

July 10th 2014

We took the pre production MAD-MAX to Ron Saint Germain's Studio and spent the afternoon with him. Below is his first take on the MAD-MAX

I've been an exclusive user of the ProAc Studio 100's for 22 years. When I must travel for work, they ALWAYS travel with me. I have a lot invested in Marc Levinson Cello amplification (250 watts per side) and my interconnects are the Reference Cables by Transparent Audio. With all this and the custom road case to move them around the world safely, I have approximately 30K invested in the entire near field setup.

Like most other producer/engineer/mixers, I NEVER stop checking out the competition in search of the best gear possible (even if I can't afford it, I STILL want to HEAR it for myself!). I have NEVER, EVER heard a self powered monitor that I could ever totally relax with, trust or enjoy.

I have listened to literally hundreds of other setups in the 22+ years I have worked on my beloved ProAc system and have never heard ANYTHING meet or beat them. Over this time I have become friends with Richard Gerberg, the exclusive U.S.A. importer for the ProAc line for 30 years (and the replacement drivers, which are only recently available through Vintage King Audio), as well as Graeme Bridge who was with ProAc as the Assistant to the Chief Designer of their higher end line of Mastering quality monitors for the past 15 years.

These two guys (Richard and Graeme) set out to come up with their own design of a self powered monitor that could equal or better the VENERABLE Studio 100's because they, like myself, felt the same way about EVERY self powered monitor, too. A formidable challenge, to be sure! They came to me a few years in to their research with their first incarnation and it took only a few minutes to tell them they were definitely headed in the right direction, but still had to go 'back to the drawing board'. They did so with a vengeance and approximately 7+ years in to the project they asked me if they could come up to my studio and audition these MAD MAX Monitors in a "Real World", professional working environment, to which I replied with an enthusiastic, yes! (BTW, for the last year and a half, Graeme found he had to leave ProAc in order to dedicate himself full time to accomplish the intense R&D to finish the project).

They arrived at Saint's Place the next day and we placed them on the meter bridge of my (also, beloved) Neve/Amek 9098i, so that we could slide from left to right and be instantly centred between one or the other pair of the monitors. Mind you, they did not bring any 'esoteric, super hi fi' interconnects to source the audio from my console and I was all using my monitor gear as described earlier. The MadMax has a two 180 watt amplifiers in each speaker. The Build of these speakers is TRULY impressive. Great quality inside and out. Very similar footprint to the Studio 100's, but slightly deeper and slightly taller. Their brand new and custom designed drivers and paper thin cone material are things of beauty!! (They are as expensive, if not more so, to replace as the ProcAc drivers have become, but supposedly will NOT blow out as frequently.... hmmm).

We began by A/B'ing multiple genres of music purposely from the (extremely pedestrian) MasterLink hard disk recorder on which I have loaded many varied songs from numerous projects over the years with which I am intimately familiar. Starting at the bottom of the audio playback food chain like this was our intent and also gave us the ability to quickly skip from song to song, which was crucial to our evaluation. The physically taught anticipation emanating from Graeme and Richard early on in the testing was palpable to me as I began to whip through various material and whizz left and right between the 2 sets of monitors on my (also beloved and now, very squeaky) custom Rock 'n Sock drum throne/mixing chair.

It was immediately apparent that they were REALLY 'ON' to something this time! The extended width and height were immediately apparent to me as was a beautiful clarity and extension into the deep and warm bass as well as the icing zone of the uppermost frequencies. I was, however, still missing the presence of some of the fundamental-to-mid bass range that hits me in the chest so well with the ProAc's. Graeme and Richard were quick to suggest another cross over. (In their preparation for this evaluation they had pre-selected a couple of crossover points that they had chosen for me in advance). Graeme loaded that up in seconds from his laptop and we continued.

This time I could hear the audio 'pool' filling up with the warm water of the missing range described, but it was still just not enough of it to knock the venerable ProAc's out. I experienced a bit of "Shock and Awe" as Graeme informed me that he had 11 different cross over points to audition and we were OFF to the races! The guys were much more relaxed now finally and we were all taking turns on the Rock n' Sock, hitting the A/B switch and zipping the 3+ feet between both pairs of speakers. Having the capability to do a TRUE and instantaneous A/B (with matched speaker playback levels) is crucial to such a comparison. (BTW, at the start of the test I set the levels up 'by ear' and we were listening for 20+ minutes before I pulled out my SPL meter, only to find that the speakers were within a half db of one another... no surprise, but a welcome confirmation to all of us in the room!).

Back to the crossover journey... with each change of the crossover we could all hear the centre of the audio 'pool' filling in. As this occurred and the MAD MAX's inched up on the Pro Ac's I was becoming more astonished as the extension in height, depth and width actually jell, becoming more 'firm'. I was also beginning to hear a definition and clarity in the mid frequencies that I had NOT heard on my mixes before! I liken this to, as in photography, an increase in the 'depth of field'. I was really excited now, having heard detail as never before and was feeling for the first time that THIS 'young buck' was gaining on my 'thorough bread' and for the first time in 22 years I found myself thinking these speakers might even pass them up!

Time to kick the source up several notches and zoom in more so we got off the Master Link and switched over to monitor through my 9098i console on the mix I was currently working on; (@ 24_88.2) a session I had recorded a couple weeks earlier at the legendary Sear Sound Studios of some very beautiful, dynamic music.

[For the tech heads, the 9098i specs are virtually flat from 5Hz to 218Khz. The (measured) THD of my particular console's Stereo Buss is, @ +27db ABOVE '0'Vu to .0017 of a db! I have the Antelope Atomic Clock as my studio's Master Time Clock and a Pro Fools, HD3 System with 48 in/out Lynx Aurora converters]

The instrumentation of the music we are now listening to included what I think is the best piano in New York City to record, the Sear Sound Steinway D with ivory keys and the only 'silent pedals' I've ever head on any piano plus one that holds a tuning better than any

piano I have ever recorded. There were numerous and varied percussion instruments including the African Clay Drum (incredible low end), Tunga, Udo, Zudang, Water Drum, Wave Drum, Finger Dulcimer, a 7-Acrylic Tubes, Tuned Drum Rack, Timpani, Marimba & Vibes, assorted bells, chimes, and other such super high frequency treats, etc.), a regular full drum kit, acoustic 6 string/steel string guitar, Chinese flute, acoustic and electric Cello (with efx)..., etc., you get the point. BTW, I have to interject that the massive microphone collection at Sear Sound comprises some the absolute best I have ever worked with in my life!

We started by listening to numerous selections from this hour and a half long, double-album project and then we soloed most of the various individual instruments to more critically compare how each monitor system handled their various frequencies. Graeme installed yet another crossover (in seconds) and as the crossover frequency moved up, you could hear and more importantly, FEEL that the fundamental to upper to mid-bass range we were missing an hour or so before, was now now stepping forward in to the soundscape! The race was now 'head to head' and I knew it was going to be close; a 'photo finish'. So here we are, all 3 of us really pumped and feeling that these self powered 'new kids on the block' may actually WIN this race! (I found myself feeling, wow, is this is really happening... this can't be... or can it?? After so long (over half of my 40+ year career) a part of me never REALLY believed that this COULD happen.. certainly not with a SELF POWERED monitor!?!?!).

We continued listening through the console and I put up a different session to A/B with and we went to what would be the last crossover of the day. This was a progressive style rock session, not recorded by me, (@ 24_48) that I was also mixing, to check out the 'punch factor' with the demands of higher levels, punishing kick and bass and aggressive vocals. OMG!! Not only do we have ALL the ProAc's have been giving me faithfully these past 22+ years, but the extra added attraction of an immediately apparent extended height and width, more clarity in the mid frequencies, and additional low and high frequency extension! It was not the 'photo finish' I originally thought it would turn out to be, but a clear WIN by a full head and neck!! As George Harrison said, "All Things Must Pass". I am not sorry, but I am a bit sad with the realization that the time has come where, as is the natural order of things) youth has triumphed over age and will eventually win out, relegating my dearly loved and loyal ProAc 'horses' to semi-retirement.

These MAD MAX speakers are a real testament to inspiration, belief in self and unwavering commitment to a specific goal from both Graeme and Richard. I commend them highly for their efforts and can say no more than the truth I have heard with my very own ears. BTW, NONE of this review or endorsement was solicited in any way. If you know me, you already know that I have never and will never be 'bought' to endorse ANY product! The simple truth of this situation is, for my ears, the here-to-fore Impossible has come to pass! To me, this is the monitor face off equivalent of the Frazier/Alti bout! I heard the the folks over at Vintage King have arrived at the same conclusion as I have and will be offering the Modern Audio Design, MAD MAX MONITORS for sale in the very near future.

All I can say is, without hesitation or reservation of any sort, these are the ONLY self-powered, near field monitors in existence that I would happily record and mix on! Their price point, I can assure you, will be significantly less than my 30K investment.

Congratulations to Richard and Graeme ("Assistant Designer", no more!) and I much appreciate your consideration of me for your testing! It was a LONG TIME Coming, but you did it!!!! Best to You and Modern Audio Designs in this and ALL Your Future Endeavours & Blue Skies! Saint