

The Rock rolls on with its bigger brother, The Boulder – and NIGEL PALMER finds it every bit as good.

Unity Audio, a company more usually associated with Pro Audio distribution, first came to attention as a loudspeaker manufacturer through its Rock nearfield speakers, which have been well received by the rec/mix/prod community. Now with the release of the new Boulder, Unity has gone for a slice of the midfield market using the same design team and a continuation of the principles that made The Rock a success, together with some additional ideas. This interested me as the idea of a Rock with greater low-end extension looked like a possible fit for mastering, and with its greater SPL I could also see it working well as a general-purpose studio monitor.

and pulp fibre-coned bass drivers to the Rock's one. The Baltic Birch construction is also thicker, as is the Corian (a dense material sometimes used in kitchen worktops) front baffle, having more rounded edges than that of the Rock and a sculpted appearance toward the centre of the cabinet. Where things get interesting is when you realise the apparent tweeter in the baffle's centre is in fact separate mid and high drivers combined in a single unit, also made by ELAC. So this is a true three-way loudspeaker boasting no less than four class A/B amplifiers (one for each woofer, plus one each for mid and top) designed by Tim de Paravacini of Esoteric Audio Research, someone with a

UNITY AUDIO THE BOULDER

Mid-field Monitor

THE REVIEWER

NIGEL PALMER has been a freelance Sound Engineer and Producer for over 20 years. He runs his CD mastering business, Lowland Masters (www.lowlandmasters.com) from rural Essex where he lives with his family and two dogs.

Overview

The Boulder carries on where the Rock leaves off, with a larger (549 x 256 x 368mm HWD) Kevin Van Green-designed sealed enclosure sporting two 180mm ELAC aluminium

long and respected history in that area who likes to talk in terms of 'real' as opposed to 'bullsh*t' watts! The amplifier cards are similar to those found in the Rock, although with some set-up differences to take advantage of The Boulder's greater capability.

Looking around the back of the cabinet you'll find the expected audio input on female XLR and a mains inlet. There's also a level control and a pair of switches for a $\pm 2.5\text{dB}$ high frequency cut and boost, and a similar degree of control over the mids, from high hundreds to low thousands. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the three-position switches are cutting when in the upper position and boosting in the lower, but it's not a deal-breaker and after some experimentation I left them flat.

In Use

I listened to the Boulders on Unity's own substantial Monolith speaker stands, and I'd suggest a potential purchaser would need at least the equivalent to get the best from these speakers with a solid low end performance that does justice to the design. After a day or so of moving things around, positioning in my room ended up with the mid/high unit at seated ear





height and the boxes toed in so that their axes crossed just behind my head on an equilateral listening triangle a little under 2m per side. The review samples had already been suitably run in, so once set up I was straight into listening to reference tracks and work in progress, and when comfortable with that I used the Boulders as my main work monitors, mastering projects on them for about a week.

The first thing that struck me was how solid and no-nonsense low frequencies sounded, belying the -3dB point of 39Hz (30kHz in the highs). This is the advantage of a properly-designed and constructed sealed box, or infinite baffle, where the LF rolloff point may be higher than with a ported arrangement but the curve is smoother and tends to go deeper, resulting in more natural-sounding bass instruments and kick drums, plus usable very low frequencies beyond the

ken of most ports. Overall presentation and imaging of the Boulders was commendable, with well-integrated drivers and no obvious anomalies around the crossover points of 694Hz and 3.5kHz. There's also no lack of amplifier power when things need to go louder: plenty of real, low distortion watts in evidence there.

The mid/high combo unit works well, and the design as a whole makes good use of the greater coherence offered through its coincident design. Overall voicing was a touch to the bright side for me personally: I normally prefer a slightly rolled-off top end, but felt going with the 'flat' high setting got the best out of the speaker as a whole system. The Boulders are ruthlessly, and I mean ruthlessly, revealing of artefacts such as distortion; as one would expect in a quality monitor, good mixes sounded good, and not-so-good mixes had their shortcomings pointed out in no uncertain terms for correction. I didn't find the Boulders to be as neutral sounding as some other designs one might come across in a mastering room – there was a slight colouration to the sound, but this wasn't overly significant and if anything contributed to the very listenable presentation. This is maybe not a speaker for classical music purists, but I suspect it's not aimed at that user group anyway.

Conclusion

The Boulder is a natural continuation of what's already been achieved with the Rock, and I think Unity Audio is to be congratulated for bringing a monitor of this quality to market at a competitive price. I'm aware of some of the careful and rigorous development that's gone on behind the scenes to make The Boulder as good as it is, and I suspect this is a brand that's going to be with us for a while yet. **AM**

.....

INFORMATION

£ GB£2,150.00 (exc.VAT)

Ⓐ Unity Audio Ltd., The Elms Barn, Baythorne End, Halstead, Essex CO9 4AB

☎ +44 (0) 1440 785843

🌐 www.unityaudio.co.uk