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Wharfedale's Diamond Series was introduced in 1981 and with each new iteration, continues to win hi-fi magazine awards for its great sound and value. The consumer-grade Diamond 8 Series is ideal for smaller studios looking for quality, inexpensive surround or stereo monitors.

The Diamond 8.1s are the smallest models in the series. Except for two powered subs, all models are passive two-way units with a 25mm silk-dome tweeter, and various sizes and numbers of Kevlar-coned woofers. You

can freely exchange different Diamond monitors in your surround setup and maintain a consistent overall sound character. All U.S. versions are internally wired with Monster cable, and every model has two sets (HF and LF) of five-way binding-post terminals. This makes the 8.1 ready for bi-amping or bi-wiring, an audiophile technique where separate speaker cables are used for the LF and the HF drivers even though the cables are connected in parallel at the amp's output terminals. I connected the 8.1s with a single set of Monster cables, using the included link that connects the HF and LF terminals together for standard operation via the internal crossover.



The Diamond 8.1's 11.6 X 7.8 X 7.6-inch enclosure is 5/8-inch medium-density fiberboard and comes in black vinyl or wood-like maple-veneer finishes. The 8.1s have attractive and removable front screens that, for both sonic and aesthetic reasons, I preferred to leave attached. Considering the \$199/pair MSRP, construction quality is good, with glued cabinetry and the drivers screwed down.

The 5-inch woofer's cone is made of bidirectional woven-Kevlar cloth with a rubber surround (making it self-damping and faster responding), while a profiled phase plug improves off-axis response. The Ferrofluid-cooled tweeter has a neodymium magnet and a naturally wide HF dispersion. The drivers are not shielded, but I could place the monitors near either side of my CRT monitor with minimal effect. Power handling is 100 watts and sensitivity rated 86 dB for 2.83 volts (at 1 meter). Frequency response is 55Hz to 20kHz with the crossover frequency set at 2.2kHz.

IN THE STUDIO

I compared the 8.1 to two other speaker stalwarts, Yamaha's NS-10M Studios (with dome-screened tweeters and *no* tissue paper) and Tannoy's PBM 6.5s, as many engineers are familiar with these. The Wharfedales are slightly smaller and about the same shape as the Tannoys, with the Yamahas being about one-third larger than both.

Listening in the near-field (about four feet away), comparing the NS-10M to the 8.1 was apples and oranges. The Tannoy's were closer to the Diamonds, with a similar sound character. The 8.1 had an effortless and silkier top end (but not over-bright) than the others, with the Yamahas sounding nasal, closed-down and boxy--in other words, rolled off in the super top end and missing the bottom octave. Wharfedale uses just one of these same tweeters in all of the models, even the largest; so in the 8.1, the tweeter is doing light duty.

Surprisingly, the 8.1's smaller woofer provided lows that were tighter, stronger and more pleasant-sounding than the Tannoys or Yamahas. That cross-woven Kevlar woofer makes a big difference compared to paper cones. The Tannoys were darker and slightly warmer-sounding than the 8.1s. The Yamahas are thick and warm to the extent that they emphasize the low midrange area (500Hz to 2kHz), contributing to their honky nature. The graph that comes with an NS-10M shows a response peak at about 1,600Hz, right below the 2kHz crossover. The chart also indicates a peak in third-harmonic distortion at 1.2kHz. Perfection would be to hear just a little more in that lower midrange area from the 8.1s. Compared to the Yamahas, the 8.1s sounded slightly "scooped out," making vocals and lead instruments sink back into the track mix.

Mixing music on the 8.1s was fine, especially at lower volumes. My vocal/lead instrument mix levels came out just right, and I could play the 8.1s much louder than the Tannoys or NS-10Ms. The 8.1s were as analytical as any small speaker I would mix on: Recording problems like sibilance, boominess or distortions were not disguised and I didn't feel like I was getting a "hyped" version of my mix. And during my days with them, I felt the least amount of ear fatigue with the 8.1s.

The "new monitor on the block", the Diamond 8.1s offer smooth high frequencies and bass extension that belies their diminutive size, making them winners for any small control

room...stereo or surround. I liked their design, look and, most of all, their great sound.

Wharfedale Intl., dist. in the U.S. by IAG America; 508/850-3950; www.iagamerica.com.

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