obvious change to the high frequency driver is the wave guide that surrounds it, this was created in order to control directivity and bring the dispersion of the tweeter and the mid/bass closer together at the crossover point. This point is at a lower frequency than usual, 1.6kHz in the case of two-way designs like the prophecy5, this is to avoid the beaming effect that affects cones above 2kHz. It gives a useful 5dB increase in sensitivity for the tweeter at 2kHz as well which makes for greater power handling. The tweeter grille was also designed for improved dispersion and not merely protection. The prophecy5 is supplied with magnetic cloth grilles should you wish to cover the stylish front baffle.

Those aluminium Laminair X plinths are also useful for fixing the supplied stainless steel spikes should such things appeal. I prefer a less nailed down approach and used Ansuz Darkz feet in their place, these raise the prophecy5 by about the same amount as spikes but don't pierce anything. I connected Townshend F1 Fractal speaker cables to the single pair of stainless terminals that are placed on the back of the extrusion for minimal aesthetic intrusion. Finding the optimal position for these speakers took a bit of experimentation but this was mainly a case of seeing how close to the wall they would sit without inducing an obvious low frequency reflection from that quarter, which turned out to be around 70cm; surprisingly far considering the



size of the speaker. This may be a slim speaker but it produces prodigious bass with the right piece of music, and there were quite a few of them.

Sound quality

I used the Rega Brio Mk7 integrated amp initially, which while it is a little on the affordable side for such a system didn't prove too much of a hinderance. It allowed the prophecy5 to deliver some extremely engaging sounds in fact, the speaker responding very well to the amp's speed and timing skills, but what was most surprising was that the Brio's 50 watts were up to the job for all but high volume listening. The prophecy5 is a revealing loudspeaker as I found after a few more hours with it but it didn't emphasise the relative lack of sophistication in this amplifier but rather played on its beguiling musical strengths.

What became clear with extended listening on a 150W Moor Amps Angel 6 power amp is that the prophecy5 is an exceptionally clean and coherent loudspeaker, with lower perceived distortion than its predecessor and a remarkably linear response. Image scale is a clear strongpoint, PMCs have always been good at projecting a full width image thanks to the company's emphasis on dispersion but I don't recall one of their compact floorstanders producing quite so much information to the outside of the boxes. Any pair of speakers will give you some kind of stereo image between the cabinets but it takes a well sorted one to deliver good results on the outside as well.

The prophecy5s proved to be highly sensitive to changes in the source as well, they are remarkably revealing of subtle things like filter settings on a DAC or power cable choices, if you make a change you will hear it, better or worse. But they don't have any apparent tonal aberrations so treat every recording on its own merits, which means that the better ones sound exceptional. Can Anyone Hear Me on the new Bugge Wesseltoft album *Am Are* being a good example, here the vocal projects right into the room in full three-dimensional form with supreme transparency to the soul of the singer. Gaz Coombes' Detroit really leaps out of the prophecy5s but the heavy-duty compression on the chorus just sounds loud and brash, he clearly needs better monitors.

Some systems give the impression that vintage analogue recordings are as good as it gets while others make a very good case for more contemporary releases and the prophecy5s are, unsurprisingly, in this latter camp. That will be the pro side of PMC's engineering dept making itself heard, after all if you have equipped some of the most prestigious studios you have some claim to know what things should really sound like. That said I got a stonking result with Watching the Detectives by Elvis Costello, the bass and drums on that are just superb, and the songwriting isn't too sloppy either. Laura Marling's side project Lump made a great sounding album a few years back and the track Late to the Flight is particularly good, the prophecy5s

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reveal just how much dynamic range was used, how quiet the background is and how good the guitar sounds. The bass is pretty phenomenal too.

It's hard to separate the benefits of Laminair X but I suspect that this has made the bass faster, with reduced blur and overhang so that overall timing is better. This makes for greater immediacy because sounds start and stop more precisely, but it doesn't obviously explain why the mid is so clean, I guess that the cleaner the overall output the better each element sounds. The driver that produces the mid is of course also the one delivering bass so the less it is



coloured the better the total result. What this means for your Freddie Hubbard tracks is that the groove is rock solid and while the horn blazes it doesn't grate, it forms part of a tight driving rhythm that you don't want to put down.

Conclusion

I was concerned that the removal of the isolation system on the base of the twenty5i series would negatively impact performance for the prophecy5, but it seems that having a substantial lump of metal on the base of the cabinet and putting a layer of cork between it and the woodwork is pretty effective at keeping energy under control. It's the musical result that counts of course and that is spot on, the sound being just as crisp, relaxed or dynamic as it needs to be and responding to variations in the source with remarkable subtlety.

The nature of wide dispersion loudspeakers is that room reflections play a bigger part in the end result, but they also contribute to a more realistic and more evenly balanced sound. Placement may need to be a little bit more precise but the quality that prophecy5s are capable of is more than worth the effort. Anyone sceptical about the potential of such a neat, compact speaker needs to hear what they can do, they will be pleasantly surprised.

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