

demonstration of both this strength and also the extraordinarily strong dynamic contrasts was made obvious, perhaps surprisingly, in Holst's 'Jupiter', from 'The Planets' suite. I usually find it easy to sit through our Naxos recording without being drawn in, putting this down to the often distant nature of classical recordings. The PL300s changed this. From the fine yet sonorous tinkling of bells at the start, through the succession of firm and powerful kettle drum strikes, to beautifully dense and detailed reproduction of strings as they enter with the main theme, the PL300s were masterful. I was drawn right in by their deep insight, vividly crisp timing and thunderous power. Yes, strings are bright, even from the graphite anode of an 845 valve which is a 'dark' source, yet the purity of the treble, its lack of phasiness and the way temporal strands were well separated made the questionable tonal balance aurally acceptable; bright did not equate to 'screech' with this loudspeaker, a benefit of very low distortion and colouration.

Just to dive into technicality quickly, the ribbon unit is measurably prominent and also has an unusually smooth frequency response, which means a lack of local resonances that beset dome drive units. That's why ribbons sound good: it's simply because they are good - measurably so. You will hear this with the PL300, every time someone hits a cymbal or shakes a tambourine. It was something I loved about the Heybrook Sextets, as characterful as they were in other areas. A big technical difference here is that Monitor Audio's midrange unit

reaches right up to 4kHz to meet the ribbon, so there's none of the warmth of the Sextet. However, there are a few wiggles at the top end of the midrange unit's output and these account for a small amount of cone colour that I occasionally became aware of. Spinning Duffy's 'Warwick Avenue' on the Rockferry LP I was aware of a hint of this colour to sibilance in her voice. Aluminium drive units possess a light air about them but there is usually a small giveaway somewhere and as good as it is the midrange unit reveals small limitations here, avoided by a good electrostatic panel for example.

But talking about Duffy brings me to Patti Smith - sorry about the obscure logic! The PL300s beautifully revealed the deadpan delivery of Patti Smith, her lack of vocal inflection but the gruff strength in her voice; listening to 'Gloria' captured all this beautifully. Duffy by way of contrast uses inflection as an art form, her vocal gymnastics and richly modulated tones being made very evident by the PL300s. Again it was a performance that had me spell bound by its closeness, its vivid dynamic range and fantastic clarity. In spite of the emphasis of highs, I found old LPs (I use mostly new re-pressings for reviewing) that commonly sound awful, like The Who's 'My Generation' where Roger Daltrey seems to be singing into a baked bean tin, were handled with aplomb. You get to hear how bad the basic recording is, that's for sure, but performances retain their dynamic vigour and were thoroughly enjoyable.

The PL300s image sharply and have good focus. The ribbons integrate well subjectively and there's

little change in image quality vertically, although listening on an axis between midrange and treble is perceptibly best. There isn't quite the sense of height a dome driver achieves, because ribbons don't throw much energy at the ceiling, but the PL300s still arrange a convincing array of well hewn images across the sound stage.

CONCLUSION

The Monitor Audio PL300 has been made characterful to entice, I believe. Its thunderous bass brings life to all performances, even those where the drummer was put under the stairs! But at times I wished for a slightly drier, more concise quality. It's a small point, but measurement suggests easily achievable. Similarly, Monitor Audio's superb ribbon tweeter has been made just a little too prominent, making suitable solid-state amplifiers difficult to find.

All the same, paired with the right ancillaries this big beast sounds breathtakingly fast, dynamic and clean, just as Monitor Audio like it. The engineering is both unique and impressive. Classical music lovers will revel in the way they pinpoint individual instruments and grace strings with a rich harmonic structure. Rock lovers will adore the clarity and dynamic power. The PL300s bring life to music and can be overwhelmingly enjoyable, offering a sound that's both genuinely and conspicuously high fidelity at the same time.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Monitor Audio's Platinum PL300 delivered exactly the results I would expect from a quality ribbon tweeter and good cone midrange. The ribbon tweeter in truth, with the microphone placed on-axis, measures almost ruler flat, as good ribbons do. Apart from high accuracy, this also connotes to extreme - by dome standards - lack of colouration.

There's a small but obvious step down at 1.5kHz in output of the midrange unit, but otherwise it too has an impressively flat frequency response down to 350Hz. Below 350Hz overall level is lower than that of higher frequencies, suggesting a lack of body to vocals. Low bass below 100Hz suddenly rises upward to form a wide plateau down to 60Hz, after which forward output falls abruptly and the ports

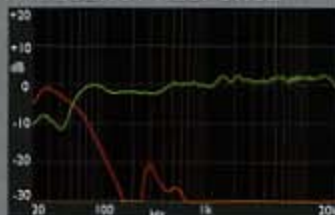
come into play. Tuned to 32Hz these take output way down to 20Hz and lower. Our 28ft room had its main mode at 24Hz strongly excited by the PL300s. This will give the loudspeaker prominent low bass, plus seismic subsonics.

Sensitivity measured a high 90dB and overall impedance 6 Ohms, DCR measuring 4 Ohms as is common nowadays. The impedance curve is nicely smooth above 100Hz and this is useful as it helps reduce amplifier matching problems. The usual twin peaks of a reflex are there and need suppressing in a loudspeaker of this cost and stature.

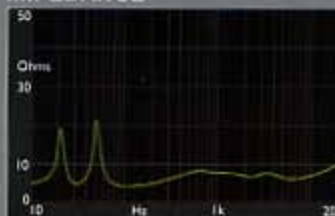
The PL300s measure well, ignoring the lower midrange plateau dip. This will draw body and smoothness from the sound. Otherwise, expect them to run high beautifully, due to the smooth ribbon

tweeter, go low with eye-popping weight, but sound more technical than accurate. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Serious 'statement' speakers with an unusually clean, fast and open sound underpinned by truly muscular bass.

MONITOR AUDIO PL300

£5,500

+44(0) 1268 740580

www.monitoraudio.co.uk

FOR

- extraordinary dynamics
- powerful, deep bass
- very sensitive

AGAINST

- amplifier critical
- prominent treble
- technical colour balance