

KRK Expose E8B Studio Monitors

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KRK, the brainchild of engineer Keith Klawitter, has been building studio monitors since 1986. The company's flagship product, the Exposé, has undergone numerous changes, at times incorporating an inverted-dome Kevlar tweeter and a titanium tweeter. The current Exposé E8B model sports a completely new, exotic tweeter configuration. At \$3,250 each, the E8Bs are pricey for the project studio market, but nonetheless are poised to attack their competitors in the exacting near- to mid-field reproduction range. Although some of the E8B's design is old-school, the results are worth hearing.

DIVINE DRIVERS

All of KRK's speaker lines are notable for their characteristic yellow cone drivers. The E8B doesn't disappoint, and uses an 8-inch dual-layer Kevlar woofer, and a substance known as Rohacell®. Used with Kevlar, Rohacell provides an extremely stiff cone structure with a low-weight-to-high-stiffness ratio, which results in a faster response time with less mechanical distortion in the subwoofer. The woofer is indeed fast and punchy, sounding superb on heavy beat-driven dance material, while also providing subtle details in an upright bass and the low end of a jazz piano.

Reproducing the top end is an all-new, 1-inch, inverted-dome AIBeMET tweeter. AIBeMET is a composite material comprising aluminum and beryllium, which offer extremely flat HF characteristics all the way out to 30 kHz within ± 1 dB. Like the woofer, this transducer is designed with a very high-stiffness-to-low-weight factor, essentially extending the bandwidth on the top end of the frequency spectrum. The resonance of AIBeMET is considered beyond the range of human hearing, thereby virtually eliminating second- and third-order harmonic distortion. I'm convinced: These tweeters have a beautiful silkiness that is smooth and accurate.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

The E8B's are bi-amplified, using dual 120-watt discrete Class-A and Class-A/B designs that cross over passively at 1.9 kHz. Signal below 8W operates in Class-A mode; crank up the volume and the amps go into Class-A/B mode. I really noticed the level of detail when monitoring at very low levels. The Class-A mode made it quite easy to calculate subtle mix changes — the mix elements'

relational values are kept intact and, of course, monitoring at these lower levels greatly reduces ear fatigue. But if you need the pressure, these speakers will produce 115dB peak SPL, with a frequency response of 40 to 30k Hz, ± 1 dB. They're extremely flat.

To adjust the speakers for optimal playback in my studio's listening space, I was able to experiment with the woofer and tweeter response using several controls that are provided on the back of the E8B. System Level Adjust has an infinitely variable range of -30 to +6 dB to control the sensitivity of the input signal. The HF Shelf Switch adjusts the high frequency above 10 kHz in 0.5dB steps from +1 to -2 dB. The HF Level Adjust alters the tweeter level throughout the entire frequency spectrum (above 1.9 kHz) in 0.5dB steps, from +1 to -2 dB. I found that leaving these controls flat worked well in my room. The LF Adjust switch is used to compensate for the low-frequency buildup that can occur when any speaker is placed against a boundary. The three selections offer a -3dB roll-off at 45, 50 or 65 Hz. A single, balanced XLR for input rounds out the back panel.

After using the E8B monitors for some period of time, I found that subtle mix changes were more noticeable. Small increments, such as 0.2 dB on cymbals and 0.5 dB on acoustic guitars and vocals are easily heard, which allows you to truly fine-tune your mix. The low end is exceptionally accurate, with bass guitars and kick drums holding their space, with no apparent smear or resonance. The front-port design leads to a punchy and in-your-face bottom end, allowing subtle changes to come to the front. The smooth midrange response gave me confidence when mixing vocals and editing, knowing that my decisions were accurate and would transfer well to other systems. Imaging is superb, with reverb tails becoming almost three-dimensional in depth.

A FINE FINISH

KRK has taken basic design characteristics and polished them to a fine sheen. Its criteria was to focus on spectral balance, distortion management and resonance management. The E8Bs do not incorporate networking, auto-alignment or software operations — features that might be important to some engineers.

Instead of pushing that particular technological envelope, KRK chose to produce an optimal transducer that lacks bells and whistles, but excels in what the company calls "accuracy, transparency, flat response and the truth." I believe that KRK has met its goals, producing a monitor that can be used in many different applications. The E8B transfers well, has great low end and

pushes the boundaries for accuracy on the top end. I found the monitors easy to listen to and accurate at all sound pressure levels, experiencing no ear fatigue after lengthy sessions.

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