

Prodigy5: small box = great sound

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PMC prodigy5 speakers

PMC started out in pro audio and their official name is Professional Monitor Company so it's hardly surprising that they are as heavily involved in the music production side of the business as the listening side where we sit in our comfy chairs. PMC's ethos is that you can use the same loudspeakers either side of this division, that there is no reason why engineers in front of a mixing desk should use a different monitor to those of us seeking to enjoy the music they make. While the pros may spend all day listening and appear to do so at pretty high levels they still want to hear what's going on in the recording in the same way that we do.

When PMC conceived the prodigy models the idea was to make them as affordable as they could, to bring them to as wide an audience as possible. In order to meet this goal they used drivers already developed for pro audio models, the soft dome tweeter can be seen in the result6 nearfield monitors while the mid/bass driver is used in PMC's custom install designs, some of which we saw at the EI Live event recently.

This approach meant that there were no research and development costs to cover for the drivers, all that they needed to engineer were the cabinets for the standmount prodigy1 and the prodigy5 seen here. These represent the least expensive models in PMC's range, and the lightest, I was surprised at how easy the prodigy5 is to move given that it conceals a transmission line within its near three foot high cabinet. Those who equate weight with quality might find this unappealing but if the prodigy5 proves anything it's that power and bass extension have nothing to do with mass. Look at the even lighter models from Vivid if this is a surprise.

The driver array consists of a 27mm soft dome tweeter with ferrofluid-cooling and a neodymium motor assembly with an aluminium heat sink, both the latter and the ferrofluid indicating that it is designed to be played at high levels for long periods. Which means longevity of operation whatever volume you prefer. It crosses over at 1.7kHz which is a lot lower than

average but typical for PMC who like the consistency of dispersion with the woofer that this achieves. The higher the crossover point the greater the difference in dispersion between the drivers, dispersion being the way that the sound radiates from the loudspeaker.

PMC are not alone in believing that the tonal balance of off axis sound needs to match that of the on axis, or to put it another way, the sound reflected off the walls and ceilings needs to be the same as that which you hear directly from the driver in order to produce a natural sound. Wider dispersion is the way to achieve this but it does of course mean that the nature of the



room will have a greater bearing than speakers with a narrow beam of sound. PMCs typically have a very open and live sound and the fact that this is preferred by many in pro audio would suggest it's accurate as well.

The prodigy5 mid/bass driver is a long throw 5 ¼ inch design with a natural fibre dished cone, this drive unit was naturally designed to work in a transmission line or as PMC have it, advanced transmission line (ATL). The stated advantage of ATL, and one which is consistently audible in their speakers, is that it presents a consistent load to the back of the driver, so there is none of the air compression or rarefaction you get with sealed and ported designs, and this makes it easier to control the driver and reduces distortion in the bass. PMC have further enhanced their ATL with fins in the vent which stop turbulence at high sound pressure levels, they allow a more laminar airflow that means there is no likelihood of pressure building behind the drive unit.





Set up

I experimented with placement of the prodigy5 a bit more than usual because while the tonal balance was good with them in the usual near wall position I prefer, imaging was better with them further into the room and closer together. The prodigy5s are quite a bit smaller than most of the speakers I review which might explain this, what was also surprising was just how deep the bass went without a great deal of reinforcement from the rear wall. I didn't use the supplied spikes but left the outrigger feet on the carpet, some experimentation was made with Ansz Darkz feet which raised them up by 45mm but the benefit was not as significant as expected, possibly a result of the low mass of the design.

Sound quality

I have to say that I was surprised by how fast, open and extended the prodigy5s are, these are typical PMC characteristics but you usually have to pay a lot more to get this degree of agility and for that matter power handling. I don't usually listen at high volumes but gave that a try a few times and found the results particularly impressive, while the room becomes more of a factor with level, the character of the sound didn't appear to change. It remained clean, detailed and expansive with wide screen, three dimensional imaging from decent recordings. At higher volumes there was a clear sense of the sound filling the room and doing so in a coherent, controlled fashion.

Most of the listening was done with my Moor Amps Angel 6 which is plenty powerful and a bit on the pricey side for the prodigy5, so some time was also spent with a Rega Elex integrated amp. This delivered a faster, brighter sound that required the speakers to be angled such that their backs were parallel with the wall and a bit closer to it. Under these circumstances the speed and vitality of the results was thrilling, especially with a nice slab of vinyl under the needle.

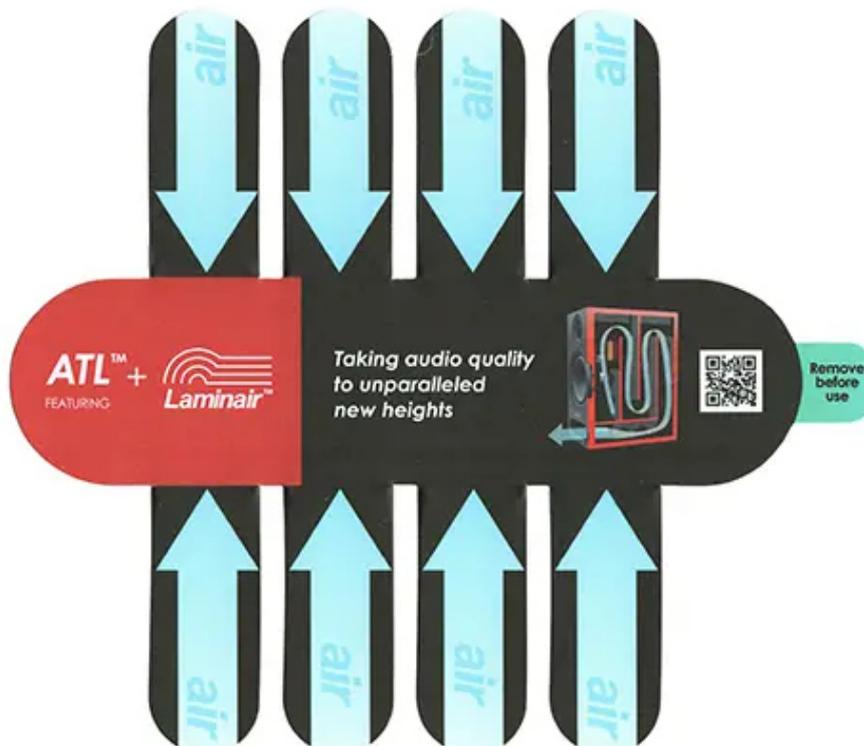
The prodigy5 while highly transparent and revealing is still smooth and even through the mid and treble, and while revealing of the source and hardware they don't have the forwardness that's found with some of the competition at this price. The better the source and electronics are the better the end result but you don't need a high end system to get a taut and nimble sound that engages the body and emotions in full effect. This is also down to superb timing, the ATL loading system means that the bass is always fast, it keeps up with the mid and treble which means that sounds of all varieties are delivered in sync. This is hard to achieve with ported speakers if decent bass extension is also required, the best can keep the energy from the port under control but not many match the stop/start precision on offer here.

I spent a very enjoyable time revisiting an old favourite in Fila Brazilia's *Luck Be a Weirdo Tonight*, a synth based British band who made some particularly nice sounding albums. Here the prodigy5s dug down surprisingly deep into the bass and delivered the pacy percussion and squelchy bass line of Van Allen's Belt, surprising me (again) with just how low they could go.

PMC prodigy5

Contrasting this with the performance from a bigger yet slightly less expensive alternative made it clear that the prodigy5s are very clean and have impressive transparency, both of which make the music more emotionally powerful.

Tracks with groove are also pretty damn stonking, this was reinforced when playing Lou Donaldson's One Cylinder, this was irresistible with bright guitar tone, expressive sax and the band leader's keyboard keeping the tune chugging while the drums ramp up the tension. It's a powerfully understated drive that these PMCs deliver to compelling effect. This is not a big



speaker but it constantly surprises with the scale of sound that it produces, this quality makes space to separate the instruments and voices in any given musical setting, so it's easier to hear individual lines and appreciate how the tune has been put together. With Ike and Tina Turner's Proud Mary that translates into a lump in the throat, if you've only heard her eighties solo material you owe it to yourself to visit this and other earlier works, especially with a speaker that's as transparent as this.

Prodigy5 verdict

I have no choice but to give this most affordable of PMC floorstanding speakers a solid thumbs up. These compact, understated looking monitors do what it says on the tin and bring the studio sound into the home in no small measure. They bring the music closer by projecting it in with scale, dynamics and pace. There may be a better alternative at the price but I've yet to hear it.