

EQUIPMENT REPORT



Powered Mini-Monitors with a Mighty Sound

Dynaudio MC 15 Active Loudspeaker

Arnie Williams

From the opening pages of its product brochure for the new MC 15 active loudspeaker, it's clear who Dynaudio has in mind as the target audience for these mini-monitors. Dynaudio claims the MC 15s deliver "high-definition multimedia sound" for computer gaming, video soundtracks, and music listening. In other words, these are speakers for everyone, but especially suited for music lovers who favor computer-based audio systems.

Nicely dressed up in a dark wood cabinet, the MC 15 is a two-way speaker system powered by two 50-watt internal amps. It sports a 1.1" soft-fabric dome tweeter and a 5.9" magnesium-silicate polymer-core woofer. The speaker's claimed frequency response is 55Hz–21kHz. Hefty, but not too, at 14 pounds, the MC 15 has a computer-desk-friendly footprint measuring only 6.7" x 10.2" x 9.3".

The MC 15s are well equipped to take up residence beside the monitor on your desktop; they come complete with beefy metal tilt-back stands designed to angle the MC 15 drivers upwards toward a seated listener's ears. The MC 15s also put you in control of a number of sonic factors with several sets of rear-mounted switches. A high-pass filter switch gives you three settings for bass control: a "flat" setting, appropriate for when the MC 15s are used as standalone monitors, or 60Hz or 80Hz high-pass filter settings, for when the speakers are used with an optional powered subwoofer. Three other "EQ" switches give you the ability to boost or trim low, mid, and high frequencies. In addition, a gain-control switch provides three settings—for -4, 0, and +10dB—giving you the ability to adjust gain levels to match the outputs of your PC or other source components. (Through

EQUIPMENT REPORT - Dynaudio MC 15 Active Loudspeaker

my Mac Dual-Core Intel Xeon and Rotel preamp, the 0dB setting worked out fine.)

Reasoning that a move from built-in computer speakers such as those that came with my Mac to desktop mini-monitors warranted recordings with huge dynamics, I wanted to put the MC 15s to the test by burning my CD of *Carmina Burana* [Sony Classics] to my iTunes library (at highest resolution). To be fair, I also selected a range of recordings that weren't as cathedral-like, such as the Kodaly Quartet's recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* [Naxos], to gauge the speakers' ability to capture the range from cello to first violin, Kyle Eastwood's *Paris Blue* [Rendezvous], featuring jazzy fretless bass and sax, and Laura Nyro's *New York Tendaberry* [Columbia], for piano and voice. Perhaps this is cowardly of me, given Dynaudio's positioning of these speakers, but I just couldn't bring myself to dive into a computer game. Maybe next time.

Upon hearing the opening strains of *Carmina Burana*'s "O Fortuna," my initial thought was that the MC 15's bass was in general too muddy and a bit overblown. But after some experimentation I found that by adjusting the LF level on the back of the MC 15s to -2dB, I could alleviate the excess bass reinforcement that was troubling me—probably caused by having my speakers placed too close to the back wall behind my desk. Here you can see the benefit of the many EQ tuning switches Dynaudio provides; rather than being stuck with the acoustics of your desktop, the MC 15s can adapt to fit your environment. On the MC 15s, the real sweet spot in *Carmina Burana* was revealed in the song "Ego Sum Abbas," featuring baritone soloist Harve Presnell. His sensitive, yet powerful voice was ably displayed in its full timbre. The interplay of choral voices against higher strings was also convincingly portrayed throughout this piece, though very low bass wasn't as full as the piece calls for. That being said, the speakers far outperform any of the standard computer speakers I've tried on this music.

Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* is not only a good test of a string quartet's skill but also a challenge to speakers to reproduce

faithfully (and simultaneously) the overlapping yet distinctive voices of cello, viola, and second and first violins. In the first movement, the two violins seemed to fare better than viola and cello, where the overtones of the larger instruments seemed truncated to a degree. In the achingly beautiful "Andante" movement, however, the blended choir of the instruments sounded fuller, with each voice more distinct and therefore more effective

These speakers are really in their element when reproducing female vocals and piano. Laura Nyro's "You Don't Love Me When I Cry" from *New York Tendaberry* focuses primarily on the middle to upper range of the piano keyboard and the high range of Nyro's voice. What caught my ear in this case was the nice sustain of Nyro's piano chords over which her emotionally charged voice rang clear and succinct. I've heard speakers fail here, so the Dynaudios had me sitting up and paying attention. The MC 15's faithful reproduction throughout this album made listening to Nyro an energizing and enjoyable experience.

I also found the MC 15s to be very jazz-friendly speakers. Kyle Eastwood's fretless bass work on "Marrakech" from his album *Paris Blue* loomed large and forward on the soundstage, which was broad, with instruments clearly defined, though not particularly deep. Overall, the listening experience was so enjoyable I didn't want to stop until the last cut on the album—not an experience I've had with passive computer speakers.

Curious how the MC 15s would sound when driven by a conventional preamp rather than a PC, I played my selected tracks through the combination of an Oppo universal player and the preamp section of my Rotel integrated amp. I found that dynamics were immediately better and the soundstage a bit wider, though tonal balance followed much the same pattern as on the Mac. The Dynaudios are at their best from the lower midrange on up, which is not to say that their bass is deficient. It's just that the MC 15's mid-to-upper bass, though clear and well-defined, is not as rich and full as some competing small monitors. Then again, you do have the option of adding Dynaudio's companion Sub 250MC subwoofer.

During my tests, I did back-and-forth comparisons between the MC 15s and the conceptually similar Quad 11L Active Loudspeaker (reviewed in TAS 176). I would characterize the Quads as having a fuller and more rounded sound with deeper, richer bass. The MC 15s, by contrast, were more focused, though also somewhat brighter. Which speaker you prefer will largely be a matter of taste. Between these two, I often found myself preferring the one I was listening to at the moment.

If you're a computer user who wants music streaming from your desktop at the quality level of small monitors you might find in a recording studio, the MC 15s will put any standard computer speaker to shame—no contest. For small room audiophile listening, the Dynaudios are also worthy of consideration, although they are not without their rivals in the sub-\$1500 range. What Denmark-based Dynaudio has done with the MC 15s is put a powerful bi-amplification system inside a speaker with a very small enclosure, one that won't crowd a desktop or small room, but that will provide substantial sound output and listening enjoyment. **TAS**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Powered two-way monitor
Driver complement: 1.1" soft dome tweeter; 5.9" magnesium-silicate polymer-cone woofer

Frequency response: 55Hz-21kHz
Internal Amplifier Power: Two 50 watt
Dimensions: 6.7" x 10.2" x 9.3"
Weight: 14 lbs.
Price: \$1299/pr.

DYNAUDIO NORTH AMERICA
1140 Tower Lane
Bensenville, IL 60106
(630) 238-4200
dynaudiousa.com

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT
Macintosh Dual-Core
Intel Xeon with standard
soundcard; iTunes music
library software; Oppo
DV-981HD universal player,
Rotel RA-1062 integrated
amp (used as a line-level
preamp); Ultralink Platinum
interconnects.