

better timbral acuity, specifically with the horns, while the phrasing of the instruments was slightly superior too. However, the lesser sized enclosure also limited the scale, power and reach of the music when compared to the bigger boxed Monitor Audios. This was their downside – they sounded dynamically compressed and smaller in scale. I preferred the Ushers between 600-800mm from the rear concrete wall. They were tonally smoother than the MAs when called upon to reveal the crescendos within the Janáček music, but seemed more diffuse too and less controlled.

'Hurt' by Johnny Cash propelled itself from the Ushers nicely, with a richer tonality compared to the Monitor Audios, exemplified in the vocal region. In terms of dynamics and scale, where I expected the smaller Ushers to be commensurately less able than the larger MAs, both loudspeakers proved highly accomplished with this recording, which surprised me. Therefore with its slightly faster sequential tempos, more three-dimensional vocals and atmospheric qualities, the Usher proved superior specifically with 'Hurt'.

However, this wasn't the way with everything I tried. Whilst the Monitor Audios turned in a typically big, punchy, crisp and expansive sound on everything they played, the Ushers were far more music dependent. The vast scale of 'Down By The Seaside' by Led Zeppelin had the Ushers shirking slightly, unable to convey sufficient weight for this grandiloquent rock music. Lead guitar melodies and vocals also revealed ringing distortions as the Ushers rendered high frequency peaks. The Ushers reproduced a clearer version of 'Rosanna' by Toto in comparison to the Monitor Audios by procuring a more expressive and animated musical quality. However, they were not as effortless as the Monitor Audios considering the Toto recording and consequently came across a little strained during the high-frequency guitar solo. That's their problem – within their 'envelope' they are excellent, but they are pushed outside of it too easily when powerful, large scale music is played.

CONCLUSION

The Usher X-718s are beautifully designed and built.

They remained more successful with the Janáček and Johnny Cash recordings, especially with 'Hurt' by Cash where they matched the bigger boxed Monitor Audios for scale and weight while bettering them for tempo with faster instrumental/vocal phrasing and rhythms. However, the Led Zeppelin and Toto recordings didn't do so well because the Ushers sounded discernibly strained on guitar solos and vocals. So while very good, they are somewhat fussy with the type of music used. The Monitor Audio RS8s have outstanding instrumental

separation, excellent phrasing and also a powerful dynamic ability. As such, they remained unflustered throughout with any of the music used and while not quite as good in tempo as the Ushers, they accommodate a wider variety of music. So for this reason, my choice would be for the Monitor Audio RS8s.

MUSIC:

Janáček/Serebrier/Czech State Philharmonic, Brno, 'Sinfonietta, Taras Bulba, etc.' (1995/1996/2001)
 Johnny Cash, 'American IV: The Man Comes Around' (2003)
 Led Zeppelin, 'Physical Graffiti' (1975)
 Toto, 'IV' SACD (1982/2003)

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

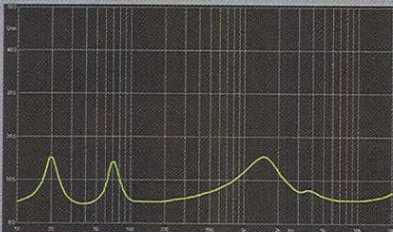
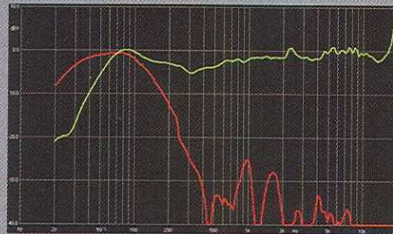
MONITOR AUDIO RS8

The twin bass units of the Monitor Audio RS8 peak strongly, by around 3dB at 70-80Hz so the RS8 is not going to lack bass. What its quality will be like can only be judged by listening. In contrast the lower midband is recessed, but above 1kHz output rises to make the upper midband and treble regions more obvious.

Above 14kHz the tweeter peaks sharply by no less than +12dB at 20kHz - an extraordinary amount but one that will increase treble detail, provided the tweeter is well controlled enough not to break up and become harsh. Sensitivity was high at 89dB, so they do not need a lot of power.

The RS8 is going to sound bright and quite bass heavy, not an especially subtle combination. Since such behaviour is easily enough

controlled nowadays, its existence in the RS8 is not likely to be accidental. The speaker is tuned to sound detailed and fast, with a heavy low end punch. NK



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

USHER X-718

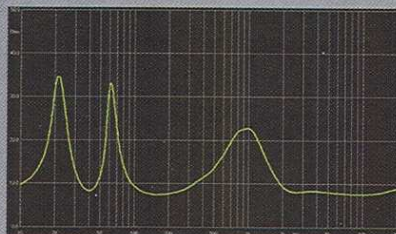
The Usher X-718s exhibit a generally flat frequency response across their full bandwidth. The tweeter in particular has a very even output with no unpleasant dips or peaks, which should give good smooth treble.

Measured bass response starts to drift gently downwards below 150Hz, before finally falling off around 60Hz but is reinforced below this by the port, which is tuned to 40Hz. The X-718s are not ultimate bass machines and will most likely benefit from placement reasonably close to a wall.

There are a couple of undulations in the midband, namely a dip at just over 1kHz and a rise at 2-3kHz, which interestingly correlates with Usher's quoted crossover frequency of 2.05kHz. This is likely to give an element of forwardness to the midrange.

Unusually these days, the X-718s really are an 8 ohm

loudspeaker, with a measured DCR of 6.8 ohms, and the benign impedance curve, along with the measured sensitivity of 85.5dB means that they will work well with a good range of amplifiers, but need 60W or more. AS



VERDICT [4 stars]

Crisp, clean, expansive and atmospheric sound that's detailed and dynamic.

MONITOR AUDIO RS8 £800

MONITOR AUDIO LTD.

☎ +44 (0) 1268 740 580

www.monitoraudio.co.uk

FOR

- powerful, articulate bass
- superb high frequencies
- build quality

AGAINST

- long running-in period

VERDICT [3 stars]

Generally very clean and detailed with fine rhythmic abilities, but lack scale and dynamic articulation.

USHER AUDIO

COMPASS X-718 £740

Usher Audio

☎ +44 (0)8450 525 259

www.hiaudio.co.uk

FOR

- styling
- build
- rhythmically excellent

AGAINST

- limited dynamics
- music dependent