

# Monitor Audio Studio 89

Inspired by its long-running Studio series, born in the 1980s, this modern-day D'Appolito standmount also illustrates Monitor Audio's long-term use of metal-coned drivers  
 Review: **Mark Craven** Lab: **Paul Miller**

As anyone who tried to buy tickets for Oasis's 2025 reunion tour will have discovered, nostalgia is big business. The hi-fi industry knows it too, and in recent years has been scouring the 1970s for speaker and amplifier designs to either leverage into new models or directly resurrect. Monitor Audio, however, has now jumped a decade ahead, launching a new speaker 'inspired by the 1980s'. Seeing as Hollywood has been tapping into that decade with revisits to the *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Top Gun* and *Ghostbusters* franchises, the British manufacturer might be onto something.

The Studio 89, selling for £2000, takes its cues from MA's Studio series from the 1980s. Specifically, the promotional literature cites the Studio 15 standmount as inspiration [see PM's boxout, p65], not for any acoustic reason, but because it apes that model's visual style by blending gold-coloured drivers with a high-gloss black finish. Note that this is the only colourway available – Monitor Audio's last Studio bookshelf speaker, a one-off model which ran from 2018-2020, came in a choice of grey, white or black.

## ON THE EDGE

The first thing you'll notice about MA's new model is the size of it. Off the top of my head I can't remember seeing another speaker so slim, the Studio 89 measuring just 157mm side to side. Neither is it especially tall, at 340mm, although a depth of 361mm means it's unlikely to ever be installed on a bookshelf, something further precluded by the speaker's dual HiVe (high-velocity) II slot ports [see p67], with their now-familiar rifled edges.

These, one at the top and one at the bottom, combine with what Monitor Audio describes as 'precisely calculated and positioned' internal walls to limit potential port noise while helping tune the Studio 89's low-frequency response down to a

claimed 53Hz (-6dB) before any boundary loading [see PM's Lab Report, p67]. Providing this low-end – and facilitating the speaker's slender design – are two RDT (Rigid Diaphragm Technology) III bass/mid drivers featuring a three-layer construction of C-CAM cone, Nomex 'central core' and a woven carbon-fibre backing. Monitor Audio lists these as 4.25in (108mm) designs, although the diameter of the dimpled cone is smaller still.

## POINT OF VIEW

As seen on other Monitor Audio speakers, including the recent Gold 300 6G [HFN Oct '24], the Studio 89's bass/mid drivers' magnets are through-bolted to the rear of the cabinet to improve rigidity. On this model the drivers are also mounted to an aluminium plate that's isolated from the 18mm-thick MDF baffle behind it via a layer of foam suspension, with the two units sandwiching the Studio 89's tweeter in an 'MTM' arrangement.

MA describes this D'Appolito layout as a 'point source', which is debatable, the same claim more realistically made for its top-of-the-range Hyphn floorstander [HFN Jul '23], which places six midrange drivers around a central tweeter. Similarities to the Hyphn are more strictly observed in the Studio 89's tweeter which is another of its MPD (Micro Pleated Diaphragm) III designs, contrasting with the more conventional C-CAM domes of the Silver and Bronze ranges.

**RIGHT:** Offered in Gloss Black only, and without a grille, the Studio 89 does have a partnering 625mm/24.5in stand. The symmetrical 'MTM' driver array is mounted into a figure-of-eight alloy frame, decoupled from the cabinet



Marshalling the output of these drivers is a third-order crossover set at 2.4kHz. The crossover network, says MA, is 'simplicity personified' but makes use of 'only the very best' polypropylene and polyester capacitors, and air-core and low-loss steel-core inductors. There's no option for bi-wire/amping, but the Studio 89's binding posts are sculpted to make tightening easy.

## THE STUDIO 15

While the Studio 89 may be 'inspired by the creativity and excitement of the 1980s', and Monitor Audio's Studio 15 in particular, reviews of the latter only appeared in print in 1992 [*Stereophile* Jun '92 and *HFN* Nov '92]. Pictured right, the two-way Studio 15 was positioned between the smaller standmount Studio 10 and the floorstanding Studio 20 [HFN Apr '92] and was priced at £2000 per pair, including stands, at launch. The 180mm bass/midrange unit was designed by MA and featured a hardened anodised alloy cone terminated in an inverted rubber surround. The 25mm dome tweeter was also fashioned from alloy and 'gold' anodised – something of an MA trademark at the time. The crossover was set at 3kHz and the bass unit reflex-loaded by a relatively large, 65mm diameter, port situated at the rear of the braced, 15 litre cabinet. Sensitivity was rated at 88.5dB/1W/1m and the nominal impedance was 8ohm – solid stuff, but the larger Studio 20 was preferred as the 'more accomplished and complete performer'. PM



The speakers themselves are also smartly styled, with an appealing contrast between the gloss black cabinets and the gold-coloured drivers, and the small badge, with its 'M' logo, that graces the front. Accepting the lack of a traditional wood veneer, is the design particularly '1980s'? Not really – I'd argue it's far more classy-looking than much of the products of that decade, particularly if you stump up £500 for Monitor Audio's dedicated Studio 89 stands. These help maintain the speaker's sleek appearance by virtue of a slim black aluminium column with integrated cable management. Four feet, adjustable for level and fitted with either metal spikes or rubber domes, screw into outriggers on the base – and each gets a gold-coloured top to match the look of the enclosures above.

Once assembled, and with the Studio 89 cabinets bolted into place, you end up with a standmount speaker that takes up precious little room or floor space. As for where to put them, however, you'll need to head online and download Monitor Audio's full manual, as the instructions supplied with the speakers are vague in this regard.

## LITTLE BELTER

While the Studio 89 has the dimensions of a 'budget' speaker, its performance steps up to the mark of its above-budget price tag. Standout traits include a punchy low-end, dynamic attack and good detail retrieval – ingredients that add up to a fun listen whether you're playing a string symphony or classic

rock. Best of all, however, might be the wide-reaching soundstage on offer, which ensures these compact cabinets deliver an enveloping performance.



Through the Studio 89s, driven by a Primare A35.2 power amp [HFN Dec '19], the Eastern-tinged synth notes that kick off Rainbow's 'Gates Of Babylon' [*Long Live Rock 'N' Roll*; Polydor/Universal 5340480] moved smoothly and seamlessly across the soundstage with a fulsome, fluid tone. The effect was eerie as intended, implying a journey into a cavernous space before the mix becomes more centre-focused, layering Ronnie James Dio's vocals atop a fast rhythm section here given plenty of bounce and detail. The performance wasn't about the last word in resolution, but individual strands, from the crashing percussion to Bob Daisley's fluent bass, were easy to discern amid the mayhem.

## BIG MOVES

Nor was Adam F's 'Brand New Funk', from the compilation set *Planet V* [V Recordings; 44.1kHz/16-bit], an exercise in listening to fine detail, but that's down to the music at hand – drum 'n' bass with a funky edge designed to get the body moving rather than the mind whirring. Still, it was enjoyable to hear the speakers' diminutive cabinets build a wide stage that extended far beyond their reaches, presenting a large spread of synths and effects from which brass notes leapt out with stabby, dynamic attack. The stuttering breakbeat rhythm that followed also snapped with vigour, in unison with an ominous bass motif carrying decent weight.

A mediocre production meant this piece didn't sound its best at high volumes, some upper-frequency

**LEFT:** Working below 2.4kHz, via a third-order crossover, the dimpled 108mm RDT III bass/mid drivers sit above and below an AMT-style MPD III tweeter. The cabinet has 15mm-thick side walls and an 18mm-thick front face





**LEFT:** The two RDT III bass/mid drivers are braced by bolts through to the cabinet rear and tuned via a pair of slot reflex ports at the top and bottom of the cabinet. The single 4mm cable binding posts fit the bill

end that some might not expect from such a slender design.

Cueing up Alice In Chains' semi-acoustic track 'No Excuses' [*Jar Of Flies*; Columbia CD] caused me to jump a little due to the transient attack of the opening bars of percussion. This sense of directness was underpinned by the subsequent instrumentation, which the Studio 89 portrayed with plenty of clarity but little warmth. Similarly, the harmonica notes in Billy Joel's 'Piano Man' [*Piano Man*; MFSL; 88.2kHz/24-bit] cut through almost too much above the fine delivery of Joel's exquisite vocal, and the rolling weight of the piano.

The sound here, therefore, is arguably not as 'crowd-pleasing', and soft around the edges, as that of some of MA's more wallet-friendly standmounts, such as the Bronze 100 [*HFN* Aug '20]. Yet I was regularly surprised by their performance. Kendrick Scott's 'Touched By An Angel', from *We Are The Drum* [Capitol; 96kHz/24-bit], sounded thrillingly present, those sustained notes from the discordant jazz piano decaying with grace as the Studio 89's slowed down the pace to allow this contemplative album closer to unfurl. It was mesmerising, with insight, subtlety and scale bang on the money for these slim, lush-looking speakers. ↵

elements becoming a little coarse. Yet Joe Bonamassa's sweetly recorded 'Blues Deluxe' from the album of the same name [Provogue PRD 7158 2] proved the Studio 89 can be pushed hard and not get flustered, impressing from the outset with the bite brought to the lead guitar and control over the bassline.

JB's vocals had great texture and emotion, and were nicely positioned front and centre, but his singing isn't the star attraction. At around the 3min 45s mark, he stamps on his guitar overdrive pedal and the band follows suit, turning the piece into an all-out, epic-scaled slab of blues rock. MA's speakers also leapt into action, conveying the edge-of-the-seat nature of the performance thanks to their energetic sound.

### BLUES BLISS

John Lee Hooker and Bonnie Rait's 'I'm In The Mood' [*The Healer*; BMG download] is blues of a more intimate nature, with a mix that puts Hooker slightly to the right and back of the image, with plenty of reverb, and Rait a little to the left. The difference in vocal styles was a delight to behold, while the feel of a live performance and the space of the recording venue was aided by the Studio 89's expansive sound. Also on show was the ability of the speakers' bass/mid drivers to offer an authentically deep, resonant low

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

With the Studio 89, Monitor Audio has squeezed its latest driver technologies into a slim cabinet that's a break from the brand norm, but will earn plenty of admiring looks. Those seduced by the 89's size and style will be rewarded with a direct, energetic and captivating sound that goes 'bigger' than you might expect. Do budget for the optional stands, though, as these complete a slick all-round package.

Sound Quality: 85%

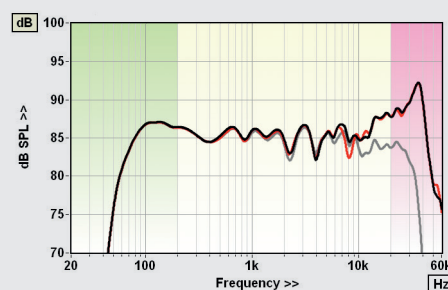


## LAB REPORT

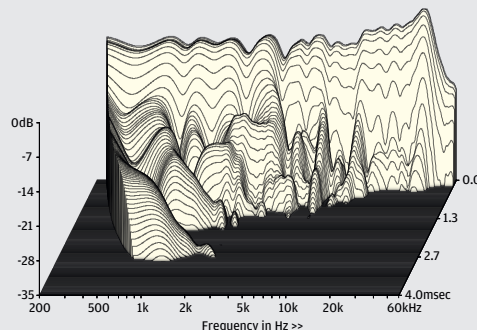
### MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO 89

The axial response [Graph 1] shows a very slightly dished overall trend and a lift after the 2.4kHz crossover – a baffle step effect – coinciding with low-level driver modes from 2-4kHz and (from the MPD III tweeter) at 8kHz seen on the CSD waterfall [Graph 2]. These, and the uplift in high treble – peaking at +6dB/36kHz – account for the relatively modest  $\pm 2.8$ dB response errors (re. 200Hz-20kHz) while the poor 2.0dB pair matching is entirely due to a dip in output of one tweeter at 8kHz [red trace, Graph 1]. Pleated film diaphragms are notoriously difficult to build, with even small deviations in edge-clamping and positioning of the rear foam producing peaks and nulls in response. Excluding this (in all likelihood) inaudible dip, pair matching was a far tighter 0.8dB. Furthermore, the treble may be tuned very effectively by toeing the speakers away from your listening axis by 10-15°, the latter flattening the response above 10kHz [grey trace, Graph 1].

Sensitivity is bang-on MA's 86dB spec. at 1kHz, decreasing very slightly to 85.4dB over 500Hz-8kHz (all re. 2.83V/1m) so the Studio 89s will need a big amp to deliver big sounds. Fortunately the 89's 4.4ohm/202Hz minimum impedance – and modest  $\pm 43^\circ$  phase angles through the bass, mid and treble – result in a relatively painless 2.2ohm/135Hz (and 20Hz) EPDR. Low sensitivity/small drivers means THD in the low bass increases to ~2% here (100Hz re. 90dB SPL/1m) and while the two drivers and ports are tuned symmetrically, the latter to 56Hz, there's also a fairly strong (-10dB) quarterwave/port mode at 750Hz. Diffraction-corrected bass extension is 57Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) but deeper is possible with rear wall reinforcement. PM



ABOVE: Response including nearfield summed driver/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, black; R, red;  $\pm 15^\circ$ , grey



ABOVE: Some modes associated with the bass/mid drivers from 2-4kHz and MPD III tweeter around 8kHz

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V - 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	86.0dB / 85.4dB / 84.6dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	4.37ohm @ 202Hz 20.3ohm @ 40Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz-20kHz)	-43° @ 109Hz +43° @ 32Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz-20kHz)	2.0dB / $\pm 2.8$ dB/ $\pm 2.8$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	57Hz / 50.2kHz/50.4kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	2.2% / 0.75% / 0.25%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	340x157x361mm/ 7.6kg