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Sceptre S8 Active Monitor

by PreSonus

REVIEWED BY [ANDY HONG](#), [STEVE SILVERSTEIN](#) · JAN. 10, 2014
\$749.95 MSRP

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Before we get to Steve Silverstein's opinion on the newest speaker offering from PreSonus, let me butt in. After reading the first draft of Steve's Sceptre S8 review and his email exchanges with PreSonus, my own interest was roused. I decided to demo a pair myself. After careful placement of the Sceptres in the well-treated control room of my personal studio, I listened to some of my favorite songs that I've recorded over the years. I immediately noticed incredible depth, front-to-back - much more than I'm accustomed to hearing from my ADAM S3-A monitors [Tape Op #66]. Vocals especially seemed to exist in a tangible location, front and center of the speakers. I was also impressed with the bass extension - the S8 reaches much lower than I expected given its dimensions.

PreSonus calls the Sceptre design CoActual, with a number of features, some obvious and some not, contributing to the innovative design. First is the coaxial speaker configuration - tweeter "inside" the woofer cone - creating a point source that changes little in geometry as your ear moves off-axis from the speaker, regardless of frequency. Second is the horn tweeter that allows for greater efficiency and controlled dispersion, while preventing woofer movement from affecting the sound emanating from the tweeter. Third is something you can't see - TQ Temporal Equalization, Fulcrum Acoustic's proprietary DSP algorithms that work with the physical design of the speaker to extend and flatten both the frequency and phase response to a degree previously unheard in speakers of this size and cost. TQ is also used to effectively eliminate reflections in the horn, so high-mid and high frequencies sound more natural. What does all this mean? The Sceptre S8 exhibits strong imaging, accurately-reproduced transients, a wide soundstage, and very little distortion - traits that go beyond the usual frequency response spec, but qualities that are required of a great speaker. And to my ears, the S8 is indeed a great speaker.

Okay, enough butting in. Let's move on to Steve's review. -AH

Studio monitors seem split into two varieties. Small, two-way nearfields typically have a 6" woofer and are often available at affordable prices, while large midfields tend to be expensive and impressive. Small studios typically have only nearfields, where larger studios might have one pair of each type.

In researching comparable speakers to the new PreSonus Sceptre S8, with its 8" woofer and relatively modest-sized enclosure, I found few examples. At a street price of \$1,500 a pair, they're less expensive than the ADAM A8X and the Dynaudio BM12A. But unlike these popular models, the PreSonus Sceptre monitors use coaxial drivers, in the style of classics like the Tannoy Monitor Gold and Electro-Voice Wolverine. Coaxial drivers mount the tweeter at the center of the woofer cone, allowing all frequencies to originate from the same point. This consistency affords a very accurate image in both width and depth, which can be especially noticeable in a nearfield position, when the distance from the ear to the driver is short. The Sceptre series incorporates TQ Temporal Equalization, trademarked algorithms licensed from Fulcrum Acoustic that run on PreSonus's custom-designed DSP. TQ operates between the analog input and the Class D amplifier, to correct for amplitude and phase anomalies - faults that all speakers exhibit, and in traditional designs, lead to significant compromises.

We set up a pair of S8s in both rooms of our studio (my partners Jay Sherman-Godfrey and Joe McGinty tested with me), and we found the S8's size perfect for our smaller room (400 sq ft in area, but very narrow in width due to an iso booth within). Large midfields have overpowered this space with bass, as they need to be positioned close to the wall, while nearfields tend to have limitations in their low-end accuracy. The S8 felt like a perfect option for this size room. Although very low frequencies seemed slightly smeary and imprecise, subtle detail efforts on the lows, like phase-aligning the close mic on a kick drum with the rest of the kit, felt intuitive and easy. While I prefer a full midfield in our bigger mix area (400 sq ft without interruptions), the S8 pair worked great in that room too, at a much lower price than is common for good quality midfields. The S8 is impressively unfatiguing, with soft but accurate transients that sound as much like a tube amp as a powered speaker - this

quality is especially noticeable on sounds with prominent attack like drums or acoustic guitars. The stereo imaging feels great, which is unsurprising given the coaxial design. On listening back to existing albums, some unusual and lo-fi mixes sound awkward on the S8, especially with murky mixes. When I asked PreSonus about this specific quality, Fulcrum Acoustic co-founder Dave Gunness replied, "Low-midrange accuracy is, in my opinion, the weakest characteristic of most small-format (6" and 8") monitors. We put a lot of effort into overcoming this in the Sceptres, so you can hear details in that range that are obscured in most other small monitors. It isn't really a coax thing - it has more to do with the cone formulation, the interior details of the enclosure, and TQ. And yes, the point is to provide the most accurate representation possible of what is actually in the recording, so that you can tell if your low mids are screwed up without having to switch to a large-format monitor." I did not notice any murkiness when working on my own mixes.

The mid and high-frequency response on the S8 feels very honest. Mixes come together naturally, and they translate well onto other speakers. Controls on the back of each speaker allow for several tonal adjustments, all using pushbuttons to select between fixed options. While we got the best results in both rooms with the low-frequency and room-correction options set to zero, we used a slight high-cut, after which the frequency balance felt more intuitive. There are also volume attenuators on the back, which proved helpful because the S8 is louder than most monitors out of the box. The very tiny knobs made it difficult to achieve precision in matching level of two speakers.

For a small or mid-size studio looking to step up from nearfields, but without the space or budget for large speakers, the S8 is a great quality, reasonably priced option.

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