

Adam Audio S3H Active Studio Monitors

By Adam Gallant



Adam Audio revamped its flagship range of studio monitors in 2017 with the release of the S Series. This new line of speakers reflects a complete overhaul in manufacturing and design. Up for test in this issue we have a pair of S3Hs. These boast a horizontal configuration and are the second-largest speakers in the S Series lineup. Competing with the likes of ATC, Barefoot, and others, Adam Audio has focused on modern features and efficiency in more ways than one.

Out of the Box

First off, these speakers are sizable and rugged; a single S3H weighs in at 26.6 kg with a width of 23 in. The casing has been completely redesigned from that of the S3H's more costly predecessor, the S3X-H, and most apparent are the newly-designed bass ports and very sleek-looking drivers.

Despite their impressive appearance, the connectivity is simple and it is quick to get up and running. We have XLR inputs on the back for analog ins as well as AES digital in/out. I see space for an optional RJ45 card that will no doubt have a future with Dante.

The back panel also holds a rotary encoder for configuring the speakers. EQ presets are available and end users can also save customized EQ profiles. The EQ consists of a six-band parametric EQ as well as a high and low shelf. Input source and sensitivity are managed here as well. The display panel above the encoder reads very clearly and the menu layout is simple. Each speaker also has a USB port that allows all of the rotary controls to be configured via the S Control app from a Windows or Mac computer. The application provides

an easy way to configure the speakers' settings as well as carry out firmware updates, all while sitting in the listening position.

In Use

I listen to pretty much all of my music via TIDAL these days and have created an extensive list of songs that I rely on as reference material while mixing. I was (and still am) extremely excited to listen to this playlist through the S3Hs. One song I check in on a lot is Adele's "Send My Love to Your New Lover." The S3Hs revealed how clean and clear the 808s are in this song. These speakers are full range (30 Hz to 50 kHz) and I've never experienced this level of clarity before. The S3Hs made me realize how the crossover points on my day-to-day studio monitors are full of distortion. When I A/B between the S3Hs and my regular speakers, the feeling is somewhat like getting a new pair of eyeglasses with pristine lenses: no scratches, no smudges.

Clarity is the most evident quality when working on mixes with the S3Hs. These speakers feel airy and exciting. The high end is fully dispersed and the sweet spot for listening feels to be pretty much anywhere. The low end is clean, effortless, and makes balancing bass instruments a breeze. Identifying issues with harshness and clipping is immediate with these speakers. At one point, I tore out my monitor controller for fear that it was coloring the sound too much after hearing distortion on Feist's "Let It Die," but lo and behold, the distortion is in the master recording and not in my playback system. All that to say these speakers were revealing aspects of that album that I had not previously heard.

Our mix room is about 330 sq. ft. Making space for the speakers and some heavy-duty stands did take a bit of thinking. Being mid-field monitors, I wanted to get as much space between the speaker as my room would allow. The S3H's ability to fill this room with sound is impressive and void of distortion. Initially, I found myself excited by the speakers and was working at higher volumes than I normally would. After two days of working with them, I was able to find a comfortable volume and simply turned the input sensitivity down via the rotary encoder.

It is always a worry that speakers this flattering will make us overlook mix issues simply because they sound great already, but I did not find this to be the case. They are equally accurate and exciting, which means I can use them to wow clients as well as get surgical on corrective EQ and balance in a mix. My mixes translated perfectly once taken out of the studio and into the real-world.

Summary

With the newly-designed DSP engine, RJ45 connections, and software control panel, the S Series from Adam Audio is seemingly future-proof. These speakers are built for a long and rugged life and include a five-year warranty. If you are a serious professional looking at speakers in this range, demoing the S Series is a must.

Adam Gallant has worked in all facets of digital audio production, from music composition to location and post audio for television and film. He currently owns and operates The Hill Sound Studio in Charlottetown, PE.